



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS PIUS XII
TO A GROUP OF SPECIALIZED PHYSICIANS
FROM SEVERAL ALLIED NATIONS****

Tuesday, 30 January 1945

Your presence, gentlemen, brings vividly before Our minds a parable told almost 2000 years ago by Christ, the divine physician, when He walked so graciously among men. It is the story of the Good Samaritan, and with striking fitness it has been preserved for posterity in the Gospel written by St. Luke, who was himself a doctor. The scene depicted is familiar to you all. A lonely road; a wounded man, helpless and bleeding lying on the roadside, evidently a victim of robbers who have stripped him after a rough and violent struggle; the Good Samaritan hurrying home sees him; he turns from his way, dismounts, goes to the suffering stranger, with sympathy examines his wounds, gently applies oil and wine to clean and heal them, lifts him to his horse and carries him to the nearest inn, where he gives orders for his special care. Nothing is to be spared for his complete cure.

The setting may be different from the circumstances that are common in your experience ; but the spirit of prompt and unselfish devotion. of lofty principles inspiring sacrifice of self in the interest of another, of tenderness and love, - that is the same spirit that has characterized your profession at all periods of human history. Alas for mankind, were it not so.

For the doctor is not handling inert matter, however priceless. Suffering in his hands is a human creature, a man like himself. Like himself that patient has a post of duty in some family where loving hearts are anxiously awaiting him; he has a mission to fulfill, even though humble, in human society. What is more, that ailing, crippled, paling form has a rendezvous with eternity; and when breath leaves his body, he will there begin an immortal life whose joy or misery will reflect the success or failure before God of his earthly mission. Precious creature of God's love and omnipotence.

Spirit and dust compounded to form an image of the Infinite; living in time and space, yet headed towards a goal that lies beyond both ; part of the created universe, yet destined to share the glory and joy of the Creator, that man who places himself in the care of a doctor is something more than nerves and tissue, blood and organs. And though the doctor is called in directly to heal the body, he must often give advice, make decisions, formulate principles that affect the spirit of man and his eternal destiny. It is after all the man who is to be treated : a man made up of soul and body, who has temporal interests but also eternal; and as his temporal interests and responsibility to family and society may not be sacrificed to fitful fancies or desperate desires of passion, so his eternal interests and responsibility to God may never be subordinated to any temporal advantage.

«Hence », as We said recently when speaking to the doctors belonging to the Italian Union of St. Luke, « hence flows a whole series of principles and practical rules which regulate the use and the right to dispose of the organs and members of the body. and which are mandatory both for the person concerned and the doctor whose advice has been asked ». For man is not really the absolute owner and master of his body, but only has the use of it; and God cannot permit him to use it in a manner contrary to the intrinsic and natural purpose which He has assigned as the function of its diverse parts.

It is clear, then, as We observed on the same occasion, how the medical profession places its representatives squarely within the orbit of the moral order, to be governed in their activity by its laws. Whether it be a question of teaching or giving advice or prescribing a cure or applying a remedy, the doctor may not step outside the frontier of morality dissociating himself from the fundamental principles of Ethics and Religion. His vocation is noble, sublime; his responsibility to society is grave; but God will not fail to bless him for his charity and for his unstinting, devoted efforts to alleviate the sufferings of his fellow-man on earth, so however that he may not fall short of the incomparable joys of heaven. It is Our most earnest prayer that this blessing may be granted to you all abundantly from the loving bounty of God.

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