SPIRITUALITY: THE BASIS FOR NURSES' ETHICS

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ABSTRACT

A social crisis in both the labor and ecological systems constitutes a problem that requires the formulation of a new ethics for humanity.¹ The social crisis is a result of the organizational model used by modern societies in the production of wealth and its unequal distribution. This intense inequality in wealth distribution contributes to a schism between populations. On one side an opulent and privileged society exists, and on the other a poor and downtrodden humanity. This crisis in the labor system stems from automated production methods, which devalue man’s work and exclude him from contemporary society. The ecological crisis emerges from the dominance with which men have subjugated the Earth and its resources. Man has not acknowledged Earth’s permutations and, therefore, has not taken the necessary caution of such changeability nor respected its effects. Such crises affect all populations and cry out for attention. Contemporary societies demand solutions to these questions. Nursing is a part and parcel of this yearning. In this setting, the nurse should be able to offer collaboration and solidarity with a project of creating a world ethos based on a minimum consensus amongst humans.¹ Understanding and believing that spirituality is invaluable in this process, the authors of this work aim at addressing it as an essential dimension for nurses’ ethics.

KEY WORDS: Ethics, Spirituality, Nurse.

INTRODUCTION

A Cartesian, mechanistic and fragmentary conception of society based on a limiting set of values has greatly influenced western civilization and has become commonplace in human thinking. At the end of the 18th century, the western world, guided by the cult of reason, raced towards modernity reaching into all spheres of life. Initially involving industry and, as a result of productive and economic efficacy, this advance expanded to other sectors, thus inaugurating the industrial or modern society.

Literature mentions that rationalization is noble when it includes the critical and scientific spirit in the area controlled by traditional authorities and in the arbitration of those in power. It is formidable when it determines Taylorism and the application of science to work organization though these methods may nullify workers’ professional autonomy. By subjecting this autonomy to rhythms and commands, which are rationalized as scientific, but which are in fact the instruments guiding the procedures they must exert under strict control for the sake of profit, they are indifferent to the psychological and social realities of men at work.2

In this setting, rationalization and organization cause the standardization of products and processes, the specialization of tasks, the maximization of efficiency and productivity, and the centralization of power and information. Additionally the synchronization of work and social life, concentration of the population in urban centers and the flow of capital generating large companies and monopolies constitute the guiding principles of our industrial society.3

This concept of modernity is dependent upon the idea that the human being is what he does. Therefore, "he must no longer look beyond society, towards God, his own individuality or origin, but rather he should seek the definition of good and evil in what is useful or harmful to the survival of the functioning of the social framework".2

Thus, modern man, provided with scientific precision and the capacity of analysis, has spawned material revolutions and enabled daring technological innovations. This technological revolution has not been accompanied by equivalent social and political advancement. The disparity between these developments "is at present one of the major destabilizing factors of humanity".4

De Masi5 discusses the technological, economic and cultural developments in the modern era as being important and a determinant of changes in man's lifestyle. However, the view is expressed that the organizational dimension, with the advent of industrial labor, has innovatively resulted in the attainment of amazing levels of productivity. The organization model adopted by the western world during the 19th century has been submitted to more and more sophisticated trials and modifications, culminating in the emergence of a new scientific field - that of organizational science, whose precepts became prominent in the second decade of the 20th century. Organizational sciences prospered with the contribution of various disciplines and contributed to human progress and development. They were the most valuable sciences in the 20th century, since, through their application, it was possible to

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maximize technological production and scientific work in various areas. "It was management that introduced new technologies in workplaces, in homes and in entertainment. It was management that created the new chains of companies, multinationals, industrial districts and the globalization of the economy, of tastes and of consumption. For good or evil, organization men changed the world in the 20th century much more than politicians, priests, the military or lawyers".\(^5\)

These sciences have been consolidated and their applications have also been extended to hospital organization.

However, in this frantic race in search of material progress, modern man has been driven by his ambition for tangible goods and has forgotten his humanity. Some consider that "his spirituality has been severely stricken".\(^4\) Man felt an emptiness within him; he desired to give a meaning to what being is, but his thought distracted him. Through reflection on the world setting, Peccei warns about the decadence in which humanity is entangled and emphasizes that changes in human thought and behavior are essential for rebirth.

