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The Justification for a Catholic Medical School

LEONARD W. WORMAN, M.D.

Answers to the question of the need for Catholic medical schools differ. Harassed university presidents, frustrated deans, ambitious department chairmen, impecunious faculty, tuition-poor parents and anxious students reply briefly or respond at length, not necessarily proportionate to the thought they have given the subject. History and tradition are invoked. The value of atmosphere and hope of transmitting virtue by proximity or by a table of organization that includes a religious, the fear of secularism, the vanity that we are just as good as "they," the taint of smugness that we are unique when we advocate ethical practice and high moral standards and emphasize the true worth of the individual, the trend of small Catholic hospitals that could not be staffed were it not for the kind of physician that Catholic medical schools generate. The shortage of physicians, the fact of present ownership and the recurring theme of some kind of moral obligation to have Catholic medical schools. It is implied that there is a moral medical science, and that in order to know it and teach it, Catholic medical education is necessary. It would seem more appropriate to consider medical science as correct or incorrect. Correct medical science will not propose illicit conduct, but the validity of our moral judgments cannot be based solely on our current scientific understanding. Physicians and patients insofar as they are capable of human acts, i.e., those proceeding from deliberate reason and free will, are the determinates of the morality of what is done. It is people who are moral, not medical science and the norms of morality must come from outside the medical school, from philosophy and theology and the Church.

This distinction is important. If we have an obligation to have medical schools, then we must simply do the best we can with what we have. If so, the justification to have Catholic medical schools may be found in the following manner. For the convenience of the patient and the community, the Catholic medical school should be staffed by the kind of physicians that it is understood to produce. The Catholic medical school should have an obligation to have Catholic medical schools.

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obliging a moral need is a confusion of ends and means that ill suits us.

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The need for medical education is sufficiently less offered that is uniquely Catholic. Theoretically, Catholic medical schools witness that the Church considers the pursuit of (scientific) truth and its communication to others as worthwhile activities. Practically, it is discouraging to discover among graduates of Catholic as well as non-Catholic schools a sizable physician population, hostile, fearful and scornful of educators and research scientists in general. It is a mystery that Catholic medical schools and Catholic hospitals continue to pursue their altruistic, divergent ways. This distrust and lack of mutual goals among the Catholics


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