

Oration from 1990

Oration Title:

Medicine - Religion or Job? - Prolegomena

Orator:

The Rev. Robert Bain, M.D.

Abstract of Oration:

Dr. Bain explains how physicians are different from everybody else. They are part of a religion in its Latin sense of "to tie together doubly," as they are tied to science, medicine, their patients, and each other. Continuing the medical religion metaphor, he points out that more is required of its clergy, the physicians, than of the clergy of traditional religions. Doctors give more time, are required to be more compassionate because they deal with people through their most human experiences of grief, pain, and joy.

Bain explains the Greek term *hamartia*, meaning that everyone "misses the target" sometimes in his or her life. No one does everything right all the time, and for that reason, we cannot be critical of others when they misstep. He discusses the meaning of ethics: "we need to understand that ethics isn't about something outside of us; ethics has to do with us understanding ourselves, understanding our role and understanding our responsibilities&it has to do with disposition, and we [physicians] are well disposed toward our fellow man." There is no code of ethics. It is what a good person does in a situation, with the intent of doing good. Ethics cannot be imposed on someone by a person or group outside of the situation at hand. The doctor is the only person responsible for the ethical decisions concerning his patients, and it is imperative that physicians realize that and act accordingly.