

July 1945

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Recommended Citation

Ready, Michael J. (1945) "The Honor of the Physician," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 13: No. 3, Article 1.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol13/iss3/1>

The Linacre Quarterly

Vol. XIII

JULY, 1945

No. 3

THE HONOR OF THE PHYSICIAN

*His Excellency, THE MOST REVEREND MICHAEL J. READY, D.D.,
Bishop of Columbus.*

The Baccalaureate Sermon delivered at the Commencement of the Schools of Medicine and Dentistry, St. Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri, June 14, 1945.

"The most High hath created medicines out of the earth; . . . the virtue of these things is come to the knowledge of men, and the most High hath given knowledge to men that He may be honored in His wonders."

—ECCLESIASTICUS 38: 4-6.

Reverend President, Members of the Faculty, Graduates, Students and Friends:

I greet you, gentlemen, graduates, before God's holy altar, with words of joy for your achievement, and with the solemn charge that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called.

I. YOUR TRIPLE HONOR

THIS day your University honors you. You are her sons, now come of age. She who has guided you, directed and admonished you, now sets between the hands of each of you the sacred treasure of her own good name. To your filial care she trustingly commits her fame and reputation.

Your country honors you today. High in the lists of her most valuable citizens stand the men to whom she looks for the promoting and the preserving of the health of her people; men who, withal, are universally regarded as the first representatives of education, science, culture and refinement. Perhaps more than any other, the physician is accepted by Americans as the finest of professional men, as a truly admirable gentle-

man. Your country recognizes your right to this high status; she expects you to do full credit to your distinguished position, professional and social.

The Church honors you. She is mindful of God's work, "Honor the physician . . . for the most High hath created him. For all healing is from God." (*Ecclus.* 38: 1-2). The bodily man whose needs you serve is also, in unbroken substance, the spiritual man who is the child and the treasure of God's Church. The Church confers upon you the dignity and the duty of ministering reverently, not to an animal organism, but to the image of God in human flesh.

Thus, a triple honor and a three fold duty come to you today. Honor may not be preserved if duty be slighted. Nor may the elements of honor or of duty be severed one from the other. All of these fuse together in a unity which is the glory of Almighty God. Your university, your country, and the Church set you in high position and look to you for notable fidelity. They remind you that your service is directed to the end that God "may be honored in His wonders."

II. YOUR PREPARATION FOR YOUR HONOR

Here in famed St. Louis University, you have learned lessons that should make your lives and labors the source of endless good to others, and should bring to yourselves the full stature and nobility of Christian manhood. You have been taught "to see the world steadily and to see it whole." It is God's world. It is to be ordered and served according to God's plan. The swift advance of sharp and narrow specialism must not distort your judgment, and turn the wide universe into a tiny area of one absorbing interest. You are to keep perspectives clear and clean. An exalted estimation of man's powers, too readily born of the magnificent progress of modern medical science, with its multiplied skills, its wondrous implements, its ever widening and deepening knowledge of the human structure and function, must not blind you with brilliance and lead you to the prideful venture of setting up a new order at variance with the natural and eternal law.

Your ideals are high. God grant you keep them so, and work towards their attainment with unflinching effort. Much that you will find among your professional brethren, both practitioners and men of research, will stand flatly in the way of your striving. You will find things that cloud true vision and misdirect true aim. You will meet men of reputation who take not only lives but destinies into unqualified hands. False but plausible arguments will be made to convince you that it is right and commendable to ease out of life the helpless aged and those who are hopelessly afflicted. Sham reasons with a garish show of value will be proposed for the breeding, the repressing, the reshaping of human life



HIS EXCELLENCY,
THE MOST REVEREND MICHAEL J. READY, D.D.
BISHOP OF COLUMBUS

in that dangerous domain where medicine joins hands with modern sociology. You will find the glorious vocation of preserving life and rebuilding broken bodies degenerated, in some quarters, into a system of preventing life, and of endeavoring, outside the true realm of medicine, to supply mankind with a new philosophy of life that is materialistic and godless and, in that measure, destructive and insane. True, you will find much that is worthy, much that is noble and fine. The evils which unworthy representatives of your profession have introduced and now actively cultivate are still occasional. But these evils are there. And they have epidemic potentialities. It will be your constant task to check their advance. It would be a fearful tragedy of failure and dishonor were you to go with their current, chanting falsely the sacred name of scientific progress.

