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PHYSICIAN, HEAL THYSELF

By the VERY REV. MSGR. M. J. GRUENEWALD
Belleville, Illinois

From their earliest inception in England in the seventh century, guilds had for their purpose, in addition to their social and commercial objectives, a well-defined *religious or spiritual program*. Thus religious observances formed an important part of early Guild life and the members assisted one another both in spiritual and temporal necessities, some of the guilds associating their members in alms-giving, care of the sick, burial of the dead and in providing Masses for deceased members. When in his encyclical letter "Rerum Novarum," the celebrated Pope of the workingman, Leo XIII, encouraged Christian workmen to form guilds or unions after the manner of the historic guilds of workingmen, he directed that these unions or guilds, which were primarily called into being for economic reasons, were to help each member better his condition

to the utmost in body, *soul* and property. Permit me to quote some of the words of the Encyclical in question: "It is clear that they (these unions or guilds) must *pay special attention to the duties of religion and morality* and that social betterment should have this chiefly in view. For the foundation of social law being thus laid in religion, it is not hard to establish the relations of members one to another in order that they may live together in concord and achieve prosperity." The late Pope Pius XI in his Encyclical "Quadragesimo Anno" sees "the glad signs of a coming social reconstruction" in the existing associations of workmen, among whom "great masses of youthful workers . . . *listen readily to the call of divine grace and strive with splendid zeal to win their fellow workmen to Christ.*"

When we see the Catholic Phy-

sicians' Guild against this historical background, it is not hard to see that this Guild of our day must first, last and all the time be a Catholic organization. It must have a definite spiritual objective, not only with regard to our fellow man but also with regard to the individual members that make up the organizations. It has been styled *the Catholic Action organization for physicians who are members of the Church*. It will be well, then, that we ascertain the mind of our late Pontiff, Pope Pius XI, the Pope of Catholic Action, on the essence and the various qualities of Catholic Action. Father Vermeersch, the learned Jesuit theologian and canonist, gives us the following summary of its common principles and foundations, contained in the letter of Pope Pius XI to Cardinal Bertram, under date of November 13, 1938. The object of Catholic Action is the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy. It is based on the mandate received from the bishops and the priests, namely those who are sent by Christ. *Its essence consists in the pursuit of one's own perfection*, plus an apostolate which is common to Catholics of every rank. It is organized under the authority of the bishops, has a membership of Catholics who are at the call of the hierarchy for religious activity in matters pertaining to faith and morals. *Its end is to advance the kingdom of Christ*. The *positive requirements* in its membership are *solid piety,*

full instruction in sound doctrine, high moral character, a supreme devotion to Catholic Action as above personal, class or party interests. Its expected results are the promotion of the common welfare in every country, the union of Catholics of all parties, winning of souls to the faith and law of the Gospel, restoring of Catholic principles to public life, public peace and prosperity. When we superimpose this summary of the common principles and foundations of Catholic Action as given us by Father Vermeersch, upon the constitution of our Catholic Physicians' Guilds, we find that the Guild admirably measures up to these requirements. There is in the constitution of the Guild among the manifold purposes of the organization, the evident object of Catholic Action, namely (a) the upholding of the principles of Catholic faith and morality against un-Christian and unscientific materialism; (b) the facilitating of intercourse between Catholic physicians and the clergy, as well as with the members of the other learned professions, such as judges, magistrates, lawyers, educators, and lawmakers who are interested in the study and discussion of medico-religious questions and those touching on the science of duty and ethics; (c) its investigation of the relations of medical theory and practice to Catholic theology and philosophy; (d) rendering such assistance to Catholic medical institutions and missions as may be practicable;

and (e) promoting among Catholic members of the profession such solidarity as may be advantageous to both their religion and their profession. The Guild has received its mandate from the Most Reverend Ordinaries of the Dioceses in which it functions. Its end is a purely spiritual one, to advance the kingdom of Christ. Although there is present that participation in the apostolate of the hierarchy, in the humble opinion of the writer it would be well to lay more stress upon *the importance of the pursuit of one's own perfection*. This last point is also in strict accord with the positive requirements of Catholic Action, namely solid piety, full instruction in sound doctrine, high moral character, a supreme devotion to Catholic Action as above personal, class or party interests.

