The Catholic Physician

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The Catholic physician, by his very title is someone more than a doctor who is a specialist in curing the sick, a respectable gentleman in the community, and a learned spokesman. Through his baptism, he is given a special commission, invested in his person which is inseparable from his profession. He is to bring the Light of Christ to his fellowman.

PrIMITIVE man feared two great evils; sickness and darkness—sickness as the unknown enemy that destroyed him from within, and darkness which helped his enemy to destroy him from without. With both he was helpless.

Ancient man somehow associated life with light. With the warmth of the sun, plants "took" life, and in the brightness of the day he could see his enemy and thus protect his life from the aggressor.

The medical doctor was always recognized as a man of vision gifted with knowledge, artistic ability, and natural talents exceeding the men of his day. His profession trained him to discern the darkness of disease and with his skill, assist his fellowman to greater health and life.

Christ, the Divine Physician and "Light of the World" during His public life restored sight to the blind, health to the sick, and knowledge to the ignorant. In His love for mankind, He inspired those who wished to follow Him, in the Way, the Truth and the Life. A Way the Truth can be brought to Life is for each "enlightened" Catholic physician to live in a Christlike manner, serving God the Father, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in assisting His people walking in the darkness of sickness and sin.

The Catholic physician striving for perfection in his vocation should listen to the voice of the Divine Healer. In so doing, he will become conscious, through the light of Christ, of the needs of his brothers crying not only from physical pain but also from economic, social, and psychological sufferings. He should become sensitized to the needs of each individual with a soul that will live for eternity. Each patient should be considered a person calling with a need and not a "case number." For some, the Catholic physician should respond with words of comfort; others may need his guidance through a critical stage, and still others his willingness to complete necessary medical and governmental forms.

Every client needs the doctor's time, patience and love. It is here where the Catholic physician should excel over his colleagues through his personal love and concern for everyone. When this is accomplished, then the words of Christ will re-echo "Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of My brethren, you did it for Me."

In the Buffalo community, Catholic physicians have shown a tremendously generous dedication to...
God and man in helping the sick, the poor and the aged. In addition, through their magnanimous contribution of time, they have taught more than 75,000 young adults preparing for marriage. Their untiring efforts in assisting the married in child-spacing, the students in marriage courses and the nurses in medical training has brought them and all of us manifold blessings in this City of Good Neighbors.

The people of God have been healthier and holier through the influence of the Catholic physician and the nobility of his profession has been enhanced by his generosity. May God reward him for his response to His people, and grant him life eternal for his dedicated service.

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The Lay Apostolate did not begin with the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity of Vatican II. One cannot be a physician without affecting patients' attitudes toward God. No one ever studied medicine without a deep desire to help his brother. A physician is a lay apostle whether he ever considered himself as such or not. Few physicians emulate Tom Dooley or Albert Schweitzer but all at some time or other have foregone a party or athletic event to remain with a sick patient.

Pope John called for an aggiornamento of the Church. Can there be a refurbishing of the Physician's Apostolate? We would answer this question in a two-fold manner: the individual physician's apostolate and the group apostolate.

THE INDIVIDUAL PHYSICIAN'S APOSTOLATE

Let a physician review his actions during one day and study them in the light of Christian doctrine, virtue and sacrifice; then let him modify his ways as indicated. Does the image he presents in his home impress his wife and children, leading them toward a love of the Christian manner of living? Does he set an example by prayer in the home and by participation in the liturgy when attending religious services? Is he expected to give some individual attention to each of his children and to his wife regularly? Does he check the children's growth spiritually, mentally and physically, exerting a guiding and stimulating influence?

A physician's manner of attending to such details may embellish the Christian image not only in the minds of his own family but in the minds of friends who visit his home or otherwise have contact with his family. In all areas . . . Christian families give testimony to Christ before the world by remaining faithful to the gospel and by providing a model of Christian marriage throughout their lives."

The gross anatomy of that part of a doctor's life, which relates strictly to his practice, may not reveal any Apostolic tendencies. Looking closely at one day's activities, might uncover some apostolic opportunities which we might ordinarily miss. Our manner with office help, with our patients in the office and the hospital, our actions in staff meetings, or patience with nurses, and in the operating room may have Christian or unchristian reflections. We may berate nurses for mistakes or we may show forebearance and teach them how to avoid error. Our manner toward our fellow physicians and our charity toward patients are reflections, too, which have apostolic meaning. A physician is always proud of being knowledgeable, up-to-date, and proficient in his field, but does he think of this as being a reflection of a