The social crisis, in the labor system as well as the ecological one, constitutes a problem that invites the development of a new ethics for humanity.\(^1\) The social crisis is a result of the organization model used by modern societies in the production of wealth and its unequal distribution. This intense inequality in wealth distribution causes discord among humans: on one side, an opulent and privileged society and on the other a poor and foundering humanity. The crisis in the labor system stems from automated production models, which devalue man's work and exclude him from contemporary societies. The ecological crisis emerges from the relationship of dominance and subjugation that men have with the Earth and its resources. Such crises affect all humanity, which yearns for a new direction. Contemporary societies clamor for solutions for these questions.

The values cast aside in modern organizations but which appear in contemporary society - subjectivity, emotion, spirituality and quality of life - are capable of providing power and freeing men from the subjugation to which they have been submitted so that they can be true to their human nature. They are values that professionals in our health service institutions must incorporate in their actions and practice.

Focusing on nursing services and specifically on nurses' work, the authors of this study aim at addressing spirituality as an important base for professional ethics.

THE NURSE'S ETHICS BASED ON SPIRITUALITY

After World War I and following the 1929 economic crisis the organizational model, which had been rigorously centered on command and control, began to be refuted; more and more frequently it was shown to be inadequate. At present it is considered non-responsive, impotent and obsolete in face of new psychological, social and political demands. Previously it had been understood that a worker who specializes in a certain task and continually dedicates himself to it, will eventually perform it with singular skill, but will also lose the capacity to integrate spirit into his work - "it can be said that, in it, man degrades himself as the worker develops".\(^5\)
Organizational sciences, through the actions of leaders, administrators, managers and also the actions of organization members, agree that humanity must progress in material terms, even if such progress implies the sacrifice of men individually and results in harmful consequences to relationships with peers and with the environment.

Man needs to be rescued; we must recover the totality of the human being. And in this sense, we believe that management can contribute a great deal if it directs its action toward the values emerging in society. Investment in human capital by considering its psychological, social, political and spiritual dimensions as well as its solidarity with the Earth will bring the reward of material progress and aid mankind in developing his potential, as an individual and as a professional. In our view, this is the role of leadership at the present time.

Chatterjee\textsuperscript{6} explains that the strengthening of leadership requires a singular skill from the leader so that he can recognize, fortify and expand the potential of individuals through collective action. It is argued that our work must not neglect the spiritual dimension in our actions. Dalai Lama defines "spirituality as that which produces inner changes in human beings". Inner changes are thought to be capable of giving a new meaning to life.\textsuperscript{7} Nowadays, the singularity of our time lies in the fact that spirituality has been discovered as a deep dimension of humans, as the necessary moment for the full awakening of our individuality and as a space for peace amid conflicts and social and existential desolation.

As mentioned, the social crisis of the work system and the ecological one yearn for a new ethics for humanity. Nursing constitutes a part and a portion of such a universe. Therefore, to be integrated in this effort, the nurse should be able to offer collaboration and solidarity to a project toward a world ethos based on a minimum consensus amongst humans.\textsuperscript{1}

In this project, it is emphasized that we need to change our civilizing paradigm. This change must include more benevolent and more synergistic relations with nature as well as more collaboration among people.

On the one hand, cultures must preserve their individuality and, on the other, they must be open to a dialogue with other peoples, thus understanding the loss and gain resulting from this process.

Founded on an ethical basis, (which, in its turn, is based on spirituality) this project rests on humanitarian sensitivity and on emotional intelligence expressed by care, social and ecological responsibility, solidarity and compassion – such attitudes are capable of sensitizing people towards the necessary change.\textsuperscript{1}

The minimum imperatives of world ethics can be delineated as follows; ethics of care; ethics of solidarity; ethics of responsibility; ethics of dialogue; ethics of compassion and liberation, i.e. holistic ethics. It is mentioned that clearly formulated ethical imperatives are essential, but not enough.\textsuperscript{1} It is in the extent of the pathos that the spiritual dimension can emerge as a profundity of the human being and of the universe itself and, together with it, the mystic perspective. Experiences based on spirituality can lead nurses to a personal and professional advancement, thus strengthening the ethical imperatives of their actions and practices.