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Report from the President of the International Federation of Catholic Physicians

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I. Introduction

I submit this report as is customary but regret that there is not much to record that is substantive. However, I must say I did attempt to fulfill the aims and objectives of FIAMC to the best of my ability during the year under review.

Being president of FIAMC is an onerous duty as it is obligatory for me to continue and develop further the inspiration of the early French physicians who founded FIAMC and also that of the many presidents, secretary-generals and executive committee members who led FIAMC over the past few decades to the present time. Now, FIAMC is a recognized international Catholic organization with great aims and a considerable potential for giving witness to Christ in the international medical community.

It is with this background that I should like to commence my report with a reference to what was said to me by a delegate present in Mexico at the last meeting of the United States Guild of Catholic Physicians held in October, 1983. He was a doctor-priest from Canada who was interested in medical ethics and Catholic doctors in particular. Yet he had not heard of FIAMC. He candidly told me that I appeared to be presiding over a "dead organization" as he did not see much activity in North America or internationally, for that matter. He went on to say that, in his opinion, there was a great need for an organization like FIAMC which provided intense Catholic formation to Catholic medical students and doctors at the local, national and international levels. Being also the psychiatrist that he was, he remarked that everybody and every organization required for growth a challenge to be met.

I do agree that we in FIAMC are not inactive, but there is no doubt whatever that we should be and can be more active than we are at the present time. We need to grow. Our Holy Father also expects it. We

must grow. What, then, is the challenge we must face? I hope that during this executive meeting, we shall come up with fresh ideas and practical suggestions to promote the role of FIAMC all over the world.

II.

After my return home from Mexico, I attended the Asian Continental Meeting organized by the Pontifical Council of the Laity (PCL) from Dec. 2-6, 1983, in my capacity of an office-bearer of FIAMC living and working in Asia. This meeting was the fourth in a series of continental meetings, the others having been held in Africa, Latin America and Europe. The theme of this Asian get-together was "The Role of the Laity in the Church's Life and Mission in Asian Society." The meeting was attended by a little over 100 delegates, consisting of 1 cardinal, 4 archbishops, 11 bishops, 10 priests, 47 laymen, 19 laywomen and representatives of some 26 international lay apostolate organizations representing men, women and youth.

In a special message, Pope John Paul II stated that the laity must have an awareness of being an ecclesiastical community. Messages were also delivered by Opilio Cardinal Rossi and Bishop Paul Cordes, president and vice-president, respectively, of the PCL. One of the keynote speakers, an Indian bishop, asked why Christianity had made such little headway in its contacts with Asia's organized religions and suggested that one major reason may be the neglect of the laity's role in the mission of the Church.

During the earlier part of the meeting, workshop-discussions were held to study and consider the interests of women, youth and professional individuals. During the latter part of the meeting, the workshops were divided on a regional basis within Asia to consider their own problems and to suggest meaningful programs for the future. Some positive data surfaced in the workshops which dealt with "Individuals in Positions of Responsibility" which should be of interest to Catholic doctors:

- 1) Examples were provided where responsible persons, even under duress, inspired their communities by their example and outspokenness.
- 2) Reference was made to responsible persons who individually, and with the support of their communities, were able to prevent immoral or unjust legislation being enacted as, for instance, with divorce and abortion.
- 3) Because of the work done by persons in responsible positions, secular governments appreciated the contribution of the Christian community and often depended on it in times of need.

Despite these examples, the delegates emphasized the fact that there was no proper system of formation to provide support and guidance to responsible and professional individuals who needed

strength and encouragement. It was also pointed out that young professionals, including some in the medical field, were not aware of the Catholic teaching in regard to abortion.

Many expressed the view that providing witness alone was not enough. Professionals had to go further and penetrate into every sphere of the secular order — socio-economic, political and professional (medicine, law, the world of trade unions and industry) — in order to inspire these fields with Christian values.

It was agreed that, in order to carry out this difficult and demanding role, formation and total commitment were necessary. Among the means available for religious formation, many felt that apart from seminars and the like, special attention should be paid to the role of associations and guilds.

The delegates concluded their workshop discussions by unanimously agreeing that Catholic professionals had inadequate formation and that this should be provided by an ongoing process which would have to be adapted to the changing conditions. Continual review and reflection were thought necessary. It was felt that such a doctrinal and apostolic formation would produce mature Christians capable of playing their proper role in the temporal order.

The delegates also advised that national formation centers be established and that wherever possible these identify professionals in the different fields, advise affiliation to international organizations and provide encouragement particularly to young professionals, as they are often left alone to fend for themselves.

The second part of the meeting considered the problem of the various regions in Asia. It was of interest that all unanimously concluded that intensive formation in doctrinal and spiritual matters was necessary. They advised that formation centers, associations, seminars and other such groups be used at all levels by the laity to acquire the necessary formation. This was recommended not only for youth, women and workers, but also for professionals such as doctors. The plea was made that new models for apostolic and doctrinal formation were required which should be discussed and made available to all. The delegates were keen that contact be continued between the participants of the Hong Kong meeting and that they should continue to stimulate one another and keep abreast of developments either through their own episcopal conferences, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, or through the PCL itself.

It was of interest also that the delegates unanimously resolved to request the Holy Father to devote the next World Synod of Bishops to consideration of the role of the laity in the life and mission of the Church. Happily, this is to be so, as we now know.

