

The Inner Life of Ethicists: The Importance of Cultivating an Interior Life

Paul J. Wadell, Ph.D.

Editor's Note: Dr. Wadell delivered a version of this paper during his presentation at CHA's annual Theology and Ethics Colloquium, March 13-15, 2019 in St. Louis.

I'd like to explore the connection between spirituality and the work you do as health care ethicists. We don't always see a connection between the two and we may even assume they are completely unconnected. In fact, there is a dynamic relationship between health care ethics and spirituality, a relationship in which each shapes and informs the other.

Why does this matter? Why is the inner life—the spiritual life—of health care ethicists worth exploring? One obvious reason is that Christianity maintains that human beings are not just rational and emotional beings, but also spiritual and religious beings. Since this is so, not paying attention to our spiritual lives leaves us with an incomplete and even distorted understanding of ourselves.

I suspect that many of you devote a lot of time addressing the moral and spiritual formation of the people you serve but I wonder how many opportunities you have for your own ongoing spiritual formation, especially formation that

connects to your work in Catholic health care ethics.

Reflecting on the relationship between ethics and spirituality matters because your profession isn't always easy. At times, it can be challenging, difficult, occasionally frustrating, and emotionally draining as well. The more we see a connection between what we do in our work and spirituality, the more we will persevere and flourish in our callings.

I will explore the deeper meaning and significance of what you do and the relationship between your work and spirituality in four steps. First, I will focus on what might be most meaningful and fulfilling about your work and what might be most challenging. Second, I will offer a theology of spirituality that sees our work and our spiritual lives as intrinsically connected. Third, I will explore a theology of work that offers a vision of work that is an alternative to the current cultural view. Rather than envisioning work to be primarily about career advancement and professional achievements, this alternative vision suggests that your work in health care ethics is better understood as a gift from God that you offer as a gift to others. Fourth, I'll conclude by considering three virtues that might help you grow in your spiritual life through your work.

MEANING AND CHALLENGE

In *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith*, Barbara Brown Taylor writes: “Call me a romantic, but I think most people want to be good for something. I think they want to do something that matters, to be part of something bigger than themselves, to give themselves to something that is meaningful instead of meaningless”¹.

I suspect all of you, whether you are in clinical ethics or organizational ethics, relate to those words. You entered the field of health care ethics because you wanted to do something that matters, because you wanted to be part of something bigger than yourselves, and because you wanted to give yourselves to something genuinely meaningful and important. In the best sense of the word, you were idealists. You wanted to take what you learned in graduate school in your study of philosophy, theology, and medicine and use it to help others, both personally and institutionally.

I asked several ethicists how they found meaning in their lives. Several things stood out. Helping people at very difficult moments of their lives, whether helping them make difficult decisions regarding their care or helping them accept and prepare for death. You can have a profound impact on people’s lives in ways that neither they nor their families will ever forget. One ethicist put it this way:

It is immensely fulfilling and satisfying when I leave my day knowing that full humanity was expressed in the work that I did because I was able to bring together the beautiful art and science of medicine with the

realities and messiness of real life circumstances and everything that comes with that so that the end result is that somebody walks away feeling fully human.

- You also mentioned the experience of a greater appreciation for human vulnerability, for the fragility of life and how important it is to be present to people at moments of sometimes frightening vulnerability. In this way, you imitate God who in Jesus entered our world and became vulnerable for us.
- You value being in an environment where you have the opportunity to share your deepest beliefs, values, and convictions, including your understanding of the Gospel, of who Jesus is, and of God’s compassionate love and care for us, in institutions that share those same beliefs, values, and convictions. Thus, what you do and where you do it resonates deeply with who you are and want to be.
- Finally, you mentioned the satisfaction of helping health care organizations and institutions live with integrity, doing what you can “to nudge things closer to the reign of God,” and shaping the rapidly changing field of health care ethics, including what it means to be an ethicist.

