

August 1981

President's Page

John P. Coughlin

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Recommended Citation

Coughlin, John P. (1981) "President's Page," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 48: No. 3, Article 3.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol48/iss3/3>



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Ageless Man

Teilhard de Chardin describes cosmic history as a continuing natural evolutionary process marked by radical changes at a few transition points. These cataclysmic transitions so alter nature as to pre-empt its existing law or even change that law. It is difficult to understand from Teilhard if man has more to fear from environmental explosions than from internal combustion. From whence does this reflective animal derive his evolution?

The animal, however, that we diagnose and treat is man — and his creation was set milleniums ago. His adaptability is eternal but his nature remains inviolably intact. Social and cultural revolution does not change that fact. The interpretation of those who propound historic inevitables must recognize this core truth: man is at once the exception to everything and the mirror and the measure of all things through all ages and universally. And we must very cautiously regard those prophetic authors who would have us consider future man as responding in basically unfamiliar patterns. To violate man's basic immutable nature leaves him awash and society in shambles — certainly reminiscent of modern man and society. So if man's nature does not change, can the laws governing that nature be less immutable? Or does the changing character of society take precedence over its individual members' unchanging nature?

But nature's laws and rights are not human rights; the latter are set in a historical process of changing values. No human right may exist outside of natural rights and there is no historical imperative. It is pre-

cisely from natural rights that human rights derive their freedom of full expression. This is certainly not a leveling of nature's unfair distribution of gifts nor a leveling of man's genius for accretions. To equalize by *fiat* is futile and leads to human frustration. To equalize the inequalities of nature would require eugenics. To equalize human invention would require tyrannical oppression. All of these deny nature's laws and rights upon which all human rights rest.

The truth for which we all thirst will not be satiated at this lower ring but will spiral upward to the ultimate realization that the supernatural is necessary to preserve the natural. We, as proud and imperious physicians, must look beyond the imperatives of our profession, the obligations to our patients, the duties of our humanity. We must look inward to both our hearts and minds, quietly, in solitary recollection and in subjection to His grace. The source of truth, the wellspring of good endeavors, the spirit of satisfaction and peace come only in an active understanding of our part in creation. The physician's strength lies solely in his interior Christian life — our communication with the divine milieu. "Spirit of light, imprint this truth in indelible characters on our minds; that our apostolate will be successful only in the measure that we ourselves live that supernatural inner-life of which Thou art the Sovereign Principle and Jesus Christ, the Source" (Dom. Chautard).

— John P. Coughlin, M.D.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RAYNAUD TRANSLATIONS

We wish to acknowledge the following persons who aided in translating portions of the material on Maurice Raynaud for the May, 1981 issue of *Linacre Quarterly*: Dr. Frank Kallus, for translating "Discours Prononce sur sa Tombe"; Roberta Nasra Gardella, Charles Bernstein and Rev. Cornelius De Groot, for "Des Derniers Ouvrages de M. Flourens"; Father De Groot for "Le Skepticisme en Medecin au Temps Passe et au Temps Present"; Mrs. Noella Hatch for sections of "Expose des Titres et Travaux Scientifiques du Dr. Maurice Raynaud"; and Rev. Ernan McCullin for many helpful suggestions relating to the entire project.