The delegates from different parts of Asia also requested the PCL to address itself to the formation of the laity in relation to the major religions of the area and to avoid the dangers arising from rivalry and

mutual suspicions among the countries, resulting often in an unfortunate arms race.

It will be observed that the various Asian regions all felt a specific need for doctrinal and apostolic matters among all sections of the laity and, as far as we are concerned, particularly among the professionals such as medical students and doctors.

The specific recommendations of the Workshop Concerning Persons in Positions of Responsibility recommended the following:

- a) Formation in doctrinal and apostolic matters; establishment of national formation centers.
- b) Basic formation of the individual through the Family Bible Apostolate, reinforced in schools and shared through peer and community groups together with participation in the liturgy and doctrinal training.
- c) Formal training and formation of the laity, hand-in-hand with their involvement in community life and a deep prayer life.

The delegates reminded themselves of the words of Pope Paul VI who said, "The world wants and expects of us simplicity of life, prayerfulness, love for all, especially the lowly and the poor, obedience and humility, self-forgetfulness and renunciation; and if we lack this holiness, only with difficulty will our words reach the heart of modern man."

III.

Participation in the Hong Kong meeting organized by the PCL provided me with a tremendous opportunity to meet delegates from all parts of Asia and to learn of their problems. One particular such issue was raised by a delegate in Taiwan in relation to a young woman who was in a coma for many years. She was a non-Christian and her parents, who originally belonged to a financially middle-class family, were reduced to penury as a result of attending to the patient. An appeal had been made to the government of that country to permit mercy killing, but this was refused. I was asked if FIAMC could help. Fortunately, after my return home, I was able to obtain assistance from Mother Teresa, who agreed to look after this young lady in one of her homes which she hoped to establish in Taiwan later in the year. My appeal to Cheshire International was also met with a positive offer of assistance. In this way, I was happy that I could render some help to this unfortunate family at the individual level, but the thought did occur that this type of service should not be too difficult to provide at our national levels with some concerted action.

IV.

The southeast Asian region of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, at its meeting in India, invited me to present an inaugural address. At that

time, I spoke of the work of St. Vincent de Paul in their program of "Man to Man Activity," paying particular attention to the real problems faced by many in regard to abortion, euthanasia and human sexuality. As a result of the information which I presented, the group realized that it was in need of instruction in these medical topics and, being true followers of Frederic Ozanam, they appealed to the FIAMC Bio-Medical Ethics Centre to provide the necessary background information which would help them in looking after the many thousands of individuals who seek their aid. Incidentally, we have also been asked for assistance in the program organized by the Catholic International Bureau for "Street Children."

V.

I have, through the year, maintained contact with the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum," the Pontifical Council of the Laity and, more recently, the new Pontifical Council for Culture (PCC). The PCC has asked our views in certain matters of interest to it and I circulate its questionnaire which we have to return.

VI.

I am glad to report that I have been in communication with a group of doctors in Tasmania who wish to start a national association in that country and who, in the course of time, will hopefully involve themselves with FIAMC.

VII.

The major part of my time, which amounts to many hours a week, has been spent in the work undertaken by the FBMEC (FIAMC Bio-Medical Ethics Centre). For your information, I am circulating the report of this center for the year 1983, which is self-explanatory. I would like to emphasize that India is really a melting pot of many nations, especially those of the developing world. Various programs which would be rejected in the advanced countries, are presented in India for consideration. If accepted, many dangers may arise. I am referring in particular to the concerted attempts which have been made internationally for the legalization of mercy killing. The FBMEC, therefore, appointed a task force for the study of euthanasia and more recently, conducted a workshop on the definition of the criteria of death; these criteria have not been studied very much in the developing world. Here I would like to acknowledge the significant help provided by Dr. Jack Mullooly, who sent us a lot of very useful material.

A colloquium was also held on the subject of Catholic postgraduates wishing to specialize in obstetrics, but who were compelled, for this purpose, to perform abortions. We studied the implications of this and realized, as had been known for a long time, that in a few years to come, no Catholic doctors following magisterial teachings would be able to specialize in obstetrics. Therefore, our community and institutions in many parts of the world will soon be denied the assistance of Catholic doctors in this area. This is an important problem which should be studied internationally and we have appealed urgently to the Holy See to take up this matter for consideration.

You will also be glad to know that the FBMEC proposed to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India to organize a three-day colloquium on medico-moral and ethical matters which are of pastoral concern. This meeting will be held in November, 1985, and it is hoped that we shall also be able to help other bishops' conferences in a similar way, if requested.

I wish to conclude my report by presenting to you three urgent concerns which cause me great anxiety:

- 1) Not much progress has been made in extending our work and contacts in Latin America. We have to plan this carefully.
- 2) Involvement of FIAMC in Africa is also slow, but there is a large scope for activity. This aspect also needs to be intensified.
- 3) The most serious cause of anxiety is the subject of our secretariat. You will all recall that we decided to locate our secretariat in Rome in the hope that we would see more activity. Regrettably, this has not materialized and it is therefore necessary to see what action has to be taken.

I conclude this rather lengthy report by thanking each one of you for your assistance and pray that the year to come will see more fruitful activity in FIAMC.