

5-1-1955

International Code of Medical Ethics

Catholic Physicians' Guilds

Follow this and additional works at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lmq>

 Part of the [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Medicine and Health Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Catholic Physicians' Guilds (1955) "International Code of Medical Ethics," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 22 : No. 2 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lmq/vol22/iss2/4>

International Code of Medical Ethics

Adopted by the third General Assembling of The World Medical Association of London, England, Oct., 1949

DUTIES OF DOCTORS IN GENERAL

A doctor must always maintain the highest standards of professional conduct. A doctor must not allow himself to be influenced merely by motives of profit. The following practices are deemed unethical:

- a) Any self advertisement except such as is expressly authorized by the national code of medical ethics.
- b) Taking part in any plan of medical care in which the doctor does not have professional independence.
- c) To receive any money in connection with services rendered to a patient other than the acceptance of a proper professional fee, or to pay any money in the same circumstances without the knowledge of the patient.

Under no circumstances is a doctor permitted to do anything that would weaken the physical or mental resistance of a human being, except from strictly therapeutic or prophylactic indications imposed in the interest of the patient.

A doctor is advised to use great caution in publishing discoveries. The same applies to methods of treatment whose value is not recognized by the profession. When a doctor is called upon to give evidence or a certificate he should only state that which he can verify.

DUTIES OF DOCTORS TO THE SICK

A doctor must always bear in mind the importance of preserving human life from the time of conception until death.

A doctor owes to his patient complete loyalty and all the resources of his science. Whenever an examination or treatment is beyond his capacity he should summon another doctor who has the necessary ability.

A doctor owes to his patient absolute secrecy on all which has been confided to him or which he knows because of the confidence entrusted to him.

A doctor must give the necessary treatment in emergency, unless he is assured that it can and will be given by others.

DUTIES OF DOCTORS TO EACH OTHER

A doctor ought to behave to his colleagues as he would have them behave to him.

A doctor must not entice patients from his colleagues.

A doctor must observe the principles of "The Declaration of Geneva" approved by The World Medical Association.

DECLARATION OF GENEVA

Adopted by the third General Assembly of The World Medical Association at Geneva, Switzerland, September, 1948

At the time of being admitted as member of the medical profession:

I solemnly pledge myself to consecrate my life to the service of humanity.

I will give to my teachers the respect and gratitude which is their due;

I will practice my profession with conscience and dignity;

The health of my patient will be my first consideration;

I will respect the secrets which are confided in me;

I will maintain by all the means in my power, the honor and the noble traditions of the medical profession;

My colleagues will be my brothers;

I will not permit considerations of religion, nationality, race, party politics or social standing to intervene between my duty and my patient;

I will maintain the utmost respect for human life, from the time of conception; even under threat, I will not use my medical knowledge contrary to the laws of humanity.

I make these promises solemnly, freely and upon my honor.

THE POPE SPEAKS

An English translation of the Pope's address to the Participants of the Eighth Congress of the World Medical Association is contained in *The Pope Speaks*, 4th Quarter, 1954; also in *The Catholic Mind*, April, 1954. Both translations include the text itself, as well as the lengthy footnote citations from previous addresses. The three previous issues of *The Pope Speaks* contained many other papal statements of special pertinence to the medical profession: e.g.,

"The Spirit of Sickness,"

"Nursing: a True and Sacred Ministry,"

"X-Rays and the Problem of Suffering,"

"Poliomyelitis: Moral and Psychological Problems,"

"Pharmacy: an Ancient and Modern Art,"

"Medicine: Some Historical, Religious and Social Aspects,"

"The Scientist: Man with a Destiny,"

"Population in True Perspective," and

"A Word to Gymnasts."

And, besides these statements, *The Pope Speaks* has published many others with which any Catholic, regardless of his profession, should be conversant.

I might take this occasion to suggest that the Catholic doctor who wants to be well-informed on official Catholic statements should be a subscriber to both *The Catholic Mind* and *The Pope Speaks*. The former, now in its fifty-third

year of publication, uses not only papal statements but also addresses, statements, and articles by bishops, priests, religious, and laity—all for the purpose of expressing "the Catholic mind." *The Pope Speaks* is just a year old; it specializes, as the title suggests, in publishing papal documents. Incidentally, it seems eminently fitting to pause here to congratulate the editors and other collaborators of *The Pope Speaks* for the truly splendid work they have done in the first year of publication.

The Catholic Mind is a monthly; \$3.00 per year in the U.S.A.; \$3.50, Canada and foreign; published by The America Press, 70 E. 45th St., New York 17, N. Y. *The Pope Speaks* is a quarterly; \$4.00 per year in the U. S. A.; \$4.50, Canada and foreign; published by *The Pope Speaks*, Box 4498, Washington 17, D. C.