We know that nothing worthwhile is easily achieved, so there are also ample challenges and frustrations. These include:

- Dealing regularly with situations that are emotionally and psychologically difficult, situations that generate “moral distress.” You find yourself at the center of a controversy and are trying to help people sort it out. Maybe a patient makes a decision you disagree with because you know it won’t be good for them. To be regularly immersed in situations of human suffering and conflict can be overwhelming and exhausting. How do you do this without becoming hardened and detached? How do you keep that essential human connection?
- Dealing frequently with complex or unusual situations. Your work is specialized but also somewhat isolating because not many people face what you face or want to hear about some of the challenging realities you regularly encounter. You deal with aspects of life that most people want to postpone considering for as long as possible.
- Experiencing moral distress that sometimes emerges from the inability to close the gap between the mission-driven aspirations and the business and financial realities of health care. Lack of resources—or resources that are given to other areas—may prevent you from doing what you should do and want to do to fulfill the mission of Catholic health care. This can be demoralizing and it can lead to clashing narratives. Catholic health care is informed by the Gospel and the Catholic moral tradition, but those narratives can be dramatically at odds with the dominant narratives of capitalism, business, and

science. As one ethicist said, “Things like spirituality, prayer, and the Gospels are effective, but not in the way that business and science typically measure effectiveness. Consequently, we’re constantly looking for ways and metrics to prove our worth to the organization.”

- Dealing with people who view ethics “as only black and white,” who don’t understand that moral situations are often ambiguous so that no clear choice presents itself. No matter what decision is made, something less than ideal could result. Consequently, ethicists may be viewed as trying to undermine the Catholic moral tradition by people who don’t know that tradition or present a very distorted account of it or fail to grasp its essentially prudential nature.

THEOLOGY OF SPIRITUALITY

These are some reasons why an interior, spiritual life is so important to an appreciation of the value of what you do. The great missionary and physician Albert Schweitzer recognized this tension:

I wanted to be a doctor so that I might be able to work without having to talk. For years I had been giving of myself in words, and it was with joy that I had followed the calling of theological teacher and preacher. But this new form of activity would consist not in preaching the religion of love, but in practicing it. Medical knowledge would make it

possible for me to carry out my intention in the best and most complete way, wherever the path of service might lead me.²

That's a wonderful description of authentic Christian spirituality. For Christians, spirituality is not a matter of "preaching the religion of love," but of "practicing it." Theologian Richard Gula writes: "A sign of authentic spirituality is the life it engenders"³ which suggests that spirituality is all about making connections between our faith and our everyday lives. A vibrant spirituality is one that moves from our heads to our hearts and then to our hands, from our minds to the depths of our inner lives and then to the everyday actions of our outer lives whether at home, in our communities, in dealing with strangers, but also in our work.

There is a tendency to compartmentalize our lives in ways that suggest that spirituality pertains to certain areas of our lives, but not to others. We connect spirituality to practices such as going to church, setting aside time for prayer and meditation, making a point to have periods of silence and solitude in our lives, or perhaps making an annual retreat.

All of these are vitally important. We can even say that a spiritual life begins in these practices, must remain centered in them, and must grow out from them because through them we show that God is the center of our lives and the most important relationship of our lives.

St. Thomas Aquinas said that Christians are called to a life of friendship with God and saw friendship with God as the very heart of the spiritual life. Friendships die if friends never have time for one another, if they never are

available to one another, and it's no different with friendship with God. Friendships require work, commitment and presence, and create a certain way of life. Spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation nurture our relationship with God. They create an opening for God to enter our lives, an opening that can easily close if too many other things, including our work, begin to take precedence over our relationship with God. These practices create and sustain a resilient intimacy between God and ourselves, an intimacy that must be the foundation of our lives.

But the spiritual life cannot stop there. Our friendship with God is never meant to stay just between God and ourselves but should continually open up in love and friendship for others and permeate our lives and work. In the Gospel, Jesus distinguishes our love for God from our love for our neighbors, but he does not separate them. The depth and authenticity of our love for God is measured in our willingness to extend it to others, to gladly share it with all the neighbors who cross our path each day, including the neighbors we meet through our work. Ultimately, the spiritual life requires a moral vision that enables us to see how all of life is lived in the presence of God and how that awareness informs how we think, how we speak, and how we act in every area of our lives.

