

## Introduction

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There is something unique in the healing activities of Jesus. His concern and compassion for the sick and suffering come from his conviction in the dignity of the human person as person. He extends his healing touch to everyone, whether rich or poor. No one is outcast. No one is marginalized or stigmatized. For him, every individual is precious, unique, and “*created in the image and likeness of God*” (Gen. 1:24). His mission is clear: “*I came that they may have life, and have it in abundance*” (Jn. 10:10).

Pope John Paul II, in his Encyclical letter, *Evangelium Vitae* (Gospel of Life) in paragraph 1, writes: “The Gospel of life is at the heart of Jesus’ message. Lovingly received day after day by the Church, it is to be preached with dauntless fidelity as ‘good news’ to the people of every age and culture”. In the same document, the Pope continues, “*In today’s cultural and social context, in which science and the practice of medicine risk losing sight of their inherent ethical dimension, healthcare professionals can be strongly tempted at times to become manipulators of life, or even agents of death*” (n. 89).

Down through the centuries, thousands are those who received inspiration from this great Master, and followed his noble path of healing and caring.

Think of Dr. Albert Schweitzer, who together with his wife - a nurse, spent their lives for the poor in Africa. His companions discouraged him, when he threw away his great career as a theologian or medical doctor in Europe, and set off to Lambéréne, in the Republic of Gabon. But, it was his dream to work for the protection of life, not just of human life alone, but every life, including the nature. Perhaps this was something he had nurtured from his childhood onwards. He writes:

“I was perhaps seven or eight years old when something happened which left a deep impression on me. Together with Henri Braesch I made some catapults. One Spring morning, an Easter Sunday, Henri said to me: “Come on, let’s go into the vineyards and go for the birds!” Even though the idea horrified me I did not dare to say no out of a fear that I would be teased. We went up to a tree which was still bare but which was full of birds. They were unafraid of us and sang happily on that clear morning. Going forward in bent fashion like an Indian on a hunt, Braesch held the stone and pulled the band of the catapult. Obeying his powerful look, I did the same. My conscience tortured me but I promised myself that I would not aim properly. At that moment the church bells began to toll and their harmony mixed with the chorus of the birds in that radiant sky.

It was the first ringing of the bells before the main ringing which took place at the half hour. For me it was as if heaven was speaking. I threw down my catapult, scared the birds so as to drive them away from the dangers of Braesch's weapon, and ran as fast as I could to my home. Every time that I hear the bells of Easter ringing in the Spring sky, with the trees stretching forth their naked branches, I experience the emotional remembrance of a commandment which the strict voice of those bells once brought to my mind: "Thou Shalt not Kill!". (Richard Brullmann, "Albert Schweitzer: A Good Samaritan of Our time")

My dear friends, [to serve life, to protect life, 'from the beginning till the natural end', is our mission. To serve the underprivileged should be our option.](#)

You know about Henry Dunant, the founder of Red Cross. He became a Nobel laureate in 1901. He is a man who believed in the dignity of every human being. He respected the value of life of every individual, and it was translated into practical humanitarian action, even at frontier situations. He had summarised his philosophy of medical action into seven Principles, which you can find in his book, '*A Memory of Solferino*'. See how relevant they are even in our times!

1. **Humanity**: The principle of humanity means endeavouring to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. This concept exists in all religions, all traditions, all civilizations and all philosophies.

Especially in the context of our country, where there is increasing violence, and even sporadic outbursts of riots between different communities, ethnic and linguistic groups, it is important that we strive for the "*Vasudaiva kudumbakam*" and the idea that we all make one single family, no matter to what religion, tradition, colour, caste or state we belong.

2. **Impartiality**: It means, we recognize that all women and men are equal, that care must be provided without prejudice or discrimination.

In our country, we remember the stigma and discrimination experienced by those people who are living with HIV/AIDS. It is inspiring to remember what [Mother Teresa of Calcutta](#) used to say: "*A person affected by HIV/AIDS is Jesus among us. How can we say 'no' to him?*" Impartiality means our conscious concern for everyone without any discrimination.

3. **Neutrality**: It means unbiased assistance. The aim is only to alleviate human suffering, without engaging in political, racial, religious or ideological controversies.

This brings to mind the "Hippocratic Oath" that each medical doctor takes: "*I will keep my life upright and my art immaculate*".

4. **Independence**: If humanitarian action is to be respected, it must remain independent as regards politics, religion and finance.

It is sad that in our country, due to the growing globalization and aggressive commercialization, and the advancement of the 'five star' hospitals, healthcare has become a luxury of the rich. I hope our hospitals, and the healthcare providers trained in the Christian Medical institutions keep their priority always in mind.

Statistics say that in India, 59% of all medical practitioners are practising in cities. A vast majority do not prefer to go and work in villages. As for example, 60% of all medical graduates in Maharashtra are located in Mumbai, where no more than 11% of the State's population lives! In our country, 84% of hospital beds today are located in urban areas, whereas 75% of our population still resides in villages.

It is here that the Catholic Church in India has set a great example. According to the Directory of Catholic Health Facilities in India, published by the CBCI Commission for Health in 2003, out of the total 4743 Healthcare institutions in the country, 85% of them are in remote villages. Most of these areas are totally or partially deprived of adequate healthcare structures and services. Church and its personnel should continue this attempt to reach health to the unreached in the periphery.

5. **Voluntary service**: This principle underscores the purposeful and disinterested nature of humanitarian action.

In this context we recall the beautiful concept of '*niskama karma*', which we find in Bhagavad Gita. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our Nation, used to mention repeatedly this profound concept: "Do your duty, without desiring its fruits".

6. **Unity**: It signifies the need to work in harmony with others.

Networking and collaboration are the key-concepts to success. We need to join hands with people of good will. Together we can make a difference.

7. **Universality**: The humanitarian spirit knows no borders. It must prevail everywhere, and at all times.

Medicine is a humanitarian profession. True spirit of caring is primary. All the care providers should follow the noble path of compassion, concern and brotherhood. For the one in the field of healthcare, **success and true satisfaction is in serving the humanity, especially the poor and the marginalized sick.** Let this be the noble path that we tread!

May God bless us all!

