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THE MEDICAL APOSTOLATE IN A CHANGING WORLD

JOHN J. FLANAGAN, S.J.

THE APOSTOLATE of the Church is a continuing mission and will not terminate until the end of the world or at that time when there are no more souls to be won for Christ. This apostolate began with the Apostles and has continued through all the chapters of the Christian era. It has gone through many phases since the time of the Apostles. It has flourished under the influence of great dynamic Saints. It has been stimulated by the blessing of royal influence; it has been spread by European clergy carrying the faith to newly discovered lands. It has always been succored by the unceasing financial and material help of the lay people in the Church and by the influx of young men and women into religious life and by the many vocations to the priesthood. In general, however, the leadership has come from a limited group within the ranks of clergy and religious, who by education and training were prepared to act in leadership roles. All of us here today owe our faith to one of these great influences. We pause to acknowledge our debt of gratitude to those who have made possible for us the great gift of membership for the Catholic Church.

A new phase of apostolic work

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is, however, opening up to the Catholic world. Because there is so much to be done, apostolic leadership is being offered to the Catholic laity of the world. This is most appropriate and opportune; not only is there the need of apostolic assistance; not only is there an inadequate supply of religious and priests, there is, providentially, a great and almost untapped resource of lay men and lay women who are capable of playing important roles in the Apostolate of the Modern Church. Catholic collegiate and university education in many parts of the world have provided thousands of graduates; other thousands of Catholics have prepared themselves in non-Catholic universities and have emerged with a full consciousness of the importance of Catholic lay leadership in our modern world. Intellectually prepared lay leaders are available. The Church has manifested its willingness to use lay people.

It is well understood that the lay apostolate beckons to Catholic lay people in all walks of life. It is also most significant that lay people are accepting this role. We find Catholic men and women working with priests and religious in Catholic colleges, universities, high schools and elementary schools. They share the work in Catholic hospitals and in Catholic welfare work. They serve as catechists and exponents of the faith in

public appearances. Today we know we could not carry on the work of the Church without active lay leadership participation.

It is rather well accepted now that all lay people in keeping with their educational background, in keeping with circumstances and opportunities have a role and a responsibility in the apostolic work of the Church. What does this mean for Catholic men and women in the medical profession? It seems to me that because of their professional and scientific education, because of their unique position in society that they have unusual opportunities to render outstanding service to the Church.

We are already familiar with the great good that Catholic medical men and women have done in preserving the moral aspects of medical practice. We know that hundreds of them in the role of personal counselor do much to influence their patients toward better moral lives. We know that thousands of them give of their time and money in assisting the poor and the medically indigent. They have been generous in providing professional care for priests and religious. In recent years we have all been edified by the number of Catholic physicians who have served in the foreign missions. Their zeal and their spirit of self-sacrifice is one of the brightest spots in modern mission work. I feel certain that this movement will grow and spread and that the work of mission priests and religious will be augmented and supported by the presence of the well-trained Catholic physicians on the frontiers of the Church.

These activities are excellent; we are proud of the men and women responsible for these; we thank God that the spirit of charity is not dead; we are grateful that generous Catholic physicians are so mission minded. But I wonder if I may mention a special professional and missionary activity which manifests itself in every nation where there are Catholic physicians. It is the apostolate of professional and scientific excellence. It is the apostolate of influential leadership where only medical men can raise their voices; it is an area where action and example speak more effectively than dogmatic and theological pronouncements. I am speaking about Catholic leadership in the area of academic and scientific medicine.

There are certain facts which we must face realistically. The world under the pressure of discoveries and scientific development is changing and moving rapidly. Science and higher education are no longer restricted to an elite few. They have become a normal medium of exchange. They are standard prerequisites for acceptance in health circles today.

We live in a strongly protestant environment in which we are daily struggling to move from the status of a minority group into some modicum of leadership and influence. We live regularly with the accusations that the Catholic Church is opposed to science, — that Catholics are not progressive, — that Catholic physicians and Catholic hospitals are not interested in medical research. There is a feeling, also, that our Catholic hospitals exist to proselytize

rather than to sponsor the best procedures in medicine and hospital care. We are irritated by these charges. We react by feeling sorry for ourselves. We attempt a refutation by indicating that we are victims of prejudice and bigotry.

