

Compassion in healthcare: pilgrimage, practice and civic life

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Background

- Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- Precision medicine
- Royal College of Physicians

I. *Peregrinatio*

It is a strange world of sickness when we look to medicine to deliver us from our finitude, from our mortality and our human vulnerability to suffering...Reading the Bible may help us to keep medicine in its (modest) place and then to celebrate it as good, without extravagant and idolatrous expectations of it. It is a strange world of medicine when modern medicine reduces the person to body and the body to manipulable nature. Reading the Bible may help us to see the folly of reducing our knowledge of persons and their bodies to the objective and objectifying gaze of science. It may help us to form and inform a medicine capable again of seeing and treating persons as embodied and communal selves, capable indeed of recognizing a patient's suffering (as well as the patient's disease) and responding to it with compassion. It is a strange world of medicine when it pretends to be value-free, a set of skills available in the marketplace...It is a strange world of medicine when the dying are not permitted to die, and stranger yet when compassion kills. (A. Verhey, *Reading the Bible in the Strange world of medicine* (Eerdmans, 2004), 60.)

- Being 'away from home'; life as transitory
- Not necessarily about geographical movement.

One by one, all of these died in faith, without having received the things that were promised, but they saw and welcomed them from a distance. They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Indeed, people who say things like that make it clear that they are looking for a land of their own. And if they were remembering the land they had come from, they would have had an opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better land—a heavenly one. For that reason, God is not ashamed to be called their God, because he prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:11-15.)

Our whole lives ought to be spent in traveling this road. — We ought to begin *early*. This should be the *first* concern, when persons become capable of acting. When they first set out in the *world*, they should set out on *this* journey. — And we ought to travel on with *assiduity*. It ought to be the work of every day. We should often think of our journey's end; and make it our daily work to travel on in the way that leads to it. — He who is on a journey is often thinking of the destined place, and it is his daily care and business to get along and to improve his time to get towards his journey's end. Thus should heaven be continually in our thoughts, and the immediate entrance or passage to it, *viz.* death, should be present with us. — We ought to *persevere* in this way as long as we live. (J. Edwards, 'The Christian Pilgrim: The True Christian's Life a Journey Towards Heaven', in H. Rogers, D. Sereno

Edwards and E. Hickman (eds.), *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, A.M: With an essay on his genius and writings* (London: W. Ball., 1839), 243-246, I.4 (p.244.)

II. *Peregrinatio* and healthcare

- compassion – its nature, and its practice – will be illuminated by thinking of the people, who encounter each other in healthcare contexts, as wayfarers and pilgrims.

(i) *peregrinatio* should be heard primarily as an *interpretation of the life-course*

(ii) *peregrinatio* encourages a *patience* with the *plurality of perspective* which marks healthcare encounters

Insofar as *peregrinatio* designates the human condition as a sojourn on earth apart from God, this does not necessarily imply the traveler's orientation to the heavenly homeland. In this sense, the image denotes, primarily, absence and does *not* assume the further meaning of journeying home. But insofar as *peregrinatio* refers to the *Christian* journey (the peregrinating believer), it must imply the direction home, for the Christian journey is a journey to God with whom humanity can only fully unite in the homeland. (Stewart-Kroeker, *Pilgrimage as Moral and Aesthetic Formation in Augustine's Thought* (OUP, 2017), 16)

(iii) wayfaring and pilgrimage are *images of encounter and companionship* with an inherent sense of porosity and curiosity not exclusion and sectarianism

(iv) *peregrinatio* yields attitudes of *humility* for companionship

Citizens are those individual human beings whose life together constitutes the life of cities. Eschatologically speaking, in terms of final and unchanging citizenship, every human being has citizenship in exactly one of the two cities, the *civitas Dei*, or city of God, and the *civitas terrena*, or earthly city...In every case that final citizenship is known to God; but living people typically do not know it with anything approaching clarity or certainty about themselves, and much less about others with whom they have to do; and even in the case of dead people it is the exception rather than the rule that their citizenship is known to those yet living. P.J. Griffiths, 'Secularity and the saeculum', in J. Wetzel (ed.), *Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide*, (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 33-54, 42.

(v) *peregrinatio* deepens healthcare's value by strengthening the significance of human encounter which lies at its heart

(vi) *peregrinatio* is a corporate undertaking requiring *perseverance*.

Consider the parable of the Good Samaritan

III. The nature of compassion

- paradigmatically a quality of human *relationship* rather than being paradigmatically a quality of an individual's *virtue* (although it may be a virtue when understood in a second-personal sense)
- distinguish the *nature* of compassion from the *content* of compassion

Qualities of compassion

- cognitive
- affective

- consensual
- *often* intercorporeal
- alleviative
- *potentially* persuasive

JH 22.6.21