Moral and Ethical Principles of Education of Future Physicians: the Holy Doctor Giuseppe Moscati – an Example to Follow

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Abstract
The article deals with the biographical data of the Italian doctor Giuseppe Moscati (1880-1927), who was recognized as a saint. Moral and ethical principles that he was guided in life are an example to follow by future doctors.

Keywords
Giuseppe Moscati; doctor's vocation; spirituality; mercy

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An extremely interesting two-part feature film was taken about the holy doctor “Giuseppe Moscati: The Healing Love” (directed by Giacomo Campiotti, 2007), which is worth watching for those who already work in the field of medicine or plan to become a physician [1]. There you can learn many instructive and useful things. First, let us dwell on the short biography of the famous physician.

Giuseppe was born on July 25, 1880 in the Italian city of Benevento in the wealthy family of the Tribunal chairman Francesco Moscati and Rosie de Luke. He was the sixth of nine children. His father was a well-known lawyer. When Giuseppe was 4 years old, the family moved to Naples, where he spent the rest of his life. In 1889, he entered the gymnasium at the Vittorio Emanuele Institute. Having received a classical education, in 1897 he entered the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Naples, which he finished in 1903. Then, he worked as a freelance adjutant in one of Neapolitan hospitals. In April 1906, he saved patients from the hospital Torredel Greco, carrying them on his shoulders, during the eruption of the Vesuvius volcano. Since 1908, he has been a full-time assistant at the Institute of Physiological Chemistry. In 1911, Moscati made a significant contribution to the elimination of the epidemic of cholera in Naples. In the same year, he was accepted as a member of the Italian Royal Medical-Surgical Academy. In 1919, Moscati became a chief physician of the third hospital for the incurable. Giuseppe Moscati died April 12, 1927, at the age of 47. Almost all Naples came for the funeral, which took place on April 14. Three years later, in 1930, there was a translation of his relics to the church of Jesús Nuovo in Naples, where they are still preserved.

The Neapolitan doctor did not stop helping people even after his death – amazing healing began to take place near his tomb. That is why the beatification and canonization processes

Figure 1. Giuseppe Moscati (1880 - 1927)
were initiated. The ceremony of beatification of Moscati was held on November 16, 1977, on St. Peter’s Square, and the ceremony of canonization (consecration a saint) on October 25, 1987. The canonization of Moscati was an example of how a modern layman can achieve holiness by choosing an ordinary laity profession [2, 3].

Basics of personality formation of Giuseppe were laid in the family. He showed diligence in gaining Christian education, which was given to him by parents. They were very devout; their personal and family life was marked by wisdom that was given to their children. Francesco Moscati, a judicial officer, has always kept and proved his faith in the judicial environment of that time. Mother Rosa, when dying taught her children: “My children let me die happy. Always escape from a sin, which is the greatest evil in life” [4]. The Moscati family was indeed a “little Church”, where Peppino, as Giuseppe was called as a child, could draw knowledge of wisdom. He had a natural sense of justice that made him live as he thought was right. In gaining the wisdom of life, Giuseppe helped his deep and thought-provoking character, who was able to find the truth of things and reflect on his behavior. Since childhood, Peppino has shown a great tendency to virtue. This is evident from some of his works, preserved to this day. These virtues originated in his childhood and will always accompany him in times of adolescence and adulthood. There is evidence of his extraordinary honesty that distinguishes him from his friends. Peppino in his conversations with friends often with a sense of adoration mentioned the tips and examples received from his parents. He used to say that when he did something good as a doctor, it was only due to the inspiration from his father [4]. Francesco Moscati somehow confessed in a conversation with the nun: “My sons are all good, but no one is like Peppino” [5].