PIUS XII AND MEDICINE

I mentioned ten recent papal statements of special interest to the medical profession that were published in *The Pope Speaks* during its first year. This is but a sample of Pius XII's interest in the medical profession. Abbé R. Kothen, in his valuable little book, *Directives récentes de l'Église concernant l'exercice de la médecine* (Louvain: Em. Warny, 1952), lists thirty-four pertinent statements made by the Holy See from the beginning of 1940 to the end of April, 1952. From a very rough tabulation of statements made since that time, I would say that a conservative estimate would now be about sixty.

Most of these papal statements have been made to specific groups of doctors or others closely associated with doctors: e.g., to an international congress of Catholic physicians; to a world congress on psychotherapy; to psychiatric nurses, etc. Some of the statements are very lengthy. They are primarily concerned with ethical and religious principles in their relation to medicine. When there is occasion for it, the Pope never fails to manifest a deep respect for the scientific qualifications of his audience and to encourage them to even higher professional standards and a deeper devotion to their calling.

MORALS (?) AND MEDICINE

Among these various papal statements have been some exceptionally complete expressions of official Catholic teaching on such things as contraception, sterilization, rhythm, artificial insemination, and the killing of the innocent. Despite this fact, *Morals and Medicine*, by Joseph Fletcher (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1954; pp. 243; \$4.50), which deals at length with Catholic teaching in these matters, makes only one reference to Pope Pius XII. Moreover, this reference is confined to a footnote and is a second-hand, decidedly inaccurate report on what the Pope said about artificial insemination. (For the complete English translation of this papal statement on artificial insemination, confer LINACRE QUARTERLY, Oct., 1949.)

Catholic reviews of Professor Fletcher's book have all been adverse. This was to be expected,

since the central portion of the book defends contraception, artificial insemination, eugenic sterilization, and euthanasia and since other parts of the book contain serious errors concerning faith and morals: e.g., a misunderstanding of the natural law, ridicule of the biblical accounts of creation and the Fall, denial of the soul, etc. Unfortunately, some reviewers in the secular press, unable to discern the moral and religious poison which permeates the book, have given it high praise. Honest physicians, however, may take more than a little comfort out of the brief, but excellent, review published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Mar. 12, 1955, pp. 974-75. It is fitting, I think, to quote a part of this review:

"... In an effort so important as this, one would reasonably hope for full consideration of the premises on which conclusions are predicated. Unfortunately, conclusions are stated and justified without such basic discussion... Based on what is desirable from the social point of view rather than on the inherent rightness or wrongness of the act, the author arrives at the conclusions that, in general, it can be validly asserted that patients have the right to know medical facts about themselves; that artificial insemination is morally lawful; and that when there is good and sufficient cause to eliminate the possibility of reproduction against rational will 'in order responsibly to fulfill the obligations of love' individuals are more than morally justified in resorting to sterilization procedures. . . . He

concludes that principles of right based upon selfhood and moral being favor voluntary euthanasia. According to his 'personal dimension' the issue is not one of life or death, but what kind of death. The discussion of contraception is not so much a discussion of morality or ethics as it appears to be a criticism and ridicule of the position of the Roman Catholic Church. Such treatment fails to establish a positive view and is of little practical value to one who desires to consider the basic moral principles underlying the use of the procedure. In the opinion of the reviewer, the book cannot be said to be a helpful reference to the physician who wishes to resolve problems of conscience and apply morals to medicine."

Among Catholic reviews, the most thorough that I have seen is by Father Urban Voll, O.P., in *The Thomist*, Jan. 1955, pp. 89-101. There is little that could be said about the book that is not said—and very well said—by Father Voll; although it is true, as Father Voll admits, that a detailed refutation of Professor Fletcher's errors "would take a shape larger than the provocation."

Some points about Professor Fletcher's book that strike me as calling for special attention here are the following. Though his actual attacks are generally leveled against Catholic theologians, it should not be thought that his is a distinctively Protestant position; he is equally willing to criticize traditional Protestant views. As for Catholic theologians, they would not expect Professor Fletcher to see eye-to-eye with them on all

points treated in his book. But, since he writes as a scholar and since his book is published by a university press, they would rightfully expect him to understand their position, to state the position correctly, to make use of accurate and up-to-date references. He fulfills none of these conditions. He does not understand what we mean by natural law; he misrepresents our use of the principle of the double effect; and, though his bibliography refers to later works, his text takes almost no account of what Catholics have published since 1949 (when he gave the lectures which form the substance of this book) and 1954, when the book was actually published.

