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Vincent A. Yzermans

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Reverend Vincent A. Yzermans

"A doctor," said Dr. Elmer Hess, former president of the American Medical Association, "who lacks faith in the Supreme Being has no right to practice medicine. A physician who walks into a sick room is not alone. He can only minister to the ailing person with the material tools of scientific medicine—his faith in a higher power does the rest."

In that statement Dr. Hess indicated the danger every medical man experiences. The fact that the health of a material organism is the subject of the doctor's attention exposes him to a careless professionalism which can easily cause him to lose sight of spiritual values. This danger explains, to a large degree, why Pope Pius XII gave so much time and attention to discuss a Christian attitude toward medicine in a series of fourscore addresses.

It would seem that whatever medical group requested an audience the Holy Father was eager to meet in order to enunciate Christian principles that should direct the medical profession. Thus, he would speak to such groups as the Fourth International Congress of Catholic Doctors, the Italian Catholic Union of Midwives, the International Congress of Psychotherapy, and Clinical Psychology, a group of Italian Nurses, and the International Congress of the Latin Medical Union. At some of these gatherings he would declare the moral law. At others he would show how the Church has contributed through the centuries to the science of medicine. In every gathering, however, the Holy Father would underline certain fundamental attitudes that are considered necessary for the professional and spiritual growth of the Catholic doctor.

RESPECT FOR THE MORAL LAW

Pope Pius XII was most insistent on the absolute, immutable moral law as the standard which must direct every act and judgment of the Catholic doctor. "Without a doubt," he told the Italian Union of Saint Luke in 1944, "the very person of the doctor as well as his every action continually revolves around the moral order and in the domain of the moral law. Every statement, every counsel, every prescription, every decision the doctor gives are subject to that law of immanent and transcendent finality which unites them in one ordered whole... However, when speaking of a Christian orientation from the other sciences. Especially, however, they are subject to that law of immanent and transcendent finality which unites them in one ordered whole... Without this understanding, both the patient has, the Pope observed, "a post of duty in some family where loving hearts are anxiously awaiting him. He has a mission to fulfill, even though humble, in human society... He has a rendezvous with eternity." Although he is directly concerned with the needs of the body, its members and organs, are at all times concerned with the soul and its faculties, man's supernatural destiny and his social mission.

Without this understanding, sympathetic and spiritual as it must be, "the doctor easily courts the danger of engaging in the more or less materialistic prejudices of following fatal conclusions, of utilitarianism, hedonism, of absolute independence of the moral law."

THE UNIVERSAL DOMINION OF GOD

Our Lord taught that the body is more than the clothing. Saint Paul taught that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Fathers of the Church continually compared the union of the body and soul, clothed with grace, to the Mystical Body of Christ. Throughout the centuries, the Church has taught the principle that we are not masters of our own bodies. They are given to us to use as instruments in working out our salvation. Our bodies come
from God and they will return to God. God alone, the Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, is the Master of the human body, the Master of life and death. Neither the individual nor society can violate this primordial right of God without breaking the natural moral law. Nor can the doctor. Speaking to the physicians of the Allied Armed Forces in 1945, the Holy Father remarked: "...a doctor, worthy of his profession, rising to the full height of unselfish, fearless devotion to his noble mission of healing and saving life, will scorn any suggestion made to destroy life, however frail or humanly useless it may appear. Well he knows that unless a man is guilty of some crime deserving the death penalty, God alone, and no power on earth, may dispose of his life. As a special minister of the God of nature, he will never countenance the deliberate frustration of nature's priceless power to generate life."

Even more emphatically the Holy Father stated this principle in his address to surgeons in 1948. "God alone is Lord of the life and integrity of man. Lord of his members, his organs, his potencies, particularly of those which make him an associate in the work of creation. Neither parents, nor spouse, nor the individual in question may dispose of them at will. ... It is not permissible to jeopardize a human life — which may never at all be suppressed — except in the hope of preserving a possession more precious still, or of actually saving or prolonging that human life itself."

**HEALTH IN SOCIETY**

Health, like most things, has both a positive and negative aspect. Formerly, a healthy person was considered one who had no pain. Today, when we speak of health, we refer to its positive side as comprising the wellbeing of the whole man. The Pope made this same point when he remarked to the World Health Organization in 1949. "Positively considered, health includes the spiritual and social well-being of human beings and in that sense it is one of the conditions of a universal peace and common security."

From the social viewpoint, the Church has never ceased to point out that the health of the people is one of the principle elements of the social and international welfare of nations. Thus, the Pope remarked to the same group: "The social teaching of the Catholic Church leaves no doubt about the fact that health of body and soul, which also regulates the health of social relations, can effectively contribute to the establishment of an atmosphere very favorable to the interior and mutual peace of peoples."

**QUALITIES OF A CATHOLIC DOCTOR**

A Catholic doctor should never be mediocre. As a loyal son of a Church that is restless with dissatisfaction for better things, the Catholic physician will be a man discontented with anything about his person or his profession that does not measure up to the ideal. His Holiness observed, "He [the Catholic doctor] is always looking to the future, to new distances to cover, to new advances to be made. He works enthusiastically both as a medical doctor, wholly dedicated to alleviate the suffering of humanity and each individual, and as a scientist whom consequent discoveries give a taste of the joy of learning. He is a believer and a Christian who, in the splendid discoveries he discovers in the new horizons that open before him, sees the greatness and the power of the Creator, the inexhaustible goodness of the Father, Who leads him again to find in nature, in art or living, mineral, vegetable or animal, remedies for bodily ills."

