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Doctors and Religion

Catholic Physicians' Guilds

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Doctors and Religion

Overpopulation and family planning are only two of today's critical problems that intimately involve medical science, morality, and religion.

As recently as the past five years, it was not uncommon to believe that most major "religious" questions involving medical practice were solved. It is true that basic moral principles and applications in almost every situation a doctor may face are by now generally quite clear. The same optimism is not justified, however, when one reaches other fields intimately associated with medical practice—including all the fields of specialization, psychiatry, community health, etc.

Topics such as the practical relationships between clergymen and doctors, the defense both clinically and theoretically of the natural law, approach to certain social and family situations, a more realistic ethical foundation in undergraduate and postgraduate medical education, these are just a few items in which knowledge and improvement have a long, long way to go.

Several weeks ago, the Journal of the American Medical Association announced the forthcoming first meeting of the new AMA Department of Medicine and Religion. The aims of the department, formed just this past summer, included among other things greater understanding of pertinent teachings of different faiths (dietary and fasting laws, Extreme Unction, etc.), augmentation of medical, nursing, and theological training, cooperation with medical mission efforts, treatment of problems of terminal illnesses, and some aspects of the topics mentioned above.

The contribution that Catholic doctors (and others such as moralists, counselors, and psychologists) who directly or indirectly carry Catholic philosophy into the healing profession, is obviously considerable. Which raises the fervent hope that the recent AMA move will inspire even greater interest among Catholic doctors—for instance through the Catholic Physicians' Guilds. By 1963, the AMA department expects to be working on the county level. The influence of active and alert local Guilds at that time could be huge.

At the moment less than 7,000 of the 35,000 Catholic doctors in the country are Guild members, according to the latest LINACRE QUARTERLY (Journal of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds).

The fact that the AMA recognizes the intimate relationship between good medical practice and religion should help convince the doubtful of the advantage of an alert and effective local organization of Catholic physicians. —(J.J.D.)

Editorial, Peoria, Ill. Register
October, 1962