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Suture Skill and Prayer Together

Archbishop Nicholas T. Elko

Archbishop Elko, episcopal advisor of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds, writes an annual message for readers of Linacre Quarterly.

Following the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II, surgical treatment was fortified by science and prayer. Skill and pious prayer were amalgamated. The specialists at Gemelli Medical Center realized that despite the fact that the Pope was the spiritual head of millions, God allowed his body to suffer a wounding attack.

Eyes of believers and non-believers alike focused hourly on the hospital reports. To the faithful, there was the question of how much divine intervention would surface in his recovery. To those weak in faith there was speculation: would there be any help forthcoming, above human help?

"Where was God when the Pope was shot?" cynics exclaimed. Such words have been paraphrased by atheists for centuries. Even on Calvary there was belittlement of God's majestic power. The interim period from Good Friday to Sunday was a time of faith testing.

Time gradation from tragedy to victory is an opportunity for trusting God, as one does in the nine month infant development or the period of adult recovery from injury. If such is divine regulation, even the Pope's humanity will not be exempt from it. If it were, then why was the very shooting not prevented by a celestial power? In this divine economy, do we not discern how the Creator Who gave us a free will awaits a free will offering of our prayers, faith, and service in return? Our Lord extracts prayers out of people by the allowance of great tragedy.

If He would have prevented the attack, heaven's calculators would not have been filled with millions of prayers that followed. God's mediaries for the reconstruction of torn bodies would have lost the opportunity not only to utilize their God-given gift of healing, but also an arousal of their faith in His assistance. The world at large would have passed by the incident as it did when an attack was made on Pope Paul VI in the Philippines. With the shooting of Pope John Paul II came an opening for heaven to reveal its connection with earth, encompassing both those who pray and those who heal.

How grateful physicians of faith must be when the Heavenly Father entrusts into their care a temple of the soul He has created, and awaits application of their human effort in the restoration of a member of His Mystical Body. How thankful the physicians must have been in seeing the Pope's continuing physical improvement after they had performed the necessary operation. It must have been an echo of the Psalmist who records that God teaches hands how to act.

A physician with faith believes that a man is not just a byproduct of chance, but a creation formed by the Master Creator. A reverence for life in preserving the life of the body brings in the spiritual connection. What satisfaction there is to practitioners when they can feel in their labors the proximity of the divine.

At the medical school of the atheistic Moscow University, a visitor who understood Russian heard whispered words from those students with a spark of faith, when dissecting a cadaver: "Dolzen byt Sozdatel" ("There must have been a Creator"). Although Communists reject a life-giver, in biology or in any science, there are now courageous scientists breaking through this atheistic armor. Their very logical, exploratory minds reject the atheistic interdict against scientific knowledge. For instance, the renowned Doctor Lysenko stands firm and opposes wrong genetic theories and refutes nihilist Marxists. The impersonal practitioner has no heart, no spirit. We cannot accept the statement, "of science for the sake of science," but need "science for the sake of mankind." The eternal price of a soul drops when the Creator's laws are lowered from consideration and only state laws are considered supreme.

Speaking earlier in Rome, John Paul II stated that we should direct our attention to the God of infinite majesty and note how present-day science can make explorations with wonderful precision. "In bygone years, a non-scientific age was ignorant of the richness and complexity of God's structures, not identifying causes that refer to the ultimate cause, the Creator Himself. Man has extended his horizontal threat of knowledge with the lack of balance of the vertical component of that knowledge. Has human knowledge handed off laterally along a minor path abandoning the main trunk structure, the Creator Himself?

Human existence needs glorification of the soul through the moral edification of the body.

The famous scientist and doctor, Louis Pasteur, a daily Mass attendant, showed that life has a magnificent value when man gives himself to his Creator to daily supplement the creature with health and grace. For the unbelievers, life is merely a long chain of unending problems with no source to go to for solutions and healing. For believers there is a Creator to go to Who establishes laws and nature, Who assists in cures. He has an unlimited supply of power and elements, many still unknown to man. He doles these out as He sees fit to those who are fit to receive them.

If we accept this, we are enlivened and renewed in confidence. Why should a physician travel a lonely road when he can do it in the company of a divine guide.?

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