The Second Vatican Council insisted that an authentic spirituality hinged on making connections between who we say we are and how we live. In *Lumen Gentium*, its document on the church, the council said that through baptism all Christians become part of the priesthood of Christ and are called to bear witness to Christ. Nobody can be on the

sidelines because all are called to do God's work in the world in different ways.

For Christians, Christ is the reference point for understanding who we are called to be, the paradigm to understand and measure our lives. As Gula remarks: "If we are to be disciples today and live faithful to Jesus, then our character and actions ought to resemble, rhyme with, or harmonize with the pattern we find in his story."⁴ How can who you are and what you do in Catholic health care resemble, rhyme with, and harmonize with Christ? Gula's comments suggest that Christian spirituality is looking for ways to make our lives resonate with the life of Christ. The council expressed this beautifully when it said that we are all called to "contribute to the sanctification of the world" and to "manifest Christ to others" by bringing the Gospel to bear on every area of life (LG, 31,33).

That's an inspiring way to think about what you do in health care ethics, especially on those days when you may wonder if what you do makes a difference. In your work as health care ethicists you contribute to the sanctification of the people you meet and the places where you work; you are Christ to others by letting the Gospel inform every dimension of your work. When you make the connection between your work life and your faith life, everything is transformed, everything is seen in a new light. You are, *Lumen Gentium* says, the means by which "the world may be filled with the spirit of Christ and may the more effectively attain its destiny in justice, in love and in peace" (LG, 36). When you see what you do as health care ethicists through the lens of Christian spirituality, you realize that you are participating in Jesus' mission of building the reign of God (LG, 36). That's Christian spirituality.

What can we glean from this overview of Christian spirituality? First, it suggests that when we bring spirituality into conversation with ethics we realize that we have to extend our understanding of ethics beyond dealing with tough cases, beyond knowing how to apply the right moral principles to complex situations, and beyond trying to ascertain the possible consequences of an action.

But there is a more fundamental question: Who do I want to become? What kind of person am I making of myself each day? What would it mean for me to be a good person who lived a good life? How do I want to be remembered? And how do I have to live today in order to make that possible? These questions demonstrate how spirituality enables us to connect the work we do with what we want to be the overall trajectory of our lives.

Second, linking spirituality to health care ethics enables us to distinguish what we *do* in our careers from what we *live for*. Theologian Gary Badcock says a career ought to be understood in light of a more comprehensive life project and ought to serve that life project. For Badcock, our career focuses on what we do, but a life project articulates what we live for, what we take to be the overarching goal and purpose of our lives.⁵

That life project could be trying to be a force for good in the world. It could be always striving to make life better for others or working for a world where life abundant is possible for all persons and creatures. It could be bringing God's love and compassion to bear in every relationship of our lives. Linking

spirituality to our professions helps us recognize how our work can be integrated with our life project and each day contribute to it. We do not have to see our work as one thing and the overall story we want to write with our life as something entirely different because we write that story through our work. Realizing this deepens the meaning of what we do and why we do it.

Third, bringing spirituality into conversation with your work in health care ethics helps you see that you craft a magnanimous life not outside of the work you do, but in and through it. Magnanimity means to be of “great soul” or “great spirit.” The philosopher Josef Pieper described the virtue of magnanimity as “the aspiration of the spirit to great things.”⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that a magnanimous person is one who has “the spirit for some great act.” That “great act” can be any way of life that calls us out of ourselves in love, service, faithfulness, sacrifice, and generosity; any way of life in which we use our gifts and opportunities to have a positive impact on the world.⁷

It is clear to me that in the work you do as health care ethicists you are living magnanimously. You could not do what you do well without being of “great soul” or “great spirit.” It is also clear that your profession requires, as Aquinas put it, “the spirit for some great act.” Looking at what you do through the lens of spirituality reveals that you achieve that great act not outside of the sometimes mundane routines of your work, but through them.

