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American Letter to the Foreign Journals

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American Letter to the Foreign Journal

In past years the attainment of a degree in medicine has been one of the major areas in which Catholics have participated in the intellectual life of the United States. The scope and depth of scholastic ambition among ever-increasing numbers of Catholic youth today has expanded to include advanced degrees in literature and in the physical and social sciences with a continued interest manifest in the health professions.

There are six Catholic medical schools in the country with an enrollment of 2,108 students of whom approximately two-thirds are Catholic. Eighty-one non-Catholic medical schools enroll 28,217 students with Catholic students constituting one-fourth. Newman Clubs exist in many of the secular schools but the vitality and influence of these organizations vary considerably. Often there is little uniformity of program and limited communication among them or with the senior Guilds of Catholic physicians from which helpful guidance and financial support could reasonably be expected.

It is estimated that there are 30,000 Catholic physicians in the United States today (15% of total). Seven thousand of these doctors are members of Physicians' Guilds in more than 100 American cities.

As no uniform state laws exist with regard to civil regulation of sterilization, therapeutic abortion or contraceptive practices, medico-moral problems as encountered by the individual Catholic physician vary according to the area in which he practices. Many states permit sterilization for eugenic reasons and recently two states have approved laws which permit sterilization to be performed at the request of an individual. Similarly

there is great disparity between the various states in the accepted legal indications for therapeutic abortion. Psychiatric disorders have constituted an ever-increasing indication despite reports from Sweden and England which have shown the fallacy of this approach.

A more positive observation is the infrequency with which therapeutic abortion is now recommended for the pregnant cardiac patient. Public health programs have been organized to carry out the pre-natal care of such patients in their homes and thereby decrease the exertion and added exposure to possible infection which the cardiac patient experiences in attending a pre-natal clinic. The promise of a successful vaccine against German measles will eliminate forever this disorder as a supposed indication for interruption of pregnancy.

Along with many other countries the United States has experienced a marked increase in the number of illegitimate pregnancies, especially among teen-aged girls. A variety of community programs exist to provide assistance for these girls either in Maternity Shelters or in the pre-natal department of large city hospitals. A Catholic physician in the city of Attleboro not far from Boston has evolved a unique approach to this problem. His program represents an effort on the part of a group of dedicated married couples, social workers, doctors and priests to create a Foster Family Home Care Program for unwed mothers. These foster couples strive to help the young girls by accepting them into their homes as a member of their families with the corresponding duties and privileges. The obstetrician who participates in this pro-

gram offers to the unwed mother the medical and psychological advantages of personal-physician-type care which is so difficult to obtain in clinic practice. All of the assistance, except the hospital care, is voluntary and unpaid. To date 43 unwed mothers have availed themselves of this service. Four of these left the program for other types of care. All of the girls

have placed their babies for adoption through licensed agencies.

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Memorial Mass . . .

The annual Memorial Mass for deceased members of the A.M.A. and the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds will be offered at St. Mary's Church, 660 California Avenue, San Francisco, at 8:00 a.m. on June 24. The Most Reverend Joseph T. McGucken, S.T.D., LL.D., Archbishop of San Francisco, will be the celebrant. A breakfast will follow at the Sir Francis Drake Hotel, preceding the Federation annual Executive Board meeting. Reservations are required. Wives and friends attending the Mass are welcome. Breakfast tickets \$3.00 each. Remit to the National Federation office, 1438 So. Grand Blvd., St. Louis, Missouri 63104, when ordering.