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Please submit electronically prior to the 15th of the month preceding publication.
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Random Thoughts on Retirement and Heresy

Scott Sattler, M.D.



Sometimes life leaves puzzles on my doorstep, often in the form of subtle insights, and after digesting them I am drawn to empty out my mind in order to make room for more. This article is one of those times and focuses on two such recent areas of thought.

THOUGHTS ON RETIREMENT

First, a little background:

Back in 2004, after practicing eight years on the Hoopa Indian Reservation and twenty-two years with Eureka Family Practice, I knew I needed to make a major course correction. During these years the practice of medicine had changed so much and in such a fashion that the format within which I was doing what I loved to do had become increasingly self-destructive. At the end of that year I resigned from EFP and fulfilling a promise to myself practiced no medicine for a year in order to re-establish inner balance. Twice over the next two years my wife, a family nurse practitioner, and I practiced international relief medical care in Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala following the devastation brought about by Hurricane Stan. To my delight the practice of medicine became straightforward again and the work brought great joy. For the past ten years I have provided pool coverage for physician services at Humboldt State University's Student Health Center.

Now to the item that I wanted to bring forth. As would be expected, ever since I left EFP I find myself frequently being asked how am I enjoying my 'retirement', and I have had a hard time responding because I simply cannot relate to the word 'retire'. In baseball, when the third out happens the side trying to score runs is said to be 'retired.' They can't bat anymore until they can make the other team 'retire.' That concept doesn't fit my idea of 'retirement'. And then again, it seems that 'retire' implies being 'tired' out one more time, being 're-tired', and that doesn't fit either.

For years I've looked for an analogy that would let me relate to that word, and I finally found one that works for me. It starts off by picturing a young man who dearly loves downhill mountain biking. It takes him into nature, forces him to stay in great physical condition and maximizes his sense of adventure, coordination and balance. But after a decade or so he finds that his reflexes aren't quite as fast and his vision not quite as sharp, and his endurance not quite as reliable, and that he's having more falls. So, since he

truly loves biking, he decides to change his format and switch to road biking. To do that he needs to put aside those smaller, soft, knobby downhill dirt path-grabbing tires and replace them with larger, thinner high-pressure tires that are perfect for the paved road. In short, he has to 're-tire' his bicycle. This kind of re-tiring I can relate to. In retrospect, I had to re-tire the format within which I can do what brings me joy. So now, when someone asks me how I like my retirement I can truthfully reply "I like my new tires just fine, thank you."

THOUGHTS ON HERESY

A few months ago I published an article here in the NCP on "The Vanishing Vasectomy," discussing the role of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in making it more difficult for men in Humboldt County to have access to vasectomies. The USCCB's enforcement of the hierarchy's Ethical and Religious Directives (#9, 52,53) have not allowed urologists, surgeons or family physicians employed by the St. Joseph Health Medical Group to provide vasectomy services.

One of my colleagues jokingly wrote me that, had I written this article during the Spanish Inquisition, I would have been made the object of an auto-da-fé, the public condemnation and immolation of those found guilty of heresy by the inquisitors.

This led me to look up the etymology of the word "heresy" and I was surprised to discover that it is the Greek word for "choice." A heretic is a "chooser", one who has the audacity to choose a path that disputes or strays from mandated religious dogma. This discovery helps me understand that while pro-choice folks consider themselves fully capable of making their own moral decisions when it comes to reproductive issues, to the Catholic hierarchy they are heretics, to be treated with disdain.

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••••• Editorial and Publications Committee is
• looking for members who are interested
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• quarterly at the Medical Society office.
• PLEASE let us know.

North Coast Physician

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MISCELLANEOUS

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