

ETHICS

BRIDGING THE GAP

“**L**e plus ça change ... le plus c'est la même chose.” The French axiom about the more things change, the more they stay the same might be said about the vital role of ethics in Catholic health care. Clearly the Catholic Health Association, from its inception, committed itself to both exploration of and explication of ethics as it pertained to those ministering within Catholic health care. The premier volume of *Hospital Progress* (this journal's previous name) in 1920 features more than 12 articles devoted to ethics, demonstrating how intricately woven the topic has always been into the fabric of Catholic care.

One of those early pieces is quite fundamental, defining ethics as a human science and distinguishing it from jurisprudence — a difference that almost 100 years later, many still fail to understand. Some articles address themselves to ethics as it pertained to the burgeoning field of nursing in hospitals and “sanatoriums”; others address the emerging challenges in surgical medicine — a timely topic in the first quarter of the 20th century.

In those early days, ethics was not a field separate from other professional disciplines, such as theology, philosophy, medicine and law. The authors of these articles were physicians and nurses as well as priest/theologians. Nor did authors reflect any kind of Catholic group-think. In seeking to analyze ethical problems in light of our faith tradition, authors at times evidenced strong differences,

and even disagreements, making their engagements genuine and challenging and amazingly contemporary.

Unafraid to publish the entirety of a physician's letter that he characterized as “serious, deep and spicy,” CHA's founder and first president, Fr. Charles B. Moulinier, SJ, responded by asserting the church's position regarding life-saving measures in a difficult obstetric delivery. He declared that the church “decrees in such matters are based upon the most careful accumulation of facts in each case from medical and surgical experts, and upon the rigidly proven principles of ethics,” thereby presaging the interdisciplinary approach required in any ethics committee consultation.

This issue of *Health Progress* reports on a recent important survey and addresses the topic of ethics in Catholic health care with similar commitment, balance and honesty. Today we stand poised at a critical juncture in our history, at a time of tremendous change and upheaval in health care, in our nation, and in the church. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that Catholic facilities address the clinical, organizational and societal concerns that they face, equipped with the richness of the church's centuries-old theological and sacramental tradition. To do less than this would do tremendous harm to those we profess to serve. ■

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