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President's Page

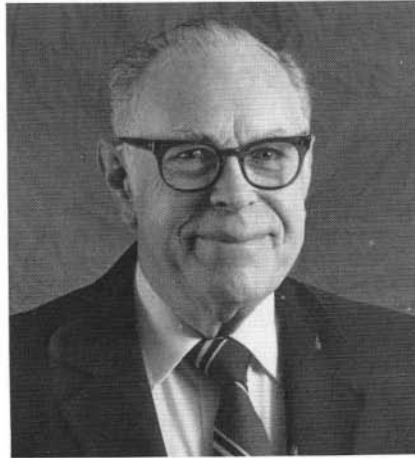
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President's Page



Questions/Reflections

What is ethics?

Random House English Dictionary defines it as a system or moral principles; the ethics of a culture; and further, moral principles, as of an individual; and further, that branch of philosophy dealing with values relating to human conduct, with respect to the rightness and wrongness of certain actions and to the goodness and badness of the motives and ends of such actions.¹

Does human society need ethics? Why?

Cognizant of God's gift of the creation of the universe on the one hand, and the creation of man in His image on the other, it must be noted that the operative order, since that time, has proceeded on a double-pronged injunction: "Increase and multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea. . . ." ² Fallen man engineered his own disordered society, and the many imperfections continue to this day. The resultant, ongoing and self-destructive human behavior has been punctuated by the many salvific covenants by a loving and merciful God; two that stand out — the imperatives of the Ten Commandments and the gift of His Son, with the subsequent impact of His passion, death, and resurrection, and derivatively, the final and ongoing covenant.

Therein do we have the moral law, a reaffirmation of the natural law written in the heart of man, and the appropriateness and the need of ethical principles to translate the natural and moral law into a system of right order and prudential action, embellished and fortified by the cardinal virtues.

Does medicine as an institution, and medical practice as an action, need ethics?

If the right order and harmony of society are dependent on moral law, and derivatively, the logical ethical system, certainly our religious and secular institutions must have principled foundations and discipline, with codification which relates to their special functions.

Since the fall, man, as well as civilized and uncivilized society, have violated the moral law and ethical principles governing behavior, but at least in the Judeo-Christian tradition, it was still regarded as immoral and abnormal. Evil was evil, sin was sin, and the Church addressed the human condition with pastoral care and the sacraments to lead us to reconciliation.

Today everyone is an ethician, and we are faced with a smorgasbord ethics and "newspeak." Consider, for a moment, a brief item in the current issue of *Medical Tribune*, citing the "Pro-Choice" Advocates' assertion that President Reagan's proposed cutoff of federal spending for family planning clinics that offer abortion counseling, "... would violate medical ethics and physicians' First Amendment rights." The president of the Planned Parenthood Federation describes the proposal as "shocking" and continues, "... it begs the modicum of intelligence we thought the President had left."

With such many-sided assaults from both the secular and the religious, is it any wonder that the NFCPG is viewed as a remnant, out of touch? But it must simply further our resolve as an institution, to continually man the ramparts, and in concert with the Magisterium, defend the traditional values, especially as they pertain to life and love.

All the more does it justify the NFCPG as an institution, and its *Linacre Quarterly* as a forum for discussion and debate, in order to expound the traditional values, defend orthodoxy and plot the directions in the application of these ethical principles to human behavior.

All the more does it point to the need of the project, headed by our past president, Gene Diamond, to establish an Institute of Clinical Ethics, essentially founded and directed by the NFCPG, to continue and expand the dialogue with well considered position papers. You will read more about this in this issue of *Linacre* and see the first such position papers published herein.

All the more does the current turmoil enjoin members of the Federation to heed Cardinal O'Connor's recent challenge to us at the annual meeting in New York — to evangelize, beginning with our own colleagues.

— **Thomas M. Hughes, M.D.**
President, NFCPG

1. *Random House English Dictionary*
2. *Book of Genesis*