"Physician, heal thyself." There can be no question that unless we take care of ourselves first, we are not fit instruments to work for the spread of the kingdom of Christ and for the sanctification of others. "If the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit" (Matt. xv. 14). To reinforce our statements in this regard, let me quote the words of His Excellency, the Most Rev. Apostolic Delegate to the United States, Archbishop Cioffani: "Catholic Action is based upon, and pre-supposes the fidelity of the Catholic to those means of personal sanctification and those evidences of public worship without which there can be no Christian life at all. First of all,

the Catholic will be not only faithful to, he will diligently cultivate the spirit and the practice of prayer; attendance at Holy Mass; the frequent reception of the Sacraments, particularly the life-giving Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, and that liturgical life of the Church which manifests the mysteries of Christ's life whereby we both imitate and are able to imitate Him. . . . The Holy Father would have us bring home to ourselves the truth that we should be 'alive,' both as individuals and as members of the Church which is the living union of the faithful under and with their bishops. The Catholic must ever remember that he is a member of this great living union. His duty as such a member is expressed by the Holy Father as follows: 'As every Christian receives the supernatural life which circulates in the veins of the mystical Body of Christ—that abundant life that Christ Himself said He came to bring on earth, so he must transfuse it into others who either do not possess it or who possess it too sparsely and more in appearance than reality.' (Letter of Pius XI, March, 1934, to Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon.)"

"Martha, Martha," said the Lord to the over-solicitous and very busy woman who was so attentive to His physical needs, "thou art careful and art troubled about many things: but one thing is necessary" (Luke x., 10-41). Would not our Lord address the same reproach to many of our very busy Catholic physicians

who are so tied down by office hours and by the cares of their practice that they do not have time to attend to that one thing necessary, the work of their personal sanctification? If they get to Mass at all on Sunday morning, it is to the shortest possible service that is offered, at which there is either no sermon at all or only a very short one. They are too busy, also, to go to the Sacraments frequently and content themselves with confession and Communion at rather long intervals during the year, if they do go more often than the one time required to make their Easter duty. "For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?" (Mark viii., 36). Aye, what profit, if our physician becomes most successful and skillful in his particular field, if he accumulates a comfortable competence of the things of this world and even if he performs certain acts of philanthropy by contributing to various deserving enterprises, if, in the end of all, the Catholic physician fails in that one all-important business, the salvation of his soul? Many physicians find ways and means of taking a holiday each week from their duties in the office, but *they have no time* to be present at the *two or three meetings of the year* which are held by their Physicians' Guild to promote the work of Catholic Action and for the pursuit of their own perfection plus one or the other works of the Catholic lay apostolate. One of

these three meetings is the annual Communion meeting which is connected with Sunday Holy Mass, already of obligation for every Catholic. It, therefore, leaves but two meetings a year which will require a sacrifice of some kind on the part of our Catholic physicians to attend. It is this evident indifference on the part of a large number of our Catholic medical men that calls forth the general complaint from the Moderators and other officers of the existing Guilds throughout the country, about the difficulty of carrying on this work, which merits the active interest and the best zeal of every individual Catholic physician.

Thank God that our Catholic doctors are not all the over-busy Marthas whom the Saviour rebukes about neglecting the one thing necessary and that there are amongst them a number of model Catholic men who are exemplary in their attendance at Sunday Mass, who regularly frequent the Sacraments and who have caught the spirit of the lay retreat movement and annually go to some house of retreat to adjust the affairs of their soul and to gather new strength and resolution for the coming year. They have heard the message: "Physician, heal thyself," and they are doing everything within their power to comply with this injunction.

