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Call to Catholic Action

The Reverend Ignatius W. Cox, S.J., first moderator of The Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds, commemorated the 25th anniversary of the organization's founding, giving the sermon at the Pontifical Mass celebrated by His Eminence Francis Cardinal Spellman at St. Patrick's Cathedral on June 5, 1957. With Father Cox's permission, we record his remarks.

Blessed be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing on high, in Christ. Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish in His sight in Love. (Eph. 1-3-5)

We are here with grateful hearts blessing God, this morning, for the first twenty-five years of Spiritual blessings He has granted us, in the formation and triumphant success of the Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds.

The words of my text apply to the past and the future. Standing at this moment in our history, we seek from the past, as it has unfolded itself, the significance of the Federation in God's providence; and we can find in the text the basis upon which, with joy and optimism, we can erect a more compelling apostolate for God and Christ in the future.

Today at this moment in history, I am willing to hazard a guess and a great hope. I think, hesitatingly, that we are witnessing the dead-end of a revolution and an evolution in the mental attitudes of many men toward God which have been decisively fatal for mankind.

Take your thoughts with me for a moment back to the ages of Faith. In those days men and women, passing from adolescence to their tasks in the varied ways of life, carried with them in their hearts and minds the faith that had enlightened Europe, the faith enshrined in the Apostles' Creed. As they took their places in law, in medicine, in government, in the higher vocations, or passed to the lowlier toiler-tasks of the world, they found everywhere — in government, in law, in medicine, in the workers' guilds—the flowering of that same Faith which was in their own hearts and dominated their whole being.

Contrast that picture with the one of today. When a Catholic steps from adolescence into the modern world he finds in every walk of modern life a contradiction to the living faith of the Apostles' Creed, which is in his heart.

How did all this happen? It took centuries, beginning in the 16th, but it can all be summed up in a few brief sentences. In the middle ages when the Church was supreme in a Christian commonwealth, "God was Lord in state and society, in town and school,"

but in the simple formula of Karl Adam, the slogan of the 16th century, "Away from the Church," evolved through the slogan of the 18th century, "Away from Christ," to the slogan of the 19th century, "Away from God." (*The Church and the 19th Century*, Raymond Corrigan, Bruce Publishing Co.) These slogans were triumphantly successful. It was a tragic world and pathetic without the Church, and without Christ, and without God. The 19th century produced, apart from Catholicism, the secularism of human life in all its departments and medicine was not exempt. Before the Federation's birth in 1932, the sex liberals were riding high. There seemed to be an international conspiracy against the human life-stream and the only international force that effectively opposed it was the Catholic Church. The conspiracy met the human life-stream in its beginning by contraception and abortion, in its progress by so-called eugenic and other sterilization, and for the end of life many sex liberals talked about euthanasia as a blessed deliverance. All these movements claimed the imprimatur of science for their thoughts and propaganda. At this moment there entered upon the scene a small body of scientific men, Catholic physicians, who organized Guilds and then the Federation of Guilds to promote more of such groups. In the words of the Federation's Constitution, a Guild was "To uphold and practice the principles of Catholic faith and morality, as related to science and the practice of medicine and to condemn unchristian and unscientific materialism." Catholic medicine here had answered the call of Catholic Action everywhere: the call to the laity to share in the apostolate of the Hierarchy, to be Lay Apostles. To me Catholic Action appeals dramatically as the vision of the Mystical Christ, Christ in and through His members, taking the offensive to bring back men according to their standing in the varied hierarchy of human activity to the strong sway of Christ the King.

We are celebrating this morning the success of the Federation in accepting the challenge of Catholic Action. Thus we cry out with St. Paul, "Blessed be the God and Father of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing on high, in Christ." Twenty-five years have passed for the Federation and we are now face to face with the future. The task of that future is to stand shoulder to shoulder for the world-wide task of Catholic Action, to reconquer the world of men's minds and hearts for Christ, to restore all things in Christ. If you look at the task with purely human eyes, you will run away in doubt, scepticism, despair; but if you face the future with the great, vivid and dynamic faith of our fore-fathers, all will be different. You will find the one sure method by which this can be done in the words of my text, "He hath chosen us in Him," that is in Christ, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in His sight in charity. The world is to be brought

back, recaptured for Christ by the holiness of the laity.

It is my confidence in the laity that brought me in the beginning of this sermon to hazard the guess and the hope that we are witnesses to the dead-end of the revolution and evolution which after three centuries brought about the secularization of every phase of human life.

The final conquest of secularization is the privileged task of the laity. That great modern Saint, Pius X, said, "What is at the present the most necessary, is to have in each parish a group of enlightened laymen—virtuous, resolute, and true apostles." A successor of Pius X, Pius XI, declared, "The whole hope of the Church is in lay saints."

And what Pius X and Pius XI declared and hoped for, I venture to say is with us today. There are many straws on the surface of the swiftly moving current of the present day life of the Mystical Christ which show the deep flowing action of the Holy Spirit. The growth of secular institutes, the interest of Catholic youth in the orders for men and women; the significance of closed retreats in the lives of Catholic youth. There is a willingness in youth to talk and think about higher planes of the spiritual life. It is a Catholic physician, Dr. Thomas Verner Moore, now a Carthusian monk, who has given us recently his book *The Life of Man with God*, describing the spiritual life as

practiced by men and women in the world as well as by secular priests and monks. Above all we have the turning of men's minds to Christ in the Eucharist and the growing practice of frequent and daily Communion.

I have a great hope that there will be again such a pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit that it will sweep humanity to the living God through Christ as it swept the Gentile world into the arms of Christianity. The sceptic may laugh and some Catholics may doubt and be indifferent, but all things are possible to those who believe. The intelligent Catholic with a dynamic faith, a vibrant hope, an ardent love, giving himself with joy to the action of the Holy Spirit, working according to his vocation in all the varied phases of life in America can make America Catholic and holy. There is only needed the daring joyous will to do so. I am not afraid to more than hope that he will do so.

May the Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds catch this vision and use all its influence that each individual Guild will make a paramount effort to sanctify its individual members and from then on the conquest of American Medicine for Christ the King will be assured.

Blessed be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing on high, in Christ. Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish in His sight in Love." (Eph. 1-3-5).