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Marvin Bordelon

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Moderator's Message...

The Profession of Medicine

Those two words "profession" and "medicine" have maintained a remarkable purity of meaning despite long and varied usage. Despite attempts of all kinds of groupings to use the appellation "profession" (witness: "the priestly profession"), doctors of medicine still seem to enjoy some sort of prior right to the title "professional men."

What does this mean?

Webster's *International Dictionary* defines profession first in the sense of religious consecration; then secondly, as a public act of belief, faith or opinion and as an avowed statement of expression of intention or purpose. In the third definition, Webster describes profession in terms of Christian or religious conviction and purpose openly avowed; and in yet another meaning defines the term as "a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive preparation including instructions in skills and methods as well as in the scientific, historical, or scholarly principles underlying such skills and methods, maintained by force of organization or concerted opinion high standards of achievement and conduct, and committing its members to continued study and to a kind of work which has for its prime purpose the rendering of a public service."

In another place, Webster describes medicine in terms of healing. What a challenge for doctors! Basically, I am personally in deep admiration for the way doctors generally have met the demands of their calling. If they fail to reach perfection, I would suggest that the default lies in the area of social organization. No discipline today can reach its objectives in isolation, but rather in closest and effective consort with others. It seems to me that medicine, and men of medicine, must appreciate sufficiently the need of private industry, of church, of government and the populace as aids in achieving its most noble purpose.

VERY REV. MSGR. MARVIN BORDELON

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