What are the facts? There is no doubt that there are prejudice and bigotry. They will always exist to a certain extent. But have we not contributed in a large measure to this attitude on the part of non-Catholics? Have we not indirectly given support to our critics? Have we not, by default and by omission, condemned ourselves to a status of mediocrity? Have we not been defensive and negative rather than constructive and positive?

Our critics, many of them sincere, ask us why there are so few Catholic physicians in medical research and medical education. Where are the Catholic scientific writers? In recent years, we have been studying these problems in the United States. In one study we found that our Catholic universities and colleges were doing very little in research. A study of Catholic hospitals indicated, at one time, that scarcely a one was sponsoring any research and this despite the fact that ample research funds were available. Neither the governing bodies nor the medical staffs were interested in research. In attempting to overcome this deficiency, we found that the greatest difficulty was to find physicians who had the aptitude and the desire to do any research work. The institutions and the physicians had become the victims of a system of inbred complacency and satisfaction with the *status quo*.

A high occupancy in the hospital, full waiting rooms, and Cadillac cars in the parking lot had become the symbols of professional success. Care was routinely good and was measured by yesterday's standards rather than by those in a more progressive hospital. Thank God these attitudes are changing.

Another area in which we are judged is that of scientific writing and medical meetings. How often do we find Catholics writing in scientific journals? Far too infrequently. Studies have been made in this area, too. Catholics are notably in an unreasonable minority. Qualified medical men tell me that there is talent in abundance to do research and to write. It would seem that there is lacking only the encouragement and the determination to engage in these activities. Catholic institutions have sometimes failed to provide needed facilities or to encourage this phase of medicine.

Our Lord inaugurated the apostolate by exhorting His followers to teach. The role of the teacher in the work of the Church has always been an honorable and important one. Yet we find very few Catholic physicians making a career of teaching. We are greatly concerned today that materialism and atheism are making progress. We are particularly concerned that they are influencing the fields of science and particularly medicine. We cry out against these dangers. But we are not taking the practical steps which are necessary to combat these unwholesome influences. We are inclined to attempt to combat them by theological denunciations; some Catholics resort to

invectives and challenge the good will of non-Catholics. In general these tactics produce only unfavorable results in the minds of those whose medium of intellectual exchange is the test tube and the laboratory. They have no theological foundations—no religious sensibilities. They do not understand our theological arguments. They do not speak our language. Only Catholic scientists and Catholic physicians who have qualified themselves as scientific authorities will be able to influence them.

At one time there was a belief that it was dangerous for a woman to submit to more than two cesarean sections. It was medical practice in non-Catholic circles to approve abortion in cases where a normal delivery would be difficult or dangerous. We Catholics protested and quoted theology in vain. Two physicians, however, did do something about this. One a non-Catholic, Dr. Samuel Cosgrove, carried on research at the Margaret Hague Maternity Center and proved scientifically that it was safe to perform seven or eight or more cesarean operations on one woman. Later, Dr. Roy Heffernan, a Catholic surgeon in Boston, brought this study up-to-date. Although these two studies have not turned the tide completely, there is now available an answer to the abortion problem which is understandable and convincing for the non-Catholic physician.

We are much concerned about birth control. On no other topic have Catholics written so much and so vehemently. We have, however, had little influence. Our approach has been theological; it has been dogmatic; we

have ridiculed and denounced, but the problem of birth control becomes more pronounced. All non-Catholics oppose us because they do not accept our theology. Many weak non-Catholics practice birth control because our arguments are not convincing to them. Intellectually our efforts have been fruitless because we have not utilized the medium which is understood in the intellectual and scientific world of influence. Ironically, the most significant contributions on the problem of the population have been written by non-Catholic scholars. Our Catholic professional people and our Catholic colleges and universities are not conducting research on these problems which mean so much to the Church. It is almost certain that the rhythm theory is potentially the most effective method of planning families. It is approved, yet it frequently fails because doctors do not understand it. Its potential is not exploited because we have not made it a matter of research.

