

5-1-1955

## Medico-Moral Notes

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### Recommended Citation

Kelly, Gerald (1955) "Medico-Moral Notes," *The Linacre Quarterly*. Vol. 22: No. 2, Article 3.  
Available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol22/iss2/3>

# Medico-Moral Notes

GERALD KELLY, S.I.

## INTERNATIONAL CODE OF MEDICAL ETHICS

ON SEPTEMBER 30, 1954, Pope Pius XII addressed about five hundred delegates to the Eighth Congress of the World Medical Association. He discussed the doctors' role in war and peace, experimentation on human beings, and the efforts being made to draw up a world-wide code of medical ethics. For the most part, his remarks on these topics were repetitions of two previous addresses: to the First International Congress on the Histopathology of the Nervous System (Sept. 13, 1952—cf. *LINACRE QUARTERLY*, Nov., 1952), and to the International Office of Documentation for Military Medicine (Oct. 19, 1953 — cf. *The Catholic Mind*, Jan., 1954.)

Speaking in particular about a code of medical ethics, the Pope was careful to distinguish between ethics in the strict sense (medical morality) and ethics in a wider sense (medical laws or statutes). The distinction is of no little importance. In its strict meaning medical ethics refers to principles and applications of the natural law. This law is necessarily the same for all human beings; but its very universality makes it, as the Pope indicated, somewhat broad and lacking precision, and it needs to be supplemented by human laws or statutes regulating professional conduct. These human laws or

statutes are medical ethics in a secondary and wider sense. For the most part, the "Code of Medical Ethics for Catholic Hospitals" is medical ethics in the first and strict sense. On the other hand, the statutes of various medical societies (e.g., "The Principles of Ethics of the American Medical Association") are largely medical ethics in the second sense: namely, man-made statutes formulated to guarantee correct professional conduct.

Codes of ethics in both senses are needed. The Holy Father stressed this; and he particularly commended the efforts of the doctors to formulate an international code. In fact, he made several references to the existing "International Code of Medical Ethics," which already has the approval of some forty-two nations. Since his address I have been frequently asked where one may obtain a copy of this international code. By coincidence, while I was trying to locate it, I discovered that the Abbott Laboratories have made a beautifully ornamented chart containing both the International Code and the Declaration of Geneva. It seems to me that it would be helpful to incorporate these texts into the present notes so that in future we can refer to *LINACRE QUARTERLY* when citing these documents. These texts, as given on the Abbott chart, follow: