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Book Review

Morale et Médecine

by Jules Paquin, S. J.

Review by

Maurice B. Walsh, S.J.

Books like this are not written often enough. Here is a volume on medical morality which deserves, and is likely to receive, rave reviews from both moralists and members of the medical profession. Perhaps its merit can be summarized by saying that it is not just a "Question Box," not a cookbook of medico-moral recipes. Some moralists have too readily assumed that the doctor and nurse are too busy about their own professional occupations to have time for anything more than the "ready answer" to moral problems which arise in the course of those occupations. Father Paquin gives the ready answers—and they are generally solid ones—but he makes no unjustified assumptions. His basic assumption (and why not?) is that Catholic doctors and nurses are vitally concerned about the philosophy and theology which are the foundation for the answer—even the answer to the questions which have not yet been asked.

The author began his teaching career as a priest in a classroom of dogmatic theology; this no doubt influences his treatment of moral questions. Any moral theologian must base his work on dogma and sound philosophy; few succeed as well as Father Paquin in integrating these basic sciences into the pattern of Christian morality. This may be the reason why the book is outstanding for the prevalence of "do" over "don't."

In broad outline, the work proceeds from a treatment of basic principles (Introduction, Part I; pp. 1-73), to general moral obligations with their application to the medical profession (Part II; pp. 77-111), to particular problems encountered in the practice of medicine (Parts III-VI; pp. 115-453).

Part I (Basic Principles) begins with a brief treatment of general ethical norms — how and why a human act is morally good or bad, either objectively or according to

the conscience of the agent. The traditional position on the norm of morality is then briefly contrasted with the situation ethics currently proposed by the Existentialists (Chapter I). But it is not enough abstractly to establish the morality of free human activity. Freedom must be exercised in order to have any influence on sending a man to heaven or hell. While it is not always possible for us to establish the precise degree of human responsibility in a given instance, Father Paquin does give some very sane norms for practical judgment — indicating how Freudian psychology, taken in small and well-filtered doses, is not necessarily totally poisonous for the Catholic moralist. Freud and some Freudians have been too willing to canonize for their Freudian heaven (wherever it is) poor, frustrated man whose Id plays the bully to his free will; but pre-Freudian moralists sometimes were — and are—too quick in condemning him to hell, not realizing the extent of his frustrations and the complexity of his complexes (Chapter II). Human liberty, even when exercised fully, will not of itself suffice, since our moral activity is directed to a supernatural end; hence supernatural merit is considered at the close of Part I, as the last and most important of the basic principles of Christian morality (Chapter III).

The professional activity of a doctor or nurse is not the carrying on of a trade or even the exercise of a profession merely; it is an apostolate. Part II, on general obligations, begins with this premise,

drawn from the allocutions of the present Holy Father. Here the author treats in turn: professional qualities required in the doctor or nurse, justice and charity, principles of cooperation, the obligation of treating the sick, and the consent of the patient to treatment. Here and throughout, frequent reference is made to the numerous statements of Pius XII on medical matters (The bibliography lists 42 distinct documents of Pius XII, either addressed to the medical profession or treating directly of medical questions). Most moral obligations of doctors and nurses are obligations either of justice or charity. The chapter on these two virtues is brief, (only six pages long), but they are weighted pages — as is the distinction made between the two virtues: "*Par la justice, je considère mon prochain en tant qu'autre, et je respecte ses droits stricts. . . . Par la charité, je considère mon prochain comme un autre moi-même, et je cherche à subvenir à ses besoins matériels ou spirituels.*" (pp. 88-89)

Particular professional obligations are all grouped around the general notion of respect for the human person. In the hierarchy of goods which the doctor and his assistants must respect, the supernatural life of the patient holds the first place (Part III, the Sacraments). But the medical profession has as its proper object the interior goods of the human person: life, the integrity of the members and functions of the human body, the physical and psychic health of man. Even after death, the human body remains an object of rever-

ence and respect (Part IV-V, Respect for interior goods). The same respect for the human person demands both discretion and integrity in using information acquired in a professional capacity—either in revealing the truth to the patient himself or in concealing it from those who have no right to the knowledge. Justice particularly, but also charity, motivates the determination of fees — since the patient is not only “*un autre*” but “*un autre moi-même*” (Part VI, Respect for combined and material goods).

As might be expected, the bulk of the work (about 350 pages) is concerned with particular obligations. Specific problems are solved on a basis of principle, with a positive and constructive attitude being maintained throughout. The author is as much concerned with what is right as with what is wrong. This constructive attitude is particularly evident in his treatment of the spiritual care of the sick and his discussion of questions of sexual morality. Some of the problems treated are: cooperation of the doctor and his assistants in the administration of the sacraments, their own administration of the sacrament of baptism — the circumstances and method in various cases, the spiritual care of non-Catholics, principles governing the preservation of human life, euthanasia, foeticide, abortion, premature birth, cesareans, mutilation and sterilization, birth control, periodic continence, sexual morality in the marriage and single state, artificial insemination, sterility tests, therapeutic incontinence,

treatments with sexual reaction, human experimentation, drugs and drug addiction, psychic health, psychotherapy in general and psychoanalysis, hypnosis, narco-analysis, problems of Christian burial, the patient's right to the truth, the professional secret, split fees, unnecessary treatments and operations, negligence or incompetence in treatment, problems of restitution after injustice.

It would be almost impossible for a moralist to cover the entire field of medical morality without proposing some opinions which are at least open to discussion. Not all the opinions expressed will be universally commended. For example, good hospital practice in the United States normally entails a delay of longer than a week before the baptism of a healthy infant (cf., pp. 122-123). Granted the categorical refusal of the non-Catholic parents, the baptism of a dying infant might more frequently be omitted here than in Catholic Quebec (cf., pp. 130-131). Father Paquin is perhaps more liberal than many moralists would prefer in allowing the Sacraments to dying heretics and schismatics who are still conscious—but this is the priest's problem. The cooperation of the medical staff in the spiritual care of the sick will vary considerably with the circumstances of time and place. In discussing the administration of the Sacraments in hospitals, the author seems to have particularly in mind the small hospital under Catholic auspices: sometimes distinctions have to be made in order to apply the principles given to the situation exist-

ing in our large city hospitals — whether Catholic or not. Some moralists and canonists will consider as too liberal the opinion which allows a non-Catholic to act as proxy for a Catholic godparent in baptism (p. 188); some will consider as exaggerated the precautions advised in summoning a Protestant Minister to assist a dying non-Catholic (p. 187). Though a seriously scarred uterus may licitly be excised in some cases, too ready an argument by analogy to similar cases may be inadvisable (cf., pp. 260-261). It is a disappointment that the chapter on psychic health and psychotherapy (pp. 365-391) contains no adequate discussion of the client-centered or non-directive type of psychotherapy. The definition of a lie as “*une expression contraire aux*

exigences de la société” (cf., pp. 407-409) is likely to occasion some mumblings of discontent from the majority of Catholic moral philosophers and theologians (This reviewer is rather inclined to mumble a bit himself at this departure from the traditional definition).

If no eyebrows were raised at any opinion proposed, this would be rather an indication that the author had contented himself with repeating what everybody else always said. Independent thought and positive contribution to the progress of any science always results in some new differences of opinion. Those who may differ most vocally with one or two particular opinions expressed will also be most vocal in their enthusiasm for this real contribution to the moral theology of medicine.

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