

CATHOLIC MEDICAL MORALS AND CULTURE AT THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF CATHOLIC DOCTORS

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A Congress of Catholic Doctors is not meant to reveal new discoveries in Medicine; indeed it deals with subjects which, more often than not, have been fully debated beforehand. No wide differences of opinion are usual; all the members profess the same Code of Morality and no disagreement on principles occurs. It is therefore not surprising that the six hundred Catholic doctors who, in September, converged to Rome from thirty different countries reached unanimous conclusions.

The subject matter of the debates is dealt with elsewhere in this number. It may however be useful to recall some conclusions.

It was the unanimous opinion that the Pre-matrimonial Certificate should be encouraged. It, however, cannot be made as an authorisation or as an impediment to marriage, but must be free, personal and confidential.

The much debated problem of Nationalisation of Medical Services had been considered at Lisbon in 1947. The following were laid down as a minimum of requirements:

1. Respect for the fundamental rights of the human person.
2. Absolute respect for the professional secret.
3. Freedom in the choice of one's own doctor within the limits of possibility and the exigencies of the general welfare.
4. Recognition by and protection from, the State of the family doctor.
5. Respect for the doctor's person and assurance of a standard-of-living corresponding to his social status.

Emphasis was again made on the necessity for respect of the rights of the human person, for freedom of choice of one's own doctor, as well as freedom for the doctor to decide what treatment he considers suitable.

On Artificial Insemination the seal was set at Castelgandolfo where His Holiness the Pope defined the practice as illegitimate and unnatural. The doctor's intervention can only be allowed between a married couple as an accessory factor after a natural act.

Concurrently with the meetings at Palazzo Venezia, other functions were organised. An exhibition on "Medicine in Christianity" was inaugurated in the Royal Hall of this Palace. A carefully picked collection of originals, or of faithful reproductions, from Christian Archaeology and Mediaeval Art, such as can easily be put together only at Rome, showed the interest of the Church in Medicine, ever since the times of Christ (also called Iatros). The early Christian doctors, the mediaeval social workers, the several Orders of Knight Hospitallers, of Nursing Sisters, of medical helpers were represented. The skull of St. Luke was exposed at St. Peter's and Mass was said in the Church of Saints Cosmas and Damian in the nearby forum.

The aim of the exhibition was to show that the early Christians undertook the healing of the body with an outlook different from that of the classical pagan healers. The old methods of treatment were often kept; thus the archaeological evidence

presented, showed that the drinking of medicinal waters at the wells of Aesculapius was persisted in, but a new meaning was given to it; the importance of the Soul was driven home, as evidenced from the Christian symbols which now decorated the cups in use.

Christian Medicine benefited greatly from the influence of Christian Charity. When the Dark Ages supervened, the love of Culture and the charity of the monks, transmitted to us medical theories, traditions and practices which would otherwise have been lost.

Monastic Medicine seems to have flourished separately in the East and in the West. San Basilio, Bishop of Cesarea, organised many hospitals in the East which are still called after him (Basiliades); whilst San Benedetto included in his "Regola" a whole chapter on the treatment of patients. In the West, Monastic Medicine culminated in the Medical School of Salerno, from which many schools on the Continent and in the United Kingdom had their origin.

Both Cassino and Salerno were visited by the congressists. The bombed Abbey of Montecassino is now a ghost of its previous splendour and glory. The little that has been done in its reconstruction has been carried out by the monks themselves. It would be unfortunate if this unique centre of Christian and European civilisation were to be left in its present state, even though no reconstruction can restore the beauty which was once Cassino.

Salerno received the Congress with enthusiasm. The Archbishop, in person, guided the members around the remains of the old Medical School which had made the town famous.

At the Hospital of Santo Spirito in Rome, the Congress was equally well received. This hospital, founded by Pope Innocent III, has seen the work of Montpellier, Filippo Neri and the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre. It has been for several centuries the leading

hospital of Christianity and still stands as a symbol of the Church's early social work. One of its many branches, still open to patients, is the hospital at Rabat, Malta, bearing the same name, about which there exists considerable unedited literature in the library of the parent hospital in Rome.

The connection of the Knight Hospitallers of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem with Medicine, need not be commented on here in Malta, where they founded our Medical School. The Grand Master of the Order was the Honorary President of the Congress and gave a reception at the mediaeval palace of the Order at Piazza del Grillo, where from the "Loggia" overlooking Via dell'Impero, one recalled the old traditions of the Order, and felt sharply the continuity of the Catholic Church through the centuries. Beneath stood monuments recording four thousand years of history, through half of which the Church has surmounted obstacles and has given what is best in Culture, Arts and Civilisation. Nor is this process at an end. The Church's contribution to civilisation was inherent in the fact that thirty countries were represented at the Congress; it was emphasised by a film show on the work of Catholic Missionary Nursing and Medical Organisations in Africa; it was crowned by a reception given at the Università Gregoriana, where a polyphonic concert was given under the able direction of Don Lorenzo Perosi.

The appeal of Catholic culture, even if only just met with, is — in a broad and all-embracing sense — inescapable to the educated mind. I have always felt that our University will lack a real Catholic spirit until it forms a post-graduate Association of Catholic Culture. My colleagues at the Congress, had the same feeling that our presence at the Congress was morally inferior to that of other members, as unlike them, we were not representative of any Catholic post-graduate association. No such association exists in Malta among doctors, nor amongst other professions.