St. Rene Goupil - Physician-Martyr

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol21/iss1/5
To carefully study each medical record in a large hospital is a time-consuming and often thankless job, but it can be done and is being done, in many of our good hospitals. The burden should not be placed upon the few, but all the active staff should participate over a period of time. The medical audit committee, if it is to be so-called, should report its findings to the credentials or executive committee; it is not a judge and jury, it merely functions as a fact finding body. No individual staff member is condemned without a hearing, and every consideration should be given to physicians who may be found wanting.

The purpose is not to punish but to teach, not to criticize but to advise, not to discriminate but to evaluate, not to snoop but to protect. The time may soon come when patients will ask their physician, does the hospital you use have a medical audit? The next time one of our widely read periodicals or newspaper feature sections suggests that the general public is being victimized by unscrupulous members of the medical profession it should be a comforting thought to know that all possible precautions are being taken to eliminate such men from your community. Surely all honest physicians will cooperate in bringing this about, and since the medical audit is the most effective procedure now available, it should be welcomed, not feared.

The first martyr's blood to consecrate the soil of North America was that of a physician—Rene Goupil.

Little is known of his early life except that he was born in Anjou, France, about 1607. He entered the Jesuit Novitiate at Rouen and his various biographers are not in agreement as to whether his medical training was secured before he entered the novitiate or after he left it, because of ill-health. That he was a qualified surgeon of his time, is attested in medical literature by Howell, who states that he served as surgeon at L'Hotel Dieu, Quebec.

The nature and extent of his medical training is nowhere recorded, though we know that the status of medical and surgical training in Paris at that time was involved and uncertain. It was within a century of the admission of Ambroise Pare to the College de St. Come, which represented direct succession to the Confrere de St. Come or Guild of St. Cosmos as it would be known in our language today; and at that time continental medicine was beginning to emerge from the contentious period of the Barbers and the Surgeons of the Long Robe. It was in 1520 that peace was finally signed between the contenders and authority over both corporations was given to the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Paris.

It is of interest to note in passing, that Pare is said to have received much of his surgical or preceptorial training from a Prof. Goupil in the College de France and it is conceivable that there may have been consanguinity between persons of a similar and unusual name.

Goupil's novitiate rejection because of ill-health did not dampen his ardour for the Missions, and we find him at the age of 34, volunteering as a Donne for the Jesuit Mission at Quebec. The Donne belonged to a special group found only in the Canadian missions at that time (our closest synonym would be oblate or volunteer). He offered his services gratis to the mission without being bound by vows. Following two years service on the staff of L'Hotel Dieu, Goupil left with Father
Jouques and his companions for the Huron territory. Within a few days, the group encountered the Iroquois enemy; outnumbered, ambushed and subjected to weeks of tortures. equalled only in diabolical ingenuity, by the inhuman atrocities which are being enacted in our own day, behind the Iron Curtain, they finally reached the village of Ossernenon (now Auriesville, New York), the scene of their martyrdom. Their torturers had stripped them of their clothes, torn out their fingernails and gouged their lacelated fingertips between their teeth. Father Jouques writing to the Father Provincial of the French Province states, "All our faces especially Rene's presented sad spectacles. The number of blows that he received on all parts of his body and particularly on his face, so disfigured him that we could see but the whites of his eyes. They cut off his thumb at the first joint." What need to elaborate on the details of Rene's tortures—He was seen to make the Sign of the Cross on the forehead of a child and believing it to be evil, an old Indian who witnessed the act, ordered his martyrdom. On September 22, 1642 Rene's skull was cloven by a hatchet blow, and thus he became the first American Jesuit Martyr, a glorious victim to his Faith and an immortal example to his profession. He was canonized June 29, 1930, by Pope Pius XI.


The Scope...published quarterly by the Department of Biology, Boston College, and edited by The Boston College Mendel Club included the following in a recent issue...

The Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds

The Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds was organized and first convened in 1932. The purpose of this Federation was to combine the various Catholic guilds already existing throughout the United States into a unified and workable organization. A constitution was adopted creating a similarity in the operation, function and purpose of the affiliated guilds. These guilds were united in one main objective; the promotion and observance of moral principles in medical education and practice according to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. That is the organization was to investigate the relations of medical theory and practice to Catholic theology and philosophy: to uphold the principles of Catholic faith and morality against an unchristian and unscientific materialism: and to promote among Catholic members of the profession such solidarity as may be advantageous to both their religion and their profession. Each guild, independent of the Federation, attempts to fulfill these purposes in its own particular locality.

The question now arises, how does the individual guild attempt to fulfill these purposes? The guild sponsors lectures and open discussions under the direction of the Church, to present the Catholic viewpoint on various moral problems confronting the Catholic physician. It provides an enlightening account of these problems for the laity. It takes an interest in family life by sponsoring Cana and pre-Cana conferences. The guild provides annual retreats for Catholic doctors and medical students. It provides for Catholic clubs at the local medical schools, and it issues scholarships and funds for research. Although only a few activities are mentioned here, it easy to recognize the outstanding contribution the guild has made to society.

The Federation supplements the activities of the various guilds in their publication of a periodical entitled The Linacre Quarterly. This publication is a journal of the philosophy and ethics of medical practice, published with Ecclesiastical authorization. It presents studies of current problems which have arisen in the individual guilds. Articles such as, "An Official Statement on Rhythm," by Gerald Kelly, S.J., and