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Catholic Action and the Healing Arts (An Address to Guild of St. Luke, St. Cosmas and St. Damien, Nov. 19, 1936.)

George E. O'Donnell
these old scholarly university men had anticipated us in the best thoughts that we have in the modern time. While it is hard for many to realize how old is the new, nothing is clearer than that a great many of the things of the modern time are not at all the novelties they are supposed to be but come to us from the very long ago. Man has not changed a bit, except possibly for the worse, in all the centuries that we know anything definite about him, though in our complacency we have been prone to think of him as constantly making progress. That fond delusion the Great War largely destroyed. It was fondly hoped to be a war to end all war. Now we have made a great peace that threatens to end all peace.

CATHOLIC ACTION AND THE HEALING ARTS
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By REV. GEO. E. O’DONNELL, Litt.D.

Perhaps you saw in the Philadelphia Record of Saturday last (Nov. 14, 1936) a half-page discussion of euthanasia. Pictures of Lord Ponsonby and two prominent Philadelphia physicians accompanied an article by G. R. Alexander in which certain pertinent questions on the proposed English bill were given answers by the Philadelphia doctors. Dr. Charles W. Burr is in favor of euthanasia, "in theory," he says. Dr. Ludwig Loeb is against it.

I am not going into the subject of euthanasia. Your President, Dr. Daly, treated that topic decisively in a lecture which you probably heard. I should rather mention some thoughts which came to me while reading the article. My first impression was that the article was on the wrong page of the paper. It should have been with the comics. There is no flippancy in this suggestion. Most comics achieve their humor through situations of misunderstanding; unconscious on the part of the characterization, but, of course, deliberate on the part of the creator. When Moon Mullins asks for the foot of the Welsh rabbit, Moon is ignorant, but Willard, the comic strip artist, is not. Now, it is difficult to believe that some one was not deliberately striving for humor in the article under consideration. At least this is the more charitable interpretation. That both eminent doctors miss the main point about euthanasia—dominion over life—is not surprising. But when one of them is guilty of a fallacy so elemental that a high school student could detect it at a glance, we’d rather believe the good doctor hoped he wouldn’t be taken too seriously.

Here are two of the questions with the answers Dr. Burr is quoted as giving:

Q. "Do you believe, in principle, that a patient suffering protracted excruciating pain with an incurable disease is entitled to euthanasia . . . ?"
Dr. Burr: "In theory, yes."

Q. "Why are you in favor of ... the principle of so-called 'mercy killings'?"

Dr. Burr: "It depends entirely upon the cause of the great pain and how long it lasts. (What does? What are you talking about, Doctor, the question is why are you in favor of euthanasia. WHY? However, go on.) In a case, for instance, of locomotor ataxia, where pain is going to last for years and is so great as to incapacitate the patient, that man is justified in asking for death. (We are still waiting for the answer to the "why," Doctor. And by the way, is it not the doctor rather than the patient who needs 'justifying' in euthanasia? Now look what you give us.) If you are a churchman, you do not believe that. (Thanks. You do believe in euthanasia, don't you, Doctor? WHY? No answer yet; but we do get the most precious gem of all.) Nevertheless, it remains true."

This, I submit, is the crudest example of the fallacy of "begging the question" ever to make print. The author not only assumes the truth of the proposition he is asked to prove, he assumes that it always has been true—"it remains true." More than that, he shifts the burden of proof to the opposition, leaving his adversary nothing more than mere "belief"—which was all he was able to allow himself in answer to the previous question—and then boldly (facetiously?) usurps the position of scientific certitude from proved, evident, and permanent fact. "It remains true"!!! Remember what the old grad said when he heard the colleges were dropping logic from their curricula, "What do they mean by saying they are dropping logic? They are not in a position to drop logic. It's logic that drops them."

Another question which occurred to me while reading the article was why a Catholic doctor was not asked for his opinion on euthanasia. We must have one, at least, of equal prominence with those who were asked. Why the Record sought the opinion of Dr. Loeb is no mystery, and we do not object. But we do object to the Record's complete disregard of the Catholic point of view. And the Record knows better. It printed the news item from London some days previously that the Catholic physicians of England were making a strong stand against the bills. Incidentally, when reverberations of the fight the English Catholic guilds are making can be heard in Philadelphia, there must be Catholic Action over there.

If human lives and Christian principles were not involved it would be shrewd business tactics to let the opposition by its mistakes perform our share of Catholic Action. The cheapest, yet most effective, adver-
tising our Catholic doctors and hospitals can get is the legalization of euthanasia. Fear that every doctor not a Catholic is a murderer and every non-Catholic hospital a slaughter-house would mean a land-office business for us. But, of course, there is too much at stake to follow that method of vicarious Catholic Action. Christianity is a challenge, not a business. And if I may suggest some immediate Catholic Action let this Guild remind the Philadelphia Record that some questions may have more than two sides, that Dr. Loeb does not, and cannot be expected to, represent the Christian opposition to the bill, and that if any opinion can be said to “remain true” it is the Catholic, which has been in possession for nineteen hundred years.

Glenn Frank is quoted as saying, “What ails modern society is the separation of the spiritual from the material.” We know in general how this came about. It began with the Renaissance. The humanities and natural sciences gradually divorced themselves from theology, until now they have achieved absolute autonomy. Sciences especially are constructed upon the results of observation and experiment, quite independent of any theological presuppositions. No one can complain about the progress science has made, though we might voice a mild protest against the ignorant or malicious assumption that science would have made no progress if it had not shed theology.