While studying at the gymnasium, Giuseppe was always the most successful in the classroom for all eight years. His teachers loved and appreciated him the most among the disciples and mentioned him as a model for others. Professor Domenico Petrona often told his students: “Let’s try to follow my student Moscati. He is a pearl among young people not only through learning, but also through behavior and seriousness” [6]. Gradually, in the heart of Giuseppe Moscati, appeared the vocation of being a doctor, facilitated by family education in the sense of sensitivity to human pain, as well as the illness of his brother Alberto, which brought the experience of suffering in the bosom of his family. Giuseppe’s father was a lawyer, and there were no doctors in the Moscati family. When Giuseppe intended to study medicine, his father who always respected the freedom and choice of his children agreed to this. However, his mother drew his son’s attention to the hard work that he would come across. Giuseppe replied that for him to be a doctor – a mission, not a profession [7]. He was deeply conscious of the high vocation of the doctor, which became the basis of all his activities. This consciousness became greater as he dipped into the world of patients and medicine. The professor G. Quagliariello, rector of the University of Naples spoke about Moscati: “Not the fact he preferred to study medicine, which, having grown up in the family of lawyers, he knew little about, no ambition to become popular or famous, which is peculiar to all physicians, and even less – the desire to gain a great position in society, but only the desire to relieve physical pain and the spiritual decline of his brothers affected by severe illnesses, influenced his choice to become a physician” [8]. Another Professor F. Jacobelli somehow asked Moscati why having such a strong faith, he does not go to the monastery. He answered that he could do more useful as a doctor than as a monk [4]. Working twelve hours a day, he performed numerous duties with knowledge and a sense of conscience, but gradually he focused on work at the Hospital for the incurable and university. Moreover, this is the years of tireless and quiet work, in which he enriched his mind with knowledge from books, his practical experience in the laboratory and by curing the sick, giving all his time to professional practice, leaving the necessary minimum to meet the material needs of a strict and extremely modest life [7]. Every early morning, Moscati used to go to Mass and communed, later he spent three or four hours at a hospital, and then at home, where he was waiting for a long line of patients. He always saw all the patients. Moreover, at the end of the day he visited those patients who, due to their physical condition, could not come to his home or to the hospital, but with the help of letters or relatives asked for his help. Giuseppe gave preference to the poorest; he examined poor patients without charge also leaving them generous financial help. In addition, if he understood that home care was inadequate, especially from a spiritual point of view, he insisted on hospitalization [2].

Giuseppe Moscati did not leave us long speeches about the value of the patient and the profession of a physician. A good example that he set daily to everyone was more eloquent. His kindness of the soul was continuously shown in his good deeds for the neighbors without any benefit, but only for the attainment and spread of goodness. The doctor treated the patients, regardless of whether they were rich or poor. He always perceived his patient as a person who needs and asks for help [9]. Moscati openly admitted his faith; daily communed and encouraged other patients to attend service. He understood that the causes of many diseases were not only physical, but also spiritual. People were in sin and habits that destroyed them internally. However, physical decay also came from there. That is why he recommended as a therapy for the rehabilitation of the body such spiritual means as to be free from sin, a good confession and to live supported by the Eucharist [2]. Being in constant contact with suffering and death, Moscati deeply in his heart drew attention to the transience and temporality of existence on earth, and because of these continuous reflections, he always felt an impulse to serve God better, to be faithful in pursuing the roads of good. Another characteristic feature of Giuseppe Moscati’s holiness was a humble spirit. His humility involves not giving himself the fruits of his own work and not expecting a reward
as something that belongs to him [6].

Some doctors are excellent specialists in their field, but spoiled in their personal lives: either selfish or superior to the sick. St. Giuseppe Moscati acted on the contrary: his medical science was closely connected with his pure and holy personality, full of human warmth and supernatural feeling, connected with God – the source of all grace and virtue [2].

Moscati, healing the sick, was not only a physician who, with the help of knowledge, cures the disease; he was also a man full of grace and virtues that cures the patient. Therefore, crowds of people with great confidence came to him. Moscati was for them, like a kind father who takes his children and cares for them [9].

The strongest inner dynamics of Moscati’s life was love for God and neighbour. He was full of this love, he lived with this love, and he proved this love every minute. An obvious sign of this supernatural love was the detachment from money, earnings, glory, and influence – all that surrounded him by excess. He was not interested in anything, besides being perfect in the service of God and neighbour [2].

He cared about the sick, but in a special way: he was in the daytime and at night near them. He bended over their wounded and suffering bodies, but at the same time, he was worried about their soul. Moscati tried to grow more in medical science every day, while devoting himself to the formation of other doctors’ sense of “high mission”, with the only desire to multiply the good for the sick. He helped those in need, as well as the other poor, giving