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The Moderator's Message ... Some Observations on Growth

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The Moderator's Message ...

Some Observations on Growth

Clinicians think positively in reference to growth viewing it as the healthy, progressive development of an organism. The pathologist and radiologist must daily face the fact of growth in a different context as they observe or examine some morbid formation. In either case, there are three valuable elements: life, change, and the doctor.

All, privileged to live at this time, find themselves in the midst of great and far-reaching changes—changes in society, in the Church, in worship, in medicine, in the concept of the individual and even of life itself. For most men these changes represent growth—for some they appear as a threat. A threat to what? There is no status quo in life—there is only growth or decline.

What of the remark of a doctor at a recent meeting: "Our Guild doesn't do a thing—it just gets us together for Mass and Communion twice a year"? Or another: "I know enough about medico-morals—why should I associate with a group of Catholic doctors?" I can think of no more scathing indictments of either the failure of the Church to communicate or of the individual to understand the true nature of the Christian vocation and the source of its growth. In these enlightened times one has a right to expect deeper spiritual insight from the educated Catholic.

Permit me to refer to some remarks made in Worship six years ago by Father Neil P. Hurley, S.J.: "Once the Christian mystery is presented in its dramatic impact, the notion of sanctity becomes obvious, not as a voluntaristic or semi-pelagian impulse toward perfection, but as a free, creative response to God's inviting plan of 'restoring all things in Christ.' Unless the American Catholic is plunged into the heart of the mystery, into the central act of worship, the Mass, it will be difficult for him to see how he differs from non-Catholics in a pluralistic society." And Father Hurley later asks the question: "Could it be that we American Catholics have been shouting from the rooftops not the good tidings, but what would be obvious to all once the good tidings are understood, moral excellence?"

I would say that spiritual growth is indicated all around; but please view the community of Catholic physicians not as a morbid formation, but as a healthy organism that must either grow or decline. Which do you want it to do—Doctor? Activity will flow from any Guild when its spiritual life is restored, emphasized and understood. This is a fact of life.

The existence of the spiritual life cannot preclude the Spirit Who inspires and prompts the individual response. The security of a well-ordered code of action, available at any given time in the history of the Church, does not supplant the creative responsibility demanded by individual witness. The Christian conscience must be recognized as the gift of God to His People, not as a threat to revealed truth but as a valid instrument for its implementation, and the respected sign of free men. St. Paul spoke to the Corinthians of a variety of ministries in the Church—apostles, prophets, teachers, healers, and others. These Christians show forth God's gifts—but they do not merely form a crowd. Each ministry must be itself—each person must be himself or the Church cannot grow properly. Every doctor knows the threat to life when only one type of cell multiplies too rapidly. If, in the changing pattern of life for the Church, and society at large, the Catholic doctor does not offer the best solution to the new problems awaiting his art, his research and his interest—if he does not grow—his voice will be supplanted by the abnormal growth of other influences in society and the Christian community will be the loser.

Fight growth if you will; hide from conscience if you can; deny your commitment to the Christian life if you dare; ignore the growing and revitalized Church of God if you must. Know this, though, by so doing you deny the Life Who said: "I shall make all things new."

REVEREND KENNETH P. MacKINNON