With the development of science specialization became inevitable. The technical elaboration of modern science has been made possible only by allowing the student to concentrate upon one small part of the field to the exclusion of the rest. This has led to the separation of the sciences one from another, and since there is no central body of supreme knowledge to which all lesser knowledges can be related, intellectual life has become compartmentalized. Thus life is seen not as a whole, but merely in its parts; it is not seen as to its ends and purposes, but only in its means. Life is a spectacle viewed by a conglomeration of monomaniacs who wear blinders and write monographs.

The sciences which deal with human conduct now do so without reference to moral theology. They aim, in theory, at a purely positive study, based upon the accumulation and analysis of facts. But not even a scientist can dabble long in human behavior without moralizing. The older school, by excluding human free will, simplified their problems and believed it was possible to forecast the future of humanity by generalizing from the past. It neither evaluated nor directed human activity. The newer schools of sociology, though still claiming to be scientific, are tending to assume directive functions, and to advise society what is its best policy in particular matters, notably sex, education, and family life. In other words, a purely technical science has not only divorced itself from moral theology, it has attempted a moral theology of its own.
Witness the confusion among the scientists when they turn theologian. Every scientist becomes a Walking Declaration of Independence. "No damned error but some sober brow will bless it as a truth." Whitehead explains God in terms of coherence and defines religion as what a man does with his solitariness; Sir Oliver Lodge jumps from materialism to spiritualism in one bound and expects us to accept his reasons for belief in immortality; to Jeans the physical universe is a mathematical equation; Freud resolves original sin into a sex complex, and Watson suggests behaviorist doubt as to whether we have minds at all. Albert Edward Wiggam, D.Sc., author of "Explore Your Mind," is the latest "spiritual director" of the scientific moralists. He said recently in answer to a question on suicide, "One cannot be dogmatic on this point—it is mostly a feeling, an emotion, but personally I should always try to persuade one against suicide under any circumstances I can now conceive." Match that for an example of the complete overthrow of God and enthronement of the ego! What would a poor fellow contemplating suicide do if Dr. Wiggam were not about at the moment? Cheer up, Dr. Wiggam probably has that other handy divine attribute—ubiquity.

What is the position of the Catholic doctor in all this, and what if anything can he do?

The supreme need of this age is something that will permeate and integrate our collected knowledge and direct it to its proper ends. This the Catholic doctor has—his faith. Ronald Knox described his conversion as the "process of pulling himself together." Without forgetting that this is not a sermon let me remind you that our Lord said to the woman He cured, "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole."

But the Catholic doctor must know his faith, especially the philosophical reasonableness of the Church’s attitude on certain moral problems. And he must not keep that faith bottled up in air-tight compartments; it must flow into every act of his profession.

Specifically we can take time out to make sure we know the Catholic position on current problems by reading Catholic books and periodicals. "We have less to fear from philosophical discussion than our opponents. But we must be properly instructed. . . . If it is necessary for the Catholic Evidence Guild to prepare carefully right answers to the questions of a street-corner heckler, surely it is at least as necessary for us to prepare correct answers to the questions of more educated hecklers amongst our colleagues, our patients and our friends." (Dr. R. Edridge, The Catholic Medical Guardian, July, 1936.) In practice the individual doctor can serve the cause of Catholic Action by performing his duties in the spirit of faith, by cooperating with the priest, and at times taking the place of the priest in driving despair from the death-bed. It ought to be evident to every dying person we
attend that, when we have used every earthly means to save life, we have not exhausted our powers; we then can use unearthly means and call into consultation the One Physician who can raise the dead to life. Doctors, let your faith shine amid the shadows of death!

What in the way of Catholic Action can our Guild do?

I have already suggested that something might be done about the newspaper article on euthanasia. We are a minority. We must be vigorous or we shall be snowed under. The forces opposing us are destructive of civilization: divorce, contraception, abortion, sterilization, professional murder, are all evidence of corruption after death.

"Civilization separated itself from God and denied His existence; and since He is the source of all life, spiritual, intellectual, and physical, to be separated from Him is to die." But it is not enough for us to know we are right, we must make our opponents see that we are right, otherwise we too shall go down in the final crash. Some way, by some concerted or corporate action, Philadelphia should be made aware that there is a Catholic Medical Guild here and that it is prepared to fight for the life and sanity of the medical profession and the Christian civilization.

ETHICS IN DEALING WITH PRIVILEGED INFORMATION

By ALPHONSE M. SCHWITALLA, S.J.

An excerpt from the Presidential Address at the National Convention of the Catholic Hospital Association

ANOTHER and very important point to which I wish to direct attention is the question of ethics in dealing with privileged information. This is a matter with which we cannot but be deeply interested, and concerned. An Association like ours must concentrate its thinking not only on strictly professional aspects of hospital activity but also upon the ethical significance of standards of excellence of hospital service and of hospital inter-relationships. One of the immediate corollaries of the principle of the personal relationship between physician and the patient is the obligation of secrecy imposed upon the physician, which obligation flows from the personal right of the patient to a personal service. Under the stresses of modern medical practice, it must be admitted that this obligation of secrecy is very easily overlooked and that the exigencies of such practice afford ample excuses for a mitigation of the obligation. I wish, however, here to call attention to the fact that the ethical obligation of secrecy on the part of the physician and by consequence on the part of the hospital, is not destroyed by those circumstances of practice under which we are today operating. The obligation still rests upon the medical man and consequently also upon hospital administrators to safeguard this secret to the fullest possible extent.