Albert Schweitzer said that most people, rather than just getting by and rather than living only for themselves, want to aspire to what is best;

Your work has an undeniable sacramental character because like Jesus you often find yourself at the center of somebody's pain, somebody's affliction, somebody's sorrow, somebody's loss. Your work is a sacrament because like Christ, rather than fleeing those moments, you enter into them in order to help.

they want to be magnanimous. He believed that the majority of people want to be idealistic inasmuch as they want their lives to be guided by noble ideals and convictions.

But Schweitzer also said that most of us live out those ideals and convictions in the ordinary routines and circumstances of our lives. That means our actions, even if they remain unrecognized and uncelebrated, make a lasting difference in the world. Cultivating an interior life helps us connect the best ideals and convictions of our lives to the routines of our daily lives. I think Schweitzer captured perfectly the true meaning of magnanimity and of Christian spirituality when he wrote:

One can save one's life as a human being, along with one's professional existence, if one seizes every opportunity, however unassuming, to act

humanly toward those who need another human being. In this way we serve both the spiritual and the good. Nothing can keep us from this second job of direct human service. So many opportunities are missed because we let them pass by.⁸

One way of understanding Christian spirituality is to see it as forming us into the kinds of persons who seize “every opportunity, however unassuming,” to act humanly toward those who need another human being. And yet we miss so many opportunities. But when we bring our spiritual life into our work life we become much more attuned to those opportunities; we not only wait for them, but we also seek them and are poised to receive them.

THEOLOGY OF WORK

In the beginning God created. (Genesis 1:1)

God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Genesis 1:31)

So, God created humankind in God's image, in the image of God they were created; male and female God created them. (Genesis 1:27)

Our society typically thinks of work primarily in terms of career advancement and professional achievements. This is why a career is different from a calling. We are the focus of our careers, but God and doing the work of God is the focus of a calling. A Christian theology of work offers an alternative vision to the dominant cultural narrative about work because it flips the focus from ourselves and what's in it for us to the good we can do through our work. As

theologian Darby Ray says, our work is a gift entrusted to us from God that we offer as a gift to others.⁹ Our work is a blessing from God and in gratitude for being so blessed we make it a blessing for others.¹⁰

Why is this? The scriptures depict God in a variety of ways. They reveal God as a God of love, as a God of justice, as a God of mercy and compassion. But they also reveal God as a worker. Yahweh is not an idle God who rejoices in doing nothing, but a creative, imaginative, and even playful God who delights in bringing beautiful things to life.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, God works. This is why it is not wrong to think of God more as a verb than a noun. As Darby Ray notes, “God works not to exert dominance or achieve superiority but to make the world an inviting, diverse, and harmonious place.”¹¹ If that is true for God's work, it should also be true for our work. God's work is a labor of love and, therefore, our work too should be a labor born from love.

What is the connection between God's work and ours? Human beings are created in the image of God. That means there is some correspondence, some similarity, between who God is and who we are and between what God does and what we are called to do. It means we are, in our own fashion, to do what God does. If God is a community of persons—Father, Son, Spirit—bonded together in unbreakable love, then we image God and grow in likeness to God in the giving and receiving of love. If God is passionate about justice, especially to the poor, then it is through justice that we image God. If God is a worker, then our work is a very important way that we imitate God and grow in likeness to God.

“We humans are workers. We were created to work as God works and to support God’s great work of creating, loving, and sustaining the world in all its complexity and diversity”¹².

Through our work we are to share in and continue the good work that God began. God creates, heals, sustains, mends, comforts, and makes whole. You do all those things as health care ethicists. You fulfill the biblical mandate “to cultivate and care for” creation in your work with patients, their families, with your colleagues, and in your institutions.

God’s work did not stop with creation but continued when God became human and entered the world in Jesus. Jesus’ work immersed him in the chaos, messiness, sorrows and sufferings of people’s everyday lives just as your work does for you. In the Gospels, Jesus so often finds himself at the center of somebody’s pain, somebody’s affliction, somebody’s sorrow, somebody’s loss. He finds himself surrounded by people who need help. He doesn’t flee those situations, he doesn’t turn away from them but enters into them. “Rather than being above the fray, he is in the thick of it”¹³.

