

November 1970

A Life of Commitment

Joseph R. Stanton

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq>

Recommended Citation

Stanton, Joseph R. (1970) "A Life of Commitment," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 37 : No. 4 , Article 3.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol37/iss4/3>

A Life Of Commitment

Joseph R. Stanton, M.D., F.A.C.P.*

Father Gilday, Guild members, friends and most warmly wives of Guild members already called to their eternal reward.

At the instruction of William Cardinal O'Connell, the Guild of St. Luke of Boston was organized and first presided over by Dr. Thomas Dwight, Professor of Anatomy at the Harvard Medical School, author of "*Thoughts of a Catholic Anatomist*," and a man who once entering a prosection room where a certain levity was going-on — struck the table forcefully and said, "Gentlemen, Silence! This body once contained an immortal soul!"

In a day when the propagandists for easy abortion assert its urgency and psychosocial necessity is there not a

need for a rededication of this Guild, indeed, of all doctors, to the profound respect for human life that marked our first President? Should not this guild come forth in a clear and ringing statement to all who would abandon a traditional and honored position of medicine? "Gentlemen, desist! The fetus from the moment of conception inherently possesses the capacity for ensoulment with an immortal soul! As such, it must not be ravaged by the surgical curette!"

The story is additionally told of Dr. Dwight that each year in the month of November he would have mass offered in the Cathedral of The Holy Cross for the souls of the bodies that were the subjects for dissection that year. It is undoubtedly from that source of inspiration that some members of this Guild keep a list of all those who die in their care during the year and in November have mass offered for their souls. I suggest to you that this custom and the mass for deceased doctors we offer tonight are part of a noble tradition that is eminently worthy of survival.

*Address given at the Carney Hospital Chapel, Boston on November 13, 1969. Dr. Stanton is an associate clinical Professor of Medicine, Tufts Medical School.

What word does one say to his peers, their wives and widows in the quiet of a chapel remembering the deceased doctors he has been privileged to know? One could reflect on the nobility of the calling of the physician — the total dedication that marks his entire professional life if he but remain true to his earliest inspirations and aspirations. One might speak of the long years of difficult preparation occasionally longer than the years left to practice and of the seeming waste of a short medical life viewed in the eyes of the world. One could in this day of discovery and seeming love of particular words — mention the words conscience, commitment, involvement and bearing witness and indicate that the worthy physician has lived these words in their fullest meaning through the centuries. What doctor's wife or widow among you has not known the delayed or missed meal, the cancelled social engagement, the putting the children to bed alone, the shortened evening, or witnessed the bone weary fatigue due to medical conscience, personal involvement and commitment and all

because, "Someone was sick — I was needed." And with what magnificent generosity of spirit have not you wives and widows responded? I suggest to you that it probably will not be a dedicated doctor or his wife who will say "Lord when did we see you sick or suffering or in want?" For only by the nature of his calling rivalled only by the priesthood if he but be spiritually perceptive the doctor has been and served Christ in the sick, the suffering, the dying.

I would then pass these things by and give to you words of hope — literally the promise of salvation from the gospel of this mass, "No need for surprise — an hour is coming in which all those in the tombs will hear His voice and will come forth — those who have done right will rise to life." And finally the liturgical reflection that is the *raison d'être* for this evening. "It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead" and we must remember that the members of The Guild of St. Luke of Boston.

Are You Moving?

If the next issue of this journal should be delivered to a different address, please advise **AT ONCE**. The return postage and cost of remailing this publication is becoming more and more costly. Your cooperation in keeping us up-to-date with your address will be most helpful.