

The spirituality of the Catholic doctor

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Table of Contents

What do we mean by Christian spirituality?

1. Human or acquired virtues
2. The divine virtues
3. The gifts of the Holy Spirit

Final conclusion

What is meant by Christian spirituality?

- This refers to the human spirit: it is the inner attitude or spirit of man from which his actions flow;
- The word also refers to the Holy Spirit, the 'Spiritus Sanctus': Christian spirituality is the inner attitude of the human spirit that listens to the Holy Spirit and allows itself to be guided by Him, so that it may lead life centred on Christ and, through Him, on the Trinity





Christian ethics emphasises the formation of the acting person

- Secular ethics: medical decision-making based on abstract principles: autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice
- Christian/classical ethics: the formation of the character of the concrete acting human person

The importance of spirituality in the context of shaping the moral character of the acting person

- It is not only about the fundamental principles of medical ethics like a dry doctrine of duty
- But also about spirituality, the inner attitude of healthcare workers, guided by the Holy Spirit, with which they apply those principles





Virtues are at the heart of spirituality, because they shape our attitude and the spirit from which we act.

- The fundamental principles of medical ethics cannot be applied as a dry set of duties
- Virtues are necessary in order to apply the fundamental principles in a prudent, decisive, courageous, just, faithful, hopeful and loving manner



1. Human or acquired virtues

We acquire these virtues on our own by frequently repeating the corresponding good actions, which eventually allows us to perform them spontaneously, more easily and with inner consent and devotion.

When applying ethical principles, virtues indicate the golden mean between excessiveness and deficiency in acting

Prudence (reason)

- Provides the golden mean between indecision and impulsiveness
- Is necessary in order to apply the principle of proportionality
- Mother of virtues/charioteer of the virtues

Fortitude (sensory target capability)

- the right balance between recklessness and excessive caution

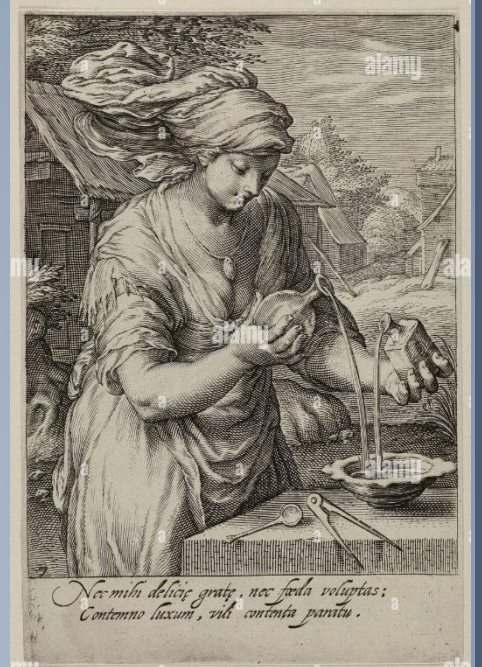


Moderation (sensory goal-setting ability)

- Provides the golden mean between excess (too much enjoyment) and abstinence (too little enjoyment)
- The virtue of moderation includes chastity, the integration of sexual impulses and affections into the whole person in accordance with their state of life

Justice (will)

- Enables us to give everyone their due
- Provides the golden mean between excessive altruism and selfishness





2. Virtues as gifts of God

Divine virtues

- 1) Faith
- 2) Hope
- 3) Love

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13)

Love is the highest of the theological virtues because it unites us with God

Seven gifts of the Holy Spirit

Faith (reason)

- Enables us to know God as the highest truth
- Enables the will to hope in God as our highest Good and the will to desire God in love as our highest Good
- Connects us so intensely with Christ that we undergo a change of being, under the influence of the Holy Spirit
- Gives an inner inclination to act lovingly and become like Christ





Faith: change in views on illness and the sick

- Ancient Greece: illness as punishment for sin
- Christianity:
 - illnesses are the result of original sin, in which all people share;
 - healing is central and analogous to redemption;
 - Christ the Physician (Christus Medicus): model for healthcare workers, especially in his compassion for the sick;
 - commandment to care for the sick: "whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40)
- Romans: only military hospitals
- Christians: hospitals for all the sick, including the terminally ill, from the 4th and 5th centuries in Egypt

Consequences of the erosion of Christian faith since the 1960s

- Awareness of the existence of universal values and norms eroded: secular ethical debate reduced to decision-making based on empirically verifiable and quantifiable data
- Technicism
- Entrepreneurship in healthcare
- Erosion of community spirit



What positive impact does faith have on healthcare workers?