And so are you. This is why you can think of the work you do as health care ethicists as sacramental. A sacrament is something that mediates the sacred. A sacrament brings us into contact with God. Sacraments are said to be “Christ events” because through them Christ continues to feed, to heal, to comfort, and to bless. Your work has an undeniable sacramental character because like Jesus you often find yourself at the center of somebody’s pain, somebody’s affliction, somebody’s sorrow, somebody’s loss. Your work is a sacrament because like Christ, rather than fleeing those moments, you enter into them in order to help.

In that way you continue Christ’s work in the world by being agents of Christ’s love, healing, comfort, and compassion to others.

Through your work you also love your neighbors—the neighbors who happen to be patients and their families, the neighbors who are your colleagues, and the neighbors who comprise all the people who come to you for guidance and support. You fulfill this commandment to love when you take time to listen, when you offer comfort and compassion, when you are patient, and when you are honest and truthful, particularly when doing so is hard.

Second, this theology of work suggests that from a Christian perspective what you do as health care ethicists is truly a special calling or vocation. Seeing your work as a calling—a special vocation—is to know that God cares for the world through you. It means, as the theologian Elizabeth Newman writes, that “our vocation is not ultimately about us as individuals but about what God is accomplishing” in and through us.¹⁴ When you see your work as a calling, your primary concern is not what it makes possible for you, but what it makes possible for others.

The language of calling puts everything we do into a larger perspective, because it incorporates our own personal and institutional narratives into the much more sweeping narrative of God’s love and redemption. This means that in living out your calling you contribute to a narrative of lasting significance, a narrative that began long before you and will continue long after you. The great benefit of seeing our work as part of this larger narrative is that it frees us from defining life on our own terms by instead offering our lives to the saving work of God. Thus, you use your gifts—and your passion and

love for what you do—to meet a deep human need and, in doing so, serve the plans and purposes of God.

THREE VIRTUES

In this last section, I will consider three virtues that might help you continue to grow spiritually through your work. Although many virtues could be considered, these three seem especially important: the virtue of attention, the virtue of gratitude, and the virtue of humility.

First, the virtue of *attention*. A most basic calling is to *pay attention*, to open our eyes and our hearts to what God, other people, our communities, our work, or life itself might be asking of us each day. To pay attention is to see what truly matters. It is to be attuned to the world in which we find ourselves. The virtue of attention forms us into persons who are fully present to life and fully present to others. Steven Garber notes: “All day, every day, there are both wounds and wonders at the very heart of life, if we have eyes to see. And seeing—what [French philosopher Simone] Weil called learning to know, to pay attention—is where vocation begins.”¹⁵

With the virtue of attention, we let the world speak to us and draw us out of ourselves for the sake of others, rather than bend the world to our own interests and needs. Attentiveness is the virtue that opposes the vice of self-absorption. A temptation most of us at least occasionally struggle with is to turn in on ourselves—to shrink the horizons of the world—especially when we are tired, frustrated, discouraged or disillusioned. But if we turn in on ourselves and thus begin to live inattentively, we miss the different ways that we

can encounter God in the people around us and in the work we do.

A life characterized by attentiveness is a life without regrets because attentive people are alert to the surprising graces that are right in front of them. It may be seeing something special in someone we had previously barely noticed or perhaps even disliked. It may be seizing opportunities for kindness that were always right in front of us but that before we were too busy to notice. Or it may be the life-saving grace of recognizing how sad it is to pass up any opportunity to love whoever is standing right in front of us.

The virtue of attention keeps us morally and spiritually alert, which is why it is a kind of prayer. As Barbara Brown Taylor observed:

Prayer, according to Brother David, is waking up to the presence of God no matter where I am or what I am doing. When I am fully alert to whatever or whoever is right in front of me; when I am electrically aware of the tremendous gift of being alive; when I am able to give myself wholly to the moment I am in, then I am in prayer.¹⁶

Like prayer, the virtue of attention awakens us to God’s presence no matter where we are or what we are doing. It forms us into the kind of persons who are “fully alert to whatever or whoever is right in front” of them. In this respect, the virtue of attention rescues us from being so taken over by distractions that we don’t see what we need to see.