The one chapter in this book on which we might have had really common ground with the author has to do with the patient's right to the truth about a medical diagnosis. Yet even in this chapter the author does not refrain from sniping at Catholic theologians for the absoluteness with which they regard the confessional secret, for their distinction between telling a lie and not telling the truth, and for their honest attempts to indicate the limits of professional secrecy. Moreover, Professor Fletcher himself does not come to grips with the one problem that really disturbs conscientious doctors: namely, what to tell a patient when one honestly judges that the knowledge might do him more harm than good. Pope Pius XII is not so unrealistic in this matter. Addressing a medical society on November 12, 1944, the Pope said: "Although he may never tell a lie, there are cases in which the

doctor, even when asked, may not bluntly speak the truth, especially when he knows that the sick man has not the strength to bear it. But there are other cases in which there is undoubtedly a duty to speak clearly and this duty takes precedence over any other medical or humanitarian consideration. It is wrong to lull the patient or the parents into a false security with the danger of compromising either the eternal salvation of the patient or the fulfillment of obligations of justice or charity."

In a penetrating review of Professor Fletcher's book, Father James E. Royce, S.J., notes that the book "contains vicious errors which forbid its being placed on open library shelves" (*America*, Feb. 19, 1955, p. 538). Perhaps we should speak even more explicitly and say that, because of its serious errors concerning both natural and supernatural religion, *Morals and Medicine* must undoubtedly be classed among the books which canon 1399 of the Code of Canon Law forbids the faithful to read without permission.

ALBERT SCHWEITZER

The Foreword to *Morals and Medicine* was (unfortunately) written by Dr. Karl Menninger, who refers to Albert Schweitzer as "the greatest living man." I surely do not wish to detract from Dr. Schweitzer's notable achievements; but I think it should be clearly recognized that his philosophy of "reverence for life" is pernicious. Beneath the rhetorical and sentimental beauty of his thesis on reverence for life lies the cold, hard fact that for Dr. Schweitzer all life

is the same—there is no essential difference between human life and merely animal life. I mention this here because I have noticed that some Catholic physicians, in all good faith, are apt to quote from Dr. Schweitzer's writings on reverence for life to confirm their otherwise sound ethical statements on certain problems. This should not be done. His thesis of reverence for life is sugar-coated ethical poison. (Cf. *Theological Studies*, March, 1953, pp. 42-43.)

THE DOCTOR'S VOCATION

We can close these jottings on a more positive note by referring briefly to "The Decision to Study Medicine," by Irwin A. Brody—a special article in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, Jan. 27, 1955, pp. 130-34. This is a study, based mostly on their autobiographies, of why many outstanding doctors chose the medical profession. Various reasons are found, and among them the conviction "of a special calling." To the Catholic, this immediately suggests the idea of vocation; and "Vocation" is actually the sub-head under which the author treats this conviction. Nevertheless, I was disappointed to find nothing here which coincides with "vocation" in the theological sense of the term. The highest motive given here seems to be a sort of humanitarianism, a desire to help one's fellow men.

Vocation, in the theological sense of the word, means a call from God; and it is not limited—as some erroneously think—to a call to the priesthood or the religious life. For every individual God has a plan that includes the

state of life he is to embrace and the work that he is to do and the degree of sanctity he is supposed to achieve—and this divine plan is his vocation. It would be interesting to know how many Catholic doctors chose the medical profession because they were convinced that such was the will of God for them; interesting also to know how many pursue their medical careers with a realization that it is their vocation and with a consequent sense of dedication not merely to their suffering fellow men but to Christ who identifies Himself with these men. I hope there are many such Catholic physicians.

To those who are interested in this idea of vocation, I heartily recommend another address of Pope Pius XII: "The Surgeon's Noble Vocation," in *The Catholic Mind*, Aug. 1948, pp. 488-492. Though directed to surgeons, the Pope's words would have deep meaning for all doctors. Also, I should like to take this occasion to recommend *The Layman's Call*, by Father (now Msgr.) William R. O'Connor (New York: Kenedy, 1942). Msgr. O'Connor's explanation of divine vocation and its application to laymen is most inspiring.

PACKAGE-GROUP OF REPRINTS AVAILABLE

- Topical Index to Moral Problems of Medicine
 - A Plan for Parenthood
 - Legal, Medical, Moral Aspects of Euthanasia
 - Is Therapeutic Abortion Scientifically Justified?
- (Above have appeared in *Linacre Quarterly*)

\$1.00 for the set
postage included