Christ the Lord must be your model as He is the model of all of us in every way of life. He who made lame men walk and blind men see; whose gentle mercy was ever moved by the spectacle of human suffering; whose willing touch brought healing to uncounted hundreds, never allows His children to forget that, since the Fall, suffering is a necessary part of human life. His own acceptance of suffering, even to the death on the Cross, was so forcefully enacted that a frivolous and forgetful world has not been able to erase its vivid memory in the space of two thousand years. Health is precious; but health is not heaven. Ease of body is a gracious thing; but it is not the one necessary grace. Life means the Cross. Life involves suffering. Health and suffering look on together to the fulfillment which is not now but is to be won for an endless hereafter. Ills of body are to be eased to make the Cross more readily acceptable, not to take away the Cross and leave men purposeless and lost. In almost every recorded instance of His healing, Our Lord cured the soul with the body, to set the whole man once again on the toilsome way, the way of suffering, that leads at last to heaven. "Thy sins are forgiven thee," He said; and then, "Arise and walk!"

Your University is confident that you will hold and heed these truths and lessons. As she imparts to you her final blessing, she bids you to your task with the reminder that the knowledge and skill she has imparted is "that God may be honored in His wonders." She warns you never to usurp, in act or theory, the place of the Creator and Ruler of the world; never to discard the true goal of human existence to set up another of your own or of other men's designing.

III. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF YOUR HONOR

You are citizens of a favored country. This joy and dignity we all share with you. But, if I may borrow an expression from the writers of advertisements, I must call you "super citizens." Or you may paraphrase St. Paul; as each of you looks about him at his fellows in other walks of

life, he may say, "They are Americans; I am more!" Yes, your position in your country is one of inevitable prominence. If we are all equally citizens, you are among the first of equals. Soldiers in the line of advance are all equal; but some move first; some lead the way and set the pace. Upon their bravery and endurance depends, in great measure, the spirit and energy of those who follow. You take upon you now, with your professional character, a new civic and social responsibility. Henceforth your conduct, your opinions, your attitudes, will leave not only a stamp, but will exercise an active moulding force upon the American Body politic. You stand, regardless of your wishes in the matter, in the vanguard of national life and progress. America justly expects of you the type of citizenship that is literally exemplary.

Your country would suffer a slackening of the bonds that hold her civic life at seemly level were you to prove careless or recreant in your slightest civic obligations. Physicians are not expected to be politicians. Neither are they to play the dilettante, the parlor radical, the loose tongued critic of men and matters. For "what the doctor says" is taken as seriously among Americans as "what the doctor ordered." His work, because of his professional and social position, is held weighty and worth quoting in any department of thought or action.

However, it is high time for the medical profession to speak more clearly to the American public on the variety of proposals and plans affecting doctor-patient relationships which citizens now regard as a heritage of freedom. A well organized propaganda actually has convinced many citizens that the medical profession stands in the way of better health services and facilities in our nation. Physicians generally have been in the front ranks of those best serving the community. Their very considerable personal sacrifices in serving the economically depressed citizens are not forgotten by thoughtful leaders in social welfare. The Profession's recommendations for constantly better standards of medical education, of hospital administration, and of more extensive public health programs are chiefly responsible for the magnificent progress in national health noted throughout our country. Government controlled and administered medical services have nowhere equalled the record achieved by this nation's traditional system of private medicine. Medical men should not permit a species of totalitarian propaganda to push them into a position of alleged opposition to better and to more widely attainable medical services for the people. The physicians and surgeons want what all decent citizens want. They want the public to have the best service and the best hospitals at the fairest cost to all.

State control and an ever increasing taxation have never demonstrated in welfare and institutional management any special efficiency in better serving the public dependent on Government aid.

Our citizens should exercise eternal vigilance in appraising plans and programs which hinder the individual from his right to select his own physician and which order a physician to engage his talents and skills according to bureaucratic control. It is well to remember in these days of sacrifice and death and struggle for liberty that so-called government benevolence can hide in edicts and decrees an even greater multitude of sins than charity can possibly cover.

The watchword of a possible American totalitarianism will not be "Heil der Fuehrer" nor "Proletariat Unite" but some version of "The State, like mama, knows best—take it and like it!"

