

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF CATHOLIC DOCTORS

Rome was the venue of the Fourth International Congress of Catholic Doctors. It was fitting that in the year of His Holiness' Sacerdotal Jubilee, representatives of all the Catholic doctors in the world, meet in the Eternal City to discuss the problems of the Human Person in the light of medical science. The Maltese medical profession was represented by Prof. W. Ganado B.Sc., M.D., M.R.C.P., B.Sc. (Lond.), Dr V. Tabone M.D., D.O. (Oxon.), D.O.M.S. (Lond.), F.R.C.S. (Edin.), and Dr. A. Tabone, Medical Supt. Victoria Hospital Gozo. Prof. Ganado and Dr. A. Tabone were accompanied by their wives who took part in the Congress as 'aggregate members'.

Congress was inaugurated at the Capitol on Saturday, 24th September. Cardinal Pizzardo presided and speeches of welcome were delivered by the Mayor of Rome, the Italian Minister of Health Gonnella, Prof. A. Gedda, President of the Congress and others. The following morning, Mass was said at San Marco by Cardinal Pizzardo, who in a short homily expounded the duties of the Catholic doctor, not merely as a healer of the body, but also as a comforter of the troubled spirits of patients. On the same morning, the exhibition "Christendom in the History of Medicine" was opened at Palazzo Venezia — this famous palace, headquarters of the Congress, being beflagged with the colours of all the nations which had sent representatives on this occasion. The first report of the Congress on "The Animation of the Foetus" by Prof. Niedermeyer of Vienna, was delivered that morning. The old standing controversy between the theory of simultaneous animation and successive animation was lucidly presented, and the view put forward that the former seems to correspond better with the facts of Biology. The problem bears more than an academic interest in that, if the theory of successive animation were to be held, some might argue that it would not be homicide to pro-

cure abortion before the infusion of the 'anima rationalis'. Prof. Niedermeyer was however, emphatic on the point that even in such a case, abortion was still to be considered at least as 'homicidium attentatum or anticipatum', as the foetus was an 'homo in potentia'. There could be no doubt that from the moral point of view, abortion was a mortal sin at whatever period it was carried out. Dr. Foley of Ireland and Dr. Torrioli of Italy spoke on the same subject.

A very topical subject, "Pre-matrimonial Eugenics", was introduced by Prof. Porto of the University of Coimbra. He stressed that the existence of nations depended on the strength and vigour of their people, and to improve the health, well-being and chances of happiness of children, was a praise-worthy aim. The purpose of eugenics is to beget physically perfect children who are also endowed with a sound mind. The medical profession can do much, by giving sound advice to prospective partners, to enhance the health of a nation. A careful history of the contracting parties will allow one to decide on the chances of a healthy offspring, and to give the required advice. It should be made clear that doctors can only give advice, and that they should not resort to coercive measures, as the dignity of the human person must be safeguarded, and as the prohibition of contracting marriage would only lead to more extra-marital relations, without reducing the chances of unhealthy offspring. Prof. Porto reviewed the many defects and diseases which could make marriage unwise, and pointed out that sterilisation of the unfit was not to be entertained. Even if such a step were to be followed it would not materially diminish the transmission of certain defects, as even apparently normal persons with recessive defects could transmit them, and no one would dare advise sterilisation of apparently normal individuals. Dr. Castillo de Lucas spoke on the same subject stressing that chastity is the

basis of pre-matrimonial eugenics, and that the pre-matrimonial certificate must be voluntary and its use dictated by Christian medical conscience. The great interest which the subject raised was reflected in the unusually large number of persons from all over the world who took part in the ensuing discussion.

In the afternoon of the 26th, there was an interesting discussion organised by the Centre de Deontologie et des Recherches Medicales de Pax Romana. Prof. Portes spoke on the Code of Medical Deontology and its moral action and limits. Dr. Oberlin and Father Larere, both of France, contributed to the discussion emphasising the need for submission in such matters, to the authority of the Church. The following day, Prof. Palmieri of the University of Naples gave a stimulating talk on Narco-analysis from the moral, medical, social and ethical points of view. Narco-analysis can be considered as a special form of psycho-analysis, which through a twilight condition determined pharmacologically, takes advantage of the removal of inhibitions of the personality, and of the absence of moral censure to look inside the internal world of the patient. Clinical applications of this procedure can be valuable in diagnosis and treatment. In forensic medicine it could be used for psychiatric valuations, for distinguishing the organic from the functional, or for obtaining a confession. From the legal point of view, the speaker maintained, narco-analysis was not lawful because the accused was thereby placed in a condition of lowered awareness, and that even if his consent were previously obtained, such confessions as he might make under narco-analysis could not be produced against him. There was an added objection, in that the medical expert could not carry out investigations as to the culpability of the accused. That was the sphere of action of the judge, and the medical expert could not ask direct questions of the accused except in the presence of the judge. Even the judge could not interrogate an accused under narco-analysis, because laws — in most, if not

all civilised countries — say that verbal interrogation must be made when the subject is able to understand, to express his own will and to defend himself. Every man has the right to defend himself and no guarantee of truth can be attached to statements made under narcosis.