The Catholic doctor knows that he has "the obligation to keep himself informed of the development and progress of medical science by the reading of scientific works and reviews, by attendance at conventions and academic courses, conversations with colleagues and consultations with professors in schools of medicine. That constant effort to perfect himself oblige the practicing physician inasmuch as it is practically possible for him and the good of the sick and the community requires it."

As a good professional man, the Catholic doctor will have more about him than professional knowledge. He will be a man dedicated to his work with a dedication raised to the supernatural level through Christian charity. "The Catholic doctor," our Holy Father told the Italian Union of Saint Luke in 1944, "will never be afraid to find a better advisor than true love when giving or accepting an opinion and bringing to a happy end the treatment of a patient."

Conscious of the sublime vocation that is his, he "will bring to the sick room and to the operating table something of the charity of God, of the love and tenderness of Christ, the Master Physician of soul and body."

Scientific knowledge and supernatural charity, however, are not enough. The Catholic doctor must be a man who knows the psychology of human nature so well that he is able to touch the soul of his patient at the same time he is caring for his body. "A merely theoretical study," the Pope said, "however conscientious it may be, is not sufficient, unless it be accompanied by another laborious effort no less persevering and continuous... We mean the exercise of your intellectual powers, of your moral and psychological capacities, of your physical skills, your senses and your fingers."

In an address of 1948, the Pope exhorted the Catholic doctor to respect the dignity of man at all times. "In the exercise of your profession," he said, "it is human persons whom you hold in your hands and under your knives. They are persons whose living bodies merit all your respect and have a right to your professional care."

The Catholic doctor who observes the moral law and its guiding principles in every professional act will find his reward
both in his work and in eternity. "You have," His Holiness told a group of ophthalmologists in 1947, "every reason to relish gratitude's rare delight as well as the joyous professional satisfaction with which you confront the happy outcome of your task. But Christ, Who suffers in the flesh of your patients, He Who is infinitely tender and kind, is grateful for the treatment you give them and He blesses you also."

The Catholic physician, filled with a sense of reverence for the moral law as explained to him by the teaching authority of his Church, will be every moment of his life the cooperator with God Himself in the preservation of the dignity of man. In this realization, he will daily rejoice as he takes his round. This is his dignity and nobility. Can one wonder then why the Pope exclaimed to a group of doctors in 1945: How exalted, how worthy of all tenor is the character of your profession! The doctor has been appointed by God Himself to minister to the needs of suffering humanity."

A REPORT FROM the Joint Study Committee in Continuing Medical Education sponsoring a plan to meet the needs of physicians and their colleagues in psychology, dentistry, nursing, pharmacology and allied professions for refresher education is available. The plan titled, *Lifetime Learning for Physicians: Principles, Practices, Proposals* by Bernard V. Dryer, M.D. of Western Reserve University, School of Medicine faculty, was sponsored by eight major national medical organizations. The report blueprints a nationwide working partnership among educators, behavioral scientists and communication experts. The entire document is available as Part 2 of the June 1962 issue of *The Journal of Medical Education*, at $2.00 a copy. Order from 2530 Ridge Ave., Evanston, Illinois.

**Medical Students and Physicians' Guilds**

THE NEWMAN CLUB movement had its beginning in 1892. The first group was formed at the University of Pennsylvania, School of Medicine. While this is a tradition in which Catholic physicians feel pride, of some practical concern to the Federation may be such questions as, how can Newman Clubs in medical schools be made more effective and in what specific ways can a local Catholic Physicians' Guild be of help.

The purpose of this article is to describe some principles and procedures found effective in the development of the Newman Club of the State University College of Medicine in Brooklyn and the support given by the Catholic Physicians' Guild of that city. We write as the immediate past-presidents and have been aided in this, as in other endeavors, by our spiritual advisor and our faculty advisor.* As students, we believe firmly that activity in a Newman Club program contributes in a unique way both to the education and the personal life of a Catholic student in medical school. The purpose of the Newman Club, as stated in our own constitution, is to foster the deeper religious life of its members participating in the Liturgy, through contact with fellow Catholic students, developing deeper understanding of Catholic thought as related to medicine, and by studying the latest developments of Catholic thinking generally.

ROLE OF THE BROOKLYN CATHOLIC PHYSICIANS' GUILD

The Catholic Physicians' Guild of Brooklyn has assisted our Newman Club in the formulation and execution of our program in many ways.

Our faculty advisor, Dr. Duncan W. Clark, serves full-time on the medical school faculty. This daily opportunity for consultation with club officers and members is a great asset to continuous activities. Dr. Clark is also a member of the Executive Committee of the Brooklyn Catholic Physicians' Guild. In effect, he is the liaison between the Guild and the Newman Club.

For several years an annual gift of one hundred dollars from the Guild has made it possible for the Club to supply every Catholic student joining the Club with a copy of the excellent book, *Medico-Moral Problems* by Gerald Kelly, S.J. This is the basic reference book for the discussions at our meetings. The availability

* William M. McCormack '63; O. Joseph Bizotero '62, and Walter H. Bradshaw '64.