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From Medicine to Ministry

Roger Sturrock

Roger Sturrock is living a most interesting life. Having graduated as a doctor in 1977 in London, he moved two years later to the Royal Infirmary in Glasgow. Later he taught for 2 years at Ahmadu Bello University hospital in northern Nigeria. From 1989 he worked with Glasgow University, and from 2008 to 2014 was Emeritus Professor of Rheumatology. During this time he trained as a Reader in the Church of Scotland. After his retirement from medicine, he studied to gain a B.Divinity degree in 2010 prior to ordination in 2014. He is serving as assistant minister at Wellington Parish Church and is an honorary chaplain at Glasgow University. In 2023 became Moderator of the Glasgow Presbytery.

After outlining his career Roger then gave a potted history of medicine from its earliest days, starting with Asclepius, the Greek god of healing. He had 5 daughters: Iaso, Panacea, Hygieia, Aceso, and Aegle, whose names are all associated with various aspects of health and healing; some having passed into current day language. Asclepius had the serpent-entwined rod that is the predominant symbol for medicine and health care even today. In India the roots of medical practice go back before 700 BCE in writings such as those of Charaka Samhita. Hippocrates, who gave his name to the oath once used by doctors lived from 460 to 375 BCE. The acts of Christ – The Great Physician - were recorded by Luke, himself a doctor. Galen of Pergamon (129-200 AD) was very influential whose ideas were well received by the Christian church. Maimonides – a Jesuit (1135-1204 AD)- believed that truth should be accepted from whatever source it proceeds. Erasmus, a humanist in the late15 century, was also a medical man who taught that doctors should be skilled, sincere and diligent.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as “complete physical, mental and social wellbeing”. When looking at health you can consider the state of populations, or consider the science of examining cells. (The proposal that there was a “God Gene” that predisposes humans towards spiritual or mystical experiences has now been disproved.) However, Body, Mind and Soul all need to be considered when treating humans. Roger outlined the life of Albert Scheitzer who was a polymath starting out as a musician (a noted organist), studied theology and was ordained at around 40, before studying medicine and setting up a hospital at Lamborene in what is now Gabon, as an example.

All through his life Roger has been closely involved with the church and with several denominations. During his time in London, he was greatly impressed by Martyn Lloyd-Jones the minister at Westminster Chapel, and who was also a medical doctor. In Nigeria he went to St Andrews Church, Zaria and in Glasgow to Ruchill, Kelvinside with the Reverend John Matthew.

A fascinating talk covering much ground emphasizing the link between the spiritual and scientific links in health care.