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From the Editor's Desk



Impressions from FIAMC Congress

The International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (FIAMC) convened in Rome in October, 1982. Approximately 5,000 physicians representing 71 nations attended this 15th meeting, the theme of which was "The Physician in the Service of Life." These Catholic physicians and their families came from virtually every continent and gathered for the five-day meeting in the Palazzo Pio Auditorium on Via della Conciliazione, just a few blocks from St. Peter's Basilica.

For an American attending an Italian-organized convention for the first time, it was an experience. No one seemed to pay too much attention to the time, everything started late, few paid attention to the time allotted to them and invariably, the meetings ran overtime. However, "when in Rome, do as the Romans do." With this in mind, our frustrations evaporated. Being in Rome was truly memorable. Perhaps the most spiritually uplifting sight was the thousands of pilgrims from many countries who filed silently into St. Peter's in prayer, in preparation for the canonization of Maximillian Kolbe, the Polish Franciscan who gave his life for his brothers in one of the concentration camps in Poland.

Dr. Gino Papola of Philadelphia, a past president of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds and president of FIAMC, presided over the House of Delegates and the general assembly of FIAMC in masterful fashion. Under difficult conditions, Doctor Papola, in his genial, firm style, kept the meeting moving right along

with a minimum of discontent. He gathered all hearts to him in his final year as international president. Retiring from that position which he had held for eight years, and having previously held the office of secretary-general for four years, Doctor Papola, at the close of the convention, was named honorary president of FIAMC by general acclamation. He has been an outstanding leader and eloquent spokesman for the world's Catholic physicians and, in recognition of this, the title of Knight Commander of the Order of St. Gregory was conferred upon Him by His Holiness, Pope John Paul II.

His successor as president of FIAMC is Dr. Chicot Vas, a neurologist from Bombay and previous secretary-general. In an eloquent report to the delegates, Dr. Vas presented a picture of the work FIAMC had done worldwide during the preceding four years (1978-82). The report is published in this issue of *Linacre Quarterly* (see pp. 19-26). Dr. Vas brings to his new position a sharp, incisive intellect, diplomatic skill, energy and drive. It is indeed most fortunate for FIAMC to have such a leader at this time, because of the many problems facing the Church and FIAMC in regard to the delivery of health care in a Christian perspective (see address of Pope John Paul II, pp. 31-37); "Final Resolution of XV FIAMC Congress," p. 27; and R. L. Walley, "An International Catholic Health Institute and Medical Service," pp. 39-44).

The 1980s are a time when FIAMC will have an impact and will achieve a great deal of good if it can mobilize organizations, physicians, nurses, pharmacists, administrators, hospitals, pharmaceutical firms, etc., to work together to alleviate the health care needs of the world. It is an awesome task, if you think about it, but with the organization of the Church behind it, with the power of the Holy Spirit giving it life, it cannot fail.

Lest these words sound utopian, it would be appropriate at this point to mention that a delegation of Canadian and United States physicians met with Cardinal Baum to discuss planning and implementation of this worldwide venture. This delegation also met with Monsignor el-Hachem, secretary to Cardinal Casaroli, the Vatican Secretary of State. The delegation was most favorably received by these distinguished prelates and encouraged to begin planning. I can report to you that the delegation has begun working on this new project and hopefully, it will bear fruit in the months ahead.

The climactic moment of the Congress was the appearance of His Holiness, Pope John Paul II. This great, humble, courageous man, attired in his white robes, was greeted by the vast assemblage of physicians, nuns, priests and lay people with resounding, prolonged and affectionate applause.

As he launched into his address with his deep, resonant voice, a hush fell over the audience. The Pope's appeal to the Catholic physicians of the world was absorbed and interiorized. His moving,

pastoral concern for God's poor, his impatience with the allocation of resources to purposes of death and destruction, his pleading for a reorientation toward health and life found a ready response within the hearts of this vast medical assembly. Lest we quail at the task lying before us, he placed us under the protection of the Virgin Mary, our Lady of Wisdom, who is invoked everywhere as "health of the sick."

Perhaps the key message that this most beloved Pope gave to us was toward the end of his talk when he said: "Consequently, in the hope that sincere availability for rapport, for dialogue, for constructive collaboration grow among all those who work in the health fields, I point to the supreme example of Christ, Who was a physician of the spirit and often of the body for all those He encountered along the paths of His earthly pilgrimage; Christ, above all, Who agreed to drink to the dregs the cup of suffering. Taking on our human condition and experiencing pain unto death, and death on the cross without any guilt, Christ became at the same time the image of illness and health, of defeat and salvation, so that in Him, all those on earth and in every age, who must contend with suffering, would have hope founded in Him.

"Therefore, practitioners of the art of medicine, may Christ in the mystery of His Passion and Resurrection remain before the eyes of your mind. May He constantly enlighten you on the dignity of your profession and in every circumstance, inspire in you those attitudes and actions which steadfast consistency of faith indicates and demands. *Mankind does not ask for the affirmation of principles, but the contribution of signs, of credible proof.*" (Emphasis added.)

The delegates to the Congress took up the challenge from Pope John Paul II enthusiastically and formalized it in a resolution already alluded to. After giving his apostolic blessing, this charismatic Pope called for a Christian alliance of physicians. This remark, of course, evoked tremendous applause and affirmed us all in what sometimes seems a lonely burden and task.

In summing up this unique experience for you, I would say that this meeting of our colleagues from around the world, in the heart of Christendom, was awesome and reassuring. Our Catholic faith had drawn us together. The incredible difficulties under which many of them practice, particularly in the Third World countries, remind one of how heroic it must be for them to be Catholic physicians. Yet they are, because of the same faith and love for Christ that motivated the early Roman Christians. Their needs, and those of their patients, are great and hopefully they will be met. This XV Congress of FIAMC laid the foundation and inspiration for achieving this goal.

— John P. Mullooly, M.D.
Editor