Because of the physician's high civic responsibility, he will be conscious of a deep moral responsibility. For surely there can be now no doubt or question about the root relation between morality and citizenship. The physician whose views on moral issues are loose, materialistic, agnostic, carelessly tossed off, fails as truly in civic as in moral duty. Who shall estimate the moral harm, and the civic and social harm, that may be done by the mere impatient remarks of an obstetrician when he finds squalor and inconvenience instead of aseptical cleanliness? Who shall compute the damage done to souls, and to the nation, by the curt remark, "Poor people ought not to have large families." You will find the rebuttal of such heedless comment in the devastated cities of Europe and in the islands of the Far Pacific. You will read their real meaning in a nation saved from enslavement, not in some "new order" which certain sociologists would introduce with more subtlety but with no less infamy than the totalitarian despots. Yes, your country requires you to be considerate of the weight that attaches to the lightest work of men who hold a recognized place of leadership.

The physician feels the burden of *noblesse oblige*. He must bear the rigid and sometimes bothersome yoke imposed by his professional position. But as he counts no inconvenience too great to avoid infection in a surgical operation; as he bears the tedious business of scrubbing, sterilizing, masks, gowns, gloves, and all the detailed circumstances of the operating room; so must he bear the weight and tedium of meticulous care to avoid the infecting of minds and the blasting of sound citizenship in his fellowmen.

IV. RELIGION AND YOUR HONOR

Closely entwined with the physician's duty as a leading citizen is the great moral responsibility which rests upon him in point of religion. The doctor must be a religious man. Surely he who lives and labors for the maintenance and repair of the human body must recognize with

reverence the Creator and Designer of the human body and of human life. An irreligious physician is almost a contradiction in terms.

God's Church expects, and rightly expects, her sons who are physicians or surgeons to be outstanding examples of piety and manly devotion. Those among you who are Catholics have taken up, with the character and calling now embraced, the strict duty of active, practical, and zealous Catholicity. Because of your prominence, because of your social and civic significance, your religious obligation is increased and emphasized. The Catholic doctor ought, by every reason, to be the first and best of parishioners. He should be frequently and fervently at the Communion railing; he should be privately and publicly a man of prayer; he should be devoted to Holy Mass. For surely he must lend his powerful influence for the right and reasonable use of that human life which he is dedicated to protect and save. With his Pastor, he will work in perfect accord. He will see that Catholic patients are admonished, in timely season, to receive the Sacraments. He will carefully and reverently administer Baptism to dying infants. Willingly, and indeed at his own suggestion, he will take the message that will summon the Priest to the Catholic bedside. The Catholic doctor will show himself in all things a devoted son of the Church, interested in souls as well as in bodies, and serving bodies because they house immortal souls.

The doctor will labor, in word and work, to destroy the false and foolish notion, widespread as any disease, that there is disagreement and open opposition between science and religion. He will show a world that needs the showing that a man of science is also a man of deep religious devotion. There is not, there never has been, there never can be a conflict between true science and true religion. It is strange that the harmful conviction of such a conflict is so general in minds that ought to know better. Chesterton gives us an accurate account of the origin of this sad conviction, although he does not pause upon the point of its destructive endurance. He says that "19th century scientists were just as ready to jump to the conclusion that any guess about nature was an obvious fact, as were 17th century sectarians to jump to the conclusion that any guess about Scripture was the obvious explanation. Thus, private theories about what the Bible ought to mean, and premature theories about what the world ought to mean, have met in a loud and widely advertised controversy, especially in the Victorian time; and *this clumsy collision of two very impatient forms of ignorance* was known as the quarrel of Science and Religion." To the dispelling of this evil ignorance, the Church devotes suitable effort, and she enlists the willing assistance of her men of science, notable among whom are her men of medical science.

Church, nation and University set upon you today a high distinction and declare a great expectancy. May God dower you all with His grace

and protection. May He guide and guard and foster and inspire. May your lives, under Providence, prove a rich blessing to mankind as to yourselves, and show grandly before the face of heaven that "the most High hath given knowledge to men that He may be honored in His wonders."



FROM PADUA TO OXFORD

"Travelling was slower work then than now. One would like to have the impressions of the graduate of Oxford and Padua on Italy and England, and the life of the time, but Linacre has left us little as to this. We only know that he returned by Geneva, Paris, Calais; and of what befell him by the way, nothing except the charming story of his last look on Italy. This he had from the top of the mountain boundary, probably the Great St. Bernard, and there he raised a rough cairn of stones—an altar to his 'sancta mater studiorum.' We have since changed the term to 'alma mater' when we speak of a university, as we have changed many other academic practices of the past."

J. P. Pye, M.D.