A second important virtue for growing spiritually in our work is *gratitude*. From the beginning gratitude was recognized as an essential characteristic of the Christian life. In Ephesians 5:20, the members of that early Christian community are exhorted to give “thanks always and for everything.” Gratitude was to be the mantra of their lives. They were not to give thanks occasionally or sporadically or selectively, but everyday for everything. Their lives were to pulse with gratitude and praise because they knew that God’s love and goodness were the foundation of their existence and because they knew that to know the world is to know a gift.

These early Christians were instructed to see blessings everywhere not because they closed their eyes to the sufferings and hardships, and sometimes-sheer cruelty of life, but because they were seized with gratitude for God’s goodness toward them and for God’s unbreakable love. This is why Karl Barth, the great twentieth century Protestant theologian, said that gratitude is not only the very center of the Christian life, but also a Christian’s true identity.¹⁷

Gratitude opens our eyes to see the beauty and goodness of life, a beauty and goodness that has always been there, but that ingratitude keeps us from seeing. Gratitude is a matter of vision; it is learning to look for what is there instead of what is missing. So much depends on what we notice or fail to notice. Grateful people notice, they see what others overlook. Grateful people recognize that life, even when it is hard, is still filled with gifts. Grateful people know that life doesn’t always give us what we want, but it does give us unexpected goods and pleasures, as well as blessings we never thought would come our way.

Why is gratitude so important for growing spiritually in your profession? Gratitude helps us resist the stubborn inclination to put ourselves first, to secure our interests, needs, and well-being over the interests, needs, and well-being of others. Gratitude fights the temptation to pull back, to become calculating, or to harden ourselves to the needs of others.

Moreover, gratitude fortifies us against resentment, complaining, cynicism, petty bickering, discord and negativity, each of which is toxic for professional relationships, especially for the collegiality we need to do our jobs well, and for the institutional cultures in which we find ourselves. “These forms of ingratitude are deadly: they kill community by chipping away at it until participants long to be just about anywhere else,” Christine Pohl writes. “While gratitude gives life to communities, ingratitude that has become established sucks out everything good, until life itself shrivels and discouragement and discontent take over.”¹⁸

But maybe the most important reason that gratitude is indispensable for your work in health care ethics is simply because your calling requires deep and abiding generosity. You cannot do what you do well without generosity. Your work demands the ongoing expending of yourselves for the sake of something good, and there is no way to succeed at that without generosity. Callings live on generosity and it is much easier to be generous when we are grateful. Finally, we need the virtue of *humility* to nurture our interior life. The philosopher Robert C. Roberts said that the “virtue of humility has fallen on hard times.”¹⁹ It’s true that humility rarely makes anyone’s list of the most important virtues, but maybe that’s because it is common to associate humility with its counterfeit versions.

Humility is not insufficient self-regard or an unhealthy lack of confidence. And it certainly has nothing to do with denying one's dignity, worth, and sacredness as a human being. Richard Gula captures true humility when he says, "Humility is not low self-esteem, but low self-preoccupation." He says that according to C.S. Lewis, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less."²⁰ Humility characterizes people who know that the world does not revolve around them.

The word "humility" is derived from the Latin word *humus*, which means "ground," "soil" or "of the earth." In fact, "humility" and "human" share the same root. Humble persons are well grounded or rooted; they are genuinely "down to earth" because they have a healthy sense of themselves, both their gifts and their limitations. They don't have to make themselves the center of attention. And because they don't pretend that they are more than they are or other than they are, they can appreciate, depend on, and celebrate the talents and accomplishments of others. As Gula notes, "With humility, you are more concerned that good be done than that others recognize you for what you do. Humility is the virtue that knows there is no limit to what can be done when it doesn't matter who gets the credit."²¹ Humility might best be described as clarity of vision about ourselves and how we stand in relation to others. It is clarity of vision that enables the cooperation and collaboration that is necessary for any organization to achieve its mission. Leaders marked by humility know they have a special role to play, but they cannot do it all. They do what they can but readily encourage the gifts of everyone who can do what they cannot. And because they are secure

in their own identity, humble leaders are not threatened by the gifts and successes of others.