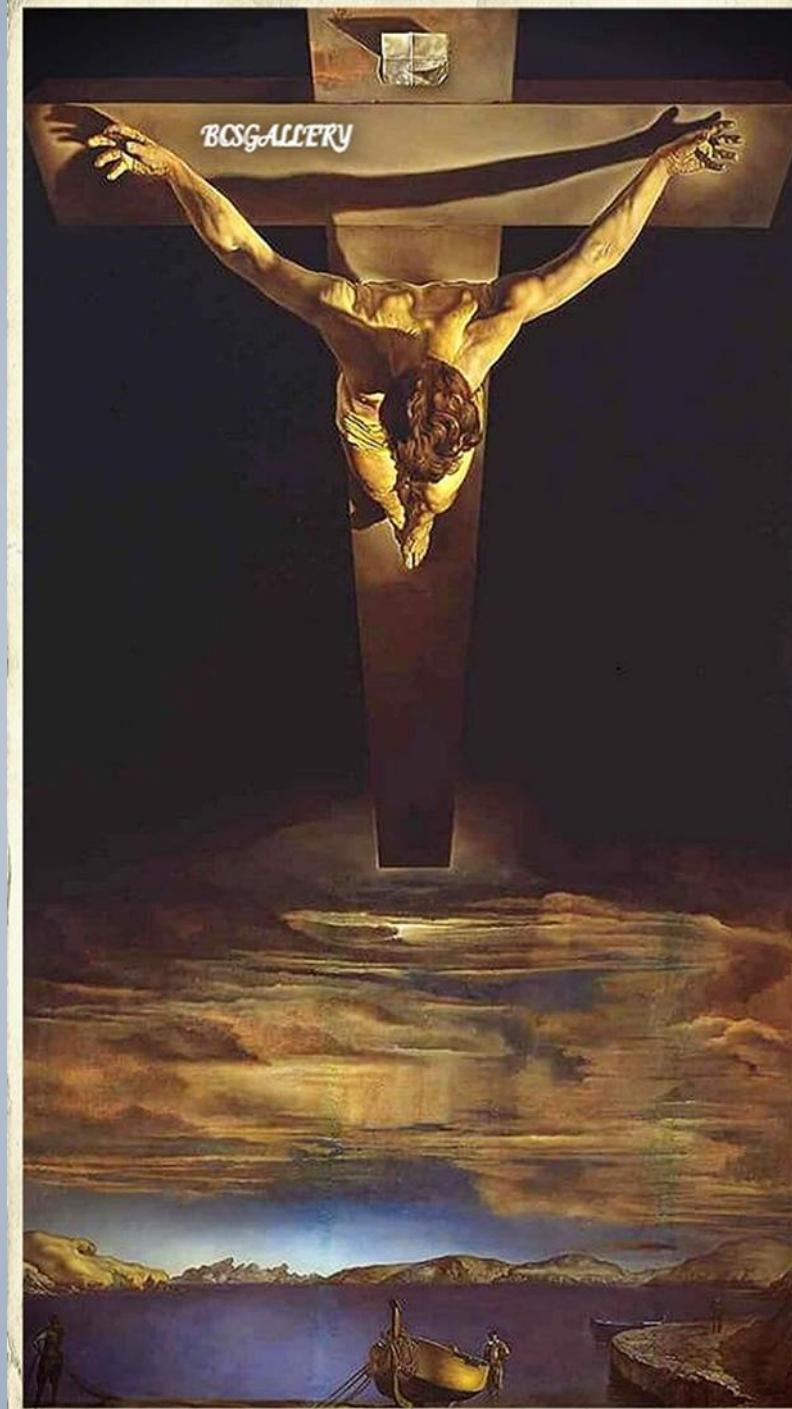
- This is evident from concrete clinical practice, where we give shape to our calling as healthcare workers
- It predisposes us to provide loving care based on sincere compassion for the sick as fellow human beings in their entirety
- It protects us from hubris (pride, overconfidence)
- We do not prolong life endlessly, knowing that our ultimate destination is eternal life with God
- Faith is our spiritual and moral compass



Hope

- Great strength for patients to bear their suffering
- Realise that a life marked by suffering is not meaningless
- See suffering as a call to follow Jesus in his suffering
- If patients share this hope with us, we can talk to them about it
- If that is not the case, our hope may also unconsciously radiate onto our patients

Salvador Dalí, Christ of Saint John of the Cross (1951)



Love

- The gift of grace through which we love God as the highest good for His own sake and the whole of creation (including the order of creation) for His sake
- Augustine: love is the organising principle of the virtues and moral action)
- Thomas Aquinas: love is the form of all virtues