Cardinal Newman, in a passage which is quoted from his "Idea of a University," saw very clearly the place that a Catholic physician occupies in a community and

how valuable particularly to Catholic patients are his ministrations. He said: "There cannot be a worse calamity for Catholic people than to have its medical attendants alien or hostile to Catholicity; there cannot be a greater blessing than when they are intelligent Catholics who acknowledge the claims of religious duty and the subordinations and limits of their own functions." An uninformed physician who is a poor Catholic and who knows little of his own faith and cares less about it, who is indifferent to the theological principles which govern the practice of medicine, is a definite point of weakness and danger, not only to himself as a Catholic physician, and to his patients who entrust themselves to his care, but also to the Church, the laws of God (which are really the laws of nature) and the proper attitude toward the work of his profession. Such a physician will generally do more harm than good.

It is the mind of the Church, as can be seen from Canon Law and from the particular applications of the general canons of the Church found in the statutes of the various diocesan synods that the faithful, if possible, go to a Catholic doctor for treatment and medical advice. But this attitude on the part of the Church and the wish which she expresses to her faithful children *connotes a corresponding obligation* on the part of the Catholic physician to fit him-

self to fully discharge this duty, by leading a good Catholic life and by a correct and thorough knowledge of the laws of God and of the Church in as far as they concern the practice of medicine. Untold harm is done by physicians who are culpably ignorant of their obligations toward their patients and of the ethics of medicine.

The Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds of the United States is on the threshold of what is possibly the greatest expansion movement in its history. The Executive Committee of the Federation has already held several meetings and is looking forward to others to make plans for a splendid meeting of delegates to the Federation as well as of all Catholic physicians attending the convention of the American Medical Association next June at New York. For this reason the writer feels that it will be timely to recommend that the Guild "sell" itself to prospective Catholic physician members on the idea of *Catholic Action in the complete sense of the word*, comprising not only the apostolate in the lives of others, but first and foremost the element of *personal sanctification*.

While our older men, who have taken a hand in the affairs of their Physicians' Guilds, have shown commendable zeal and intelligent interest in this work, according to the words of the Rev. Ignatius W. Cox, S.J., Moderator of the Federation, "It is the *young doctors*

whom we ought to get more and more, in order to inoculate them with the Guild idea while they are still young." The writer, therefore, appeals to those responsible for the training of our physicians to impress upon them the necessity of looking beyond the narrow confines of this life and of making provision for their eternal interests by actively identifying themselves with a Catholic Action organization such as the Catholic Physicians' Guild.

Furthermore, we take the liberty to recommend that the constitutions of Guilds already in existence throughout this country be revised, particularly in the statement of the objects of the Guild and that the clause "to constitute a brotherhood of physicians who will teach and practice the ideals of the Catholic religion" be given its proper place first in order amongst the purposes of the Guild; that this first purpose of Catholic Action be amplified according to the recommendations of the Apostolic Delegate and the recommendations of the Holy See by adding the positive instructions to this paragraph "by diligently cultivating the spirit and practice of prayer by attendance at Holy Mass even on week days, if possible, by the frequent reception of the Sacraments, particularly the life-giving Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, and by annual attendance at a retreat for laymen."

In the *America* of February 11, 1933, we find the following quotation: "Unless our professional men listen to the voice of the Vicar of Christ, a force of great power for the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth, the end of all Catholic Action, will be lost."

I am certain that the Guild will treasure amongst its most precious documents the letter of commendation received through the late Cardinal Hayes of New York from Cardinal Pacelli, then Secretary of State, now gloriously reigning as Pope Pius XII: "It is with the most lively pleasure and appreciation that the Holy Father has received Your Eminence's account of the establishment of the Catholic Physicians' Guild in your Archdiocese, and of the fruitful work which the Guild is now promoting while at the same time it gives hope of still greater fruits for the future by *vindicating, as it does, Catholic doctrine and morals which its members further confirm by their activities and example* as well as by the authoritative pronouncements of their science. To each of these beloved Sons, the Holy Father imparts his special Apostolic Benediction with the devout wish that their *apostolic work nourished by the Lord's choicest graces may sprout into more vigorous fruitfulness for the salvation of souls and for the spread of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"