Humility nurtures collegiality. A humble person recognizes that none of us, no matter how highly educated, trained, and skilled, knows or can do everything. Because our knowledge and expertise are limited, we have to be willing to listen to and learn from others. We have to be open to their insights and suggestions, be willing to consult them, and be ready to admit when their ideas and arguments may be better than our own. And humility nurtures the spirit of graciousness by which we assume the best of others, give them the benefit of the doubt, and interpret what they say and do in the best possible light.

Without humility, we can be overly confident in our abilities and judgments, assuming we know best without taking time to listen to our patients and their families or to consult with our colleagues. Humility contributes to an institutional culture characterized by mutual respect, open communication, and ongoing collaboration. One ethicist captured the importance of humility in health care with these words:

"Sometimes I think I've seen it all and know the answer to every situation. I need to remind myself to come into every situation with open eyes to see what is needed for this patient or this coworker. That is why my prayer everyday is focused on humility."

CONCLUSION

In your work as health care ethicists, you are doing something that matters, you are part of something that is bigger than yourselves, and you are expending your talents, time, and energy on something that is truly meaningful because you are continuing the healing work of Christ. As Barbara Brown Taylor said:

“Call me a romantic, but I think most people want to be good for something. I think they want to do something that matters, to be part of something bigger than themselves, to give themselves to something that is meaningful instead of meaningless.”²²

That work is too important not to do as well as you can. There is an undeniable spiritual character to the work you do. And that is why, cultivating a vibrant spiritual life can help you grasp what your work truly is: God’s gift to you that you offer as a gift to others.



Paul J. Wadell, Ph.D.

Professor of Theology and Religious Studies

St. Norbert College

De Pere, Wis.

Paul.wadell@snc.edu

Creating Dialogue

What is the connection between spirituality and the work of health care ethicists?

Describe how you currently pursue your own spiritual formation and opportunities you see to foster continued growth.

What is the theology of work and how does it apply to health care ethicists?

ENDNOTES

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins 2010) 113.

² Albert Schweitzer, "I Resolve to Become a Jungle Doctor," from *Out of My Life and Thought* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998): 81-95. *Leading Lives that Matter: What We Should do and Who We Should Be*, Mark Schwehn and Dorothy Bass, eds. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2006) 29-36.

³ Richard Gula, *The Way of Goodness and Holiness: A Spirituality for Pastoral Ministers* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), x.

⁴ Gula, 9.

⁵ Gary D. Badcock, "Choosing," in *Leading Lives that Matter: What We Should do and Who We Should Be*, Mark Schwehn and Dorothy Bass, eds. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2006) 101-107 at 103.

⁶ Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love*. Trans. Richard Winston, Clara Winston and Sr. Mary Francis, SND. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 101.

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. Blackfriars Edition, Vol. 42. Trans. Anthony Ross, OP and P.G. Walsh. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), II-II, 129,1.

⁸ Schweitzer, 35.

⁹ Darby Ray, *Working* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press) 125

¹⁰ Ray, 67.

¹¹ Ray, 44.

¹² Ray, 45

¹³ Ray, 51

¹⁴ Elizabeth Newmann, "Called Through Relationship," *Christian Reflection Project*, (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2004) 20-28, at 23

¹⁵ Steven Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: , Intervarsity Press 2014) 26, 35.

¹⁶ Taylor, 178.

¹⁷ Christine Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2011) 17.

¹⁸ Pohl, 18.

¹⁹ Robert C. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 78

²⁰ Gula, "Happiness Does Not Happen by Happenstance," unpublished talk to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men.

²¹ Gula, "Happiness Does Not Happen by Happenstance."

²² Taylor, *An Altar*, 113.