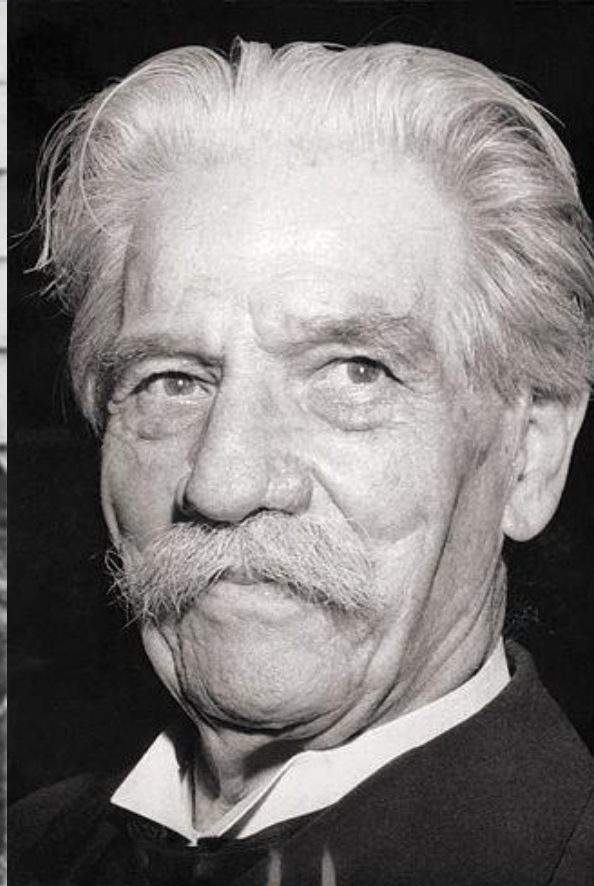
Love

- The fundamental principles of medical ethics are not a dry set of duties
- It is love for the Creator and His order of creation that leads us to apply these principles
- It is love for patients that motivates healthcare workers to respect the intrinsic value of their physical lives, to preserve their lives and restore their health in accordance with the principle of proportionality, and to respect their freedom and responsibility



Love

- A certain self-sacrifice in accordance with our calling, striking a balance where necessary
- Some people have a vocation to sacrifice a great deal:



3. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit

- Source Isaiah 11:1-3: “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him - the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord -”
- Christian tradition has added piety/love to this



The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit

1. Understanding;
2. Knowledge;
3. Wisdom;
4. Counsel;
5. Piety/Love;
6. Fortitude;
7. Fear of the Lord;



The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit

Similarities with the divine virtues

1. A habitus (constant inner attitude of the human spirit, which predisposes one to moral good deeds);
2. The efficient cause of this is God;
3. They are directed towards the same subject, namely human faculties.
4. Their object includes every moral action;
5. The final cause is the same. They also contribute to the supernatural perfection of man, which begins in this world and finds its completion in the next.



The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit

Differences with the divine virtues

1. The motive cause of the divine virtues is human reason and will; in the case of the gifts, it is the Holy Spirit
2. As a result, the effect of the divine virtues is limited by the boundaries set by human abilities; the gifts work on a divine, supernatural level
3. In the case of the divine virtues, human faculties are active, while in the case of the gifts they are receptive, which, incidentally, leaves human freedom intact
4. The final cause is the same. They also contribute to the supernatural perfection of man, which begins in this world and finds its completion in the world to come.



Because the Holy Spirit is active in his seven gifts and makes people receptive, his gifts are the crowning glory of the virtues.

Understanding	Faith
Knowledge	
Counsel	Prudence
Fear of the Lord	Hope
Wisdom	Love
Fortitude	Courage
Fear of the Lord	Temperance



Final conclusion

The doctrine of virtues clearly shows how Christian faith and medicine relate to each other

1. Christianity avoids mixing medicine and religious rites, but is based on a desacralised medicine
2. Christian faith is a source of inspiration for the practice of medicine
3. It is not merely an external source of inspiration, but also and above all an internal one, because the character and personality of healthcare workers are transformed from within under the influence of the virtues they have acquired and instilled



Virtue ethics shows healthcare workers a way to follow their calling

1. In today's healthcare system, guided by the principles of free market thinking, bureaucracy and the protocolisation of care tasks, where one's own personality, ideals and opinions must remain hidden behind a mask of uniform professional behaviour, it is difficult for employees to live out their calling
2. Under these circumstances, the formation of virtues and an inner spiritual life is a fruitful way to live out and nurture their calling

