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EDITORIAL

DOCTOR, QUO VADIS?

If today were your last, would you meet it happily? If you were given just a couple of days, would you change anything? If you were promised another six months, what new project might you undertake? Are you breathless from running, but still uncertain of the goal? Has your Christianity been something of a "Sunday-suit," or do you wear it at the office, on a house-call, or in the operating-room?

Some of the finest doctors I know never enter a church, never speak of God, never talk about a life after death. They aspire to professional excellence, and find that enough. They are kind and understanding, tolerant and perceptive. Often they are splendid humanitarians. They show a sense of direction, and, indeed, inspiration.

What special flavor, then, can Christianity impart to the life of a practicing physician? What will come over me if I put on Christ?

These are ecumenical years. Questions like the above belong more than ever to conversations that take place among laymen. One's relationship to his Creator ought not to await the visit of a clergyman in order to become a fit subject for discussion. Christ never suggested we might be in poor taste to talk of Him when we are together with family, or friends, hospital attendants, or patients.

A physician could try a very simple thing. He could talk to God. He could say: "Jesus here are my hands. Let them work Your miracles. Here are my lips. Use them to tell Your creatures about You. Let them speak tender words . . . words that reflect Your Love. And Jesus, here are my legs. May they carry me only where I can best fulfill Your plan. When they falter, brace them, and set them straight on a road of Your choosing. Finally, Jesus, here is my heart. Write upon it as on a sheet of pure white vellum. Teach this heart to look for You in the fatigue I feel, in the suffering I see, and in the rebuffs I encounter . . . often from the ones who consider themselves friends."

After a physician whispered such a prayer, he might return to work. If the prayer were really his own, little time could pass before some change took place in the character of his work. Even his moments of relaxation could reflect the "style of Christ."

A doctor who does these simple things should prepare for surprise. Many things that happen will be easier for him to understand. He will find more interest in his patients as people, and their defects will not annoy him. He may find himself more studious because his motive is love. He will witness coincidences which transcend statistical analysis, and even his scientific mind will recognize the Hand of the Holy Spirit.

Surprise will yield to confidence once the doctor learns to anticipate the cooperation of his Creator. He will grow more adept at discussing the implications of serious illness with the patient. He might find himself explaining why a good God permits physical evil. He might readily understand the reason for the first time himself.

After all is said and done, he might see himself kneel in prayer at the bedside of a dying patient. He might even teach a patient to pray, or join him in a spoken prayer. He might, more easily, find the proper words in discussing, with residents and nurses, the approach to a sick patient. Indeed, if the whole concept takes hold of him, he may find less need to discuss these things, since his own good example will spread the word with truly thundering impact.

This sort of Christianity could hardly fail to enhance the pallid concept, the traditional goal of "professional excellence." Unlike most changes in the *status quo*, this one requires little or no actual time. It has been known to save time, for it represents, in truth, a simplification, a sort of polarization of a man's life.

Most of the work required by such a rededication evolves, as usual, upon the willing shoulders of the Holy Spirit, who has infinite free time, as well as an insatiable appetite, for new projects.

A warning is here in order. Unknown to himself, though hardly by accident, the doctor could become a saint.

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