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From the Editor's Desk

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The Catholic (Christian) Physician

This talk was given at the Milwaukee Catholic Physicians' Guild annual meeting, Jan. 11, 1981.

It is a great honor for me to be elected your president and I thank you all for this honor and for the trust which you have put in me. As you all know, the Guild has been very close to my heart and I promise you that I will do my level best as your president to honor this commitment I have just assumed and will work diligently for the renewal and continued growth of this Catholic Physicians' Guild. While pondering this theme of renewal which was inspired by His Excellency, Rembert Weakland, Archbishop of Milwaukee, who is with us today, I wrote out a beautiful talk but decided not to give it. As I pondered what I would say, it came to me during these past 24 hours after some deep thought and meditation and it is this. What is a Catholic (Christian) physician? What makes him different from a non-Christian M.D.? Once we have firmly grasped this entity, the rest follows, viz., the purpose of the Catholic Physicians' Guild, its activities, etc.

Pondering this question (What is a Catholic or Christian physician?), we get back to fundamental theological reasoning and like all things, it is quite simple. We Catholic physicians have been baptized in Christ so

that we are literally sons of God and brothers of Jesus Christ. Christ is in us, works through us and is one with us. He is one with us not only in a most personal way, but in a community way, viz., the Mystical Body of Christ. We Christians are a community in Christ. When we meet our fellow Christians, it is Christ Whom we meet. When we help, work or play with our fellow Christians, it is Christ with Whom we are working, talking or playing. In other words, we who are Christians must be consciously aware of Christ in all of us and relate with that fellow Christian as we would relate with Christ.

St. Paul talks about the various gifts and ministries that members of the Christian community have, e.g., "prophecy, tongues." As Catholic physicians, we have a special ministry with the appropriate gifts to heal the members of the Mystical Body of Christ. We have been blessed with the gifts of intellect, personality, mental and physical skills, practical wisdom, insight and the art of dealing with the sick. We use these gifts to alleviate the sickness of the members of our community, seeing Christ not only in ourselves, but in all our patients. This, I think, is a description of the Catholic or Christian physician which gives some concrete reality to the term and distinguishes him from a non-Christian physician.

With Christ as our model, Who lives and acts within us and Who is in all the persons we meet, it is but another step to see how we Christian physicians must relate with the rest of God's community and with ourselves as members of the Catholic Physicians' Guild.

Two years ago, His Excellency, Archbishop Weakland, encouraged us as a Guild to become more spiritually oriented and not be just a debating society. We have taken up the challenge and have proceeded on this course. While still in the embryonic stage, we have concentrated on the spiritual life of the board of directors and some of our members. We have had prayers at our meetings, husband and wife and single retreats, and post-retreat gatherings. The spiritual results of these prayerful times have been awesome and full of fruit in our relationships with one another, our wives, our children and, most importantly, our patients. We plan to expand these activities during the coming year and would encourage all of our members and their guests to participate in these spiritually-enriching activities. These programs are not meant to take anyone away from his or her parish or other spiritual programs. It is, rather, to supplement them in our own unique vocation and ministry as physicians. The spiritual bond and encouragement that one physician gives to his brother physicians is not to be underestimated. This spiritual strength of this community of physicians is a veritable source of grace for each and every one of us, and we hope that it will grow like the biblical mustard seed in this year to come.

Para-Medical Groups

The Christian physician is also a member of the larger spiritual community which is likewise working for the sick members of the Mystical Body of Christ. I refer specifically to:

1. our devoted and highly skilled nurses,
2. members of our clinical pastoral care teams,
3. our hospital administrators,
4. our house staff and medical students,
5. our social workers, and
6. the philosophers, theologians and ethicists of our university community.

All of these separate groups with specific areas of competence, expertise, insight, compassion and concern are partners with us in alleviating the spiritual, emotional and bodily afflictions of our patients. It is most important for us as Christian physicians to see Christ in our partners and to work together with them as we would with Christ. Too often, I think, we are as ships passing in the night, neither seeing nor relating with one another. It is for this reason that the Catholic Physicians' Guild has invited so many of these various groups to this annual meeting of the Guild, and it is hoped that we may meet together in the future in similar gatherings as one in Christ for the spiritual and professional enrichment of this community.

I would like at this time to make a plea to all of our guests and physician-members. I would like to see you working together at the bedside of the sick patient, not only in the routine problems that we daily encounter, but also in the different medico-moral decisions which afflict us. We physicians and nurses know that most of the important medical know-how we have has been learned at the bedside. All of our years of schooling, the books and journals we have read, the conferences and post-graduate courses we have attended simply provide information which is of sterile use until we encounter the sick patient. It is only when we take the hand of that patient and listen carefully to him as we would to Christ, that we *see* what is wrong. All of our skill, insight, love and compassion are centered on this sick child, mother, father or grandparent. Intuitively, our mind puts it all together; a deep relationship is established and we strive to heal this individual. With this experiential knowledge, it is my hope that learned ethicists, theologians and philosophers — professionals who have devoted themselves to the medico-moral scene of ethics — would be invited to be at the bedside with us so that they may share in this vivid learning experience. Programs should be designed and initiated by the Medical College of Wisconsin, Marquette University's College of Nursing and the community hospitals in which this interdisciplinary technique could be established. Medical conferences should incor-

porate the ethician, philosopher or theologian into the format in order to give wholeness to the entire discussion of the sick patient.

The ethical and medico-moral dilemmas of our technological age are with us now and will get worse as science advances. It is up to us in the medical profession to open our doors as would Christ and invite these other professionals in. Christ's Mystical Body needs it and we who are its members welcome it so that we may fulfill the message of love, compassion and concern He has for all of us.

In these increasingly dehumanizing times, when we see the fragmentation in society and in the medical, nursing and academic professions, in this time when the religion of America is secularism and the utilitarian ethic its expression, it is well for us all to pause and pray that the Holy Spirit will bring those of us in the health profession together as a loving community whose commitment is to the patients entrusted to our healing care. Perhaps what I am looking for in this talk to you is a relationship among us in the healing professions that we find in the ideal family relationship as outlined by one of my heroes, St. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians: "Because you are God's chosen, holy and beloved, clothe yourself with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. Over all these virtues, put on love, which binds the rest together and makes them perfect. Christ's peace must reign in your hearts since as members of one body you have been called to that peace. Let the word of Christ, rich as it is, dwell in you. In wisdom made perfect, instruct and admonish one another. Whatever you do, whether in speech or in action, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus. Give thanks to the Father through Him."

— John P. Mullooly, M.D.

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