His Eminence Cardinal Leon Joseph Suennes has complained in a recent work that although chastity, continence and restraint are key problems in Catholic life, no Catholic university has a department to study these problems and to develop spiritual, psychological and physical helps for people. Why should we not marshal all possible psychological and medical resources to help our Catholic people. We cannot rely on theology alone.

They, of course, have not approached the problem from a theological point of view, but have investigated it statistically and according to a methodology

well-understood and acceptable in non-Catholic circles. Their findings and their opinions will have more weight and influence, not because their faith is great, not because their convictions are stronger, but because they know how to evaluate a problem in terms which the non-Catholic world understands. Because, also, they have established for themselves reputations as scholars and researchers. If only we spent more time and energy in preparing Catholic scholars, we could be of so much assistance to the apostolate of the Church.

In this twentieth century, fighting the modern enemies of the Church, we must learn to use the weapons of our age. The scientific scholar, the researcher in the laboratory and in the social sciences are the respected men and women of our day. The Church needs them today as she needed a Jerome, a Thomas Aquinas, an Albertus Magnus, and a Bellarmine, each in his own time, each doing combat for the Faith which has bound us together through all the centuries.

To be specific, with this generation of Catholic physicians, the Church needs many of you in the academic halls and laboratories of medicine; many are needed in the field of research to seek the truth which God has mysteriously hidden in the realm of the physical sciences. Needed also are new apologists to take strong positions bolstered by facts and to boldly carry the fight for Christ's Church into the camps of materialism and agnostic science.

This requires courage, sacrifice, vision and imagination. You have made sacrifices; you give

of your time and talent, even of your leisure to help the poor; our Catholic hospitals make sacrifices for the poor. Will we be willing to sacrifice the lure of a lucrative practice for a lesser salary to carry the apostolate into the medical class room and laboratory? Some of you have sacrificed, or are willing to sacrifice money and conveniences of home to give time in the mission fields. Would you be willing to have your son do missionary work in the field of research—with the hope of bringing light and understanding to those who are learned in so many ways, but who have been denied the grace of faith? Can you visualize the apostolic influence of an Einstein who had the faith of Aquinas or Bellarmine?

There are many kinds of vocations in the Church; the vocation to nurse the poor; the vocation to teach the poor; the vocation to teach the intellectual elite in order that the Faith may be carried to them. Can there not be a special vocation of professional excellence in academic medicine and medical research in order that Catholic principles may infiltrate and influence. Regardless of the type of special vocation, there is one common motivation—the glory of God, the saving of souls. Is it too much to want to use scholarship and research to serve such a cause? Does not Christ expect us to use these tools? Modern missionaries no longer travel by covered wagon or slow steamboat; they travel by jet. The Church needs a modern Pasteur, a Catholic Salk.

We must plant the seed in minds and hearts of young students—in undergraduate work—

in professional schools. Was the apostolate of teaching and research ever mentioned to you in your student days? I doubt it seriously. I know that young people can be guided into these fields. The Church stresses its role as a teacher—does this not indicate the importance of teachers and researchers in medicine?

Problems in new nations will challenge the Church. Do we have twentieth century answers for twentieth century problems?

One thing is certain, we must operate from positions of professional strength and excellence. We cannot exercise leadership if we are weighted down with mediocrity, compromise and a spirit of trying to get by

with the minimum. I am not a scholar; I belong to the group which would be classed as administrators, but it would do my heart good to have opened the way just a little for one who has the potential to do great things for the Church and for souls. Many of you have settled in a professional status; it may not be possible for you to rise to this challenge of our decade, but you may be the ones to change attitudes, to give counsel, guidance and encouragement to younger men. The apostolate of medical excellence is only now unfolding; you may have the distinction and satisfaction of giving it direction and meaning. In your own way you are part of the same apostolate.