Prof. Joseph Prink spoke on the Moral Aspects of Pre-frontal Leucotomy. He analysed the results of this surgical operation and stated that there is usually a degeneration of the personality with marked diminution of the emotional life of the patients. In considering whether such an intervention is lawful or otherwise, one must consider the actual state of the mental condition of the patient, and if this is permanently deteriorated and there is no hope of improvement by other means, leucotomy may be considered justifiable. It is a matter of profit and loss, and the former must be proportional or superior to the latter. He did not consider it lawful to perform leucotomy on patients who were in great pain for incurable conditions, unless the superior mental faculties of such patients were at the same time diminished permanently.

On the 29th, Dr. Jesus Bacala' of Manila, gave a detailed and comprehensive exposition of the problem of Artificial Insemination. He made a critical study of the question and described the methods used and the percentage of successful attempts claimed by various investigators. He raised the many medico-legal problems involved and then went on to consider the moral, ethical and religious aspects of the problem. There could be no doubt that artificial insemination outside marriage was to be condemned, and that children so begotten were illegitimate. The procedure in wedlock could be considered only when no acts against nature were committed in the process, and when no third parties took part in the act of procreation, which is a function belonging entirely to husband and wife. The speaker asked whether the production of semen by aspiration or testicular puncture could be considered as against nature. It was claimed that

on this point moralists were divided as some maintained that the absence of erotic pleasure ruled out pollution.

The last report was on the Rights and Limits of Social Medicine. Prof. Grenet of Paris stated that social medicine protects the collectivity and guarantees the care of individuals for the sake of social conservation. Social medicine must respect the dignity of the human person and his rights and liberties. It should be in everyone's power to choose one's doctor both for the curative and preventive side of medicine. There should be respect of the rights of the family, and it should not be lawful to 'impose' the separation of children from parents on the grounds that they are living in an unhealthy environment. There should be respect of the human person in the hospital and the attendance of relatives should not be prevented. There should be liberty of action for the hospital Chaplain, who should be able to administer Sacraments quickly. In combating venereal diseases the speaker condemns brothels, claiming that they have not justified their existence and that they wound human dignity deeply. Sterilisation of the unfit is to be condemned outright, and Catholic doctors cannot take part in its performance. Pre-marital certificate should not be transformed into an authorisation or prohibition for contracting marriage. As was to be expected, the whole problem of social medicine was hotly debated, and the delicate and difficult position of Catholic doctors in non-Catholic countries was emphasised.

The social side of the Congress was no less attractive and important. Contacts made in such meetings are as valuable as the reports obtained therefrom. Most of the congressists were accompanied by their wives and arrangements were made for them to visit Villa d'Este at Tivoli and the Vatican Museums during the official sitting of the Congress.

The first tourist trip around Rome in-

cluded visits to Santo Spirito Hospital (with which, it was discovered, our own Santo Spirito Hospital at Rabat has some connection), the Foro Italico, the Pincio, the Pontifical Gregorian University and the Cappella Sistina. On the second tour, the Istituto Superiore d'Igiene, the Basilica of San Paolo outside the walls of Rome and the Casa dei Cavalieri di Rodi were visited.

The audience at Castel Gandolfo was the culminating point of the programme. The Pope, received with loud cheers and prolonged clapping, talked on the duties of Catholic doctors and dwelt on the moral aspects of artificial insemination. The Sovereign Pontiff made it clear that this procedure could only be allowed when performed to help nature, after the normal act of intercourse had been accomplished between husband and wife. After this authoritative pronouncement, His Holiness spoke with representatives of each delegation, but soon the crowd of doctors and their families surged forward around him in an effort to kiss his hand.

After a visit to the Isle of Capri, a reception was held at Castel Angioino where Congress ended its sittings. Prof. Gedda explained that the findings of the Congress would be submitted to the Holy See for approval before becoming the official resolutions of the Fourth International Congress. He proposed an order of the day saying that "considering that in many countries National Health Schemes offended or did not take into sufficient consideration the dignity of the human person, all doctors were urged to carry out in their respective countries propaganda among the masses to enlighten them about the rights and limits of any State Health Scheme".

The final act of the Congress was the official banquet at the Hotel Transatlantico in Santa Lucia. Thus ended a memorable Congress which should be fruitful not only to those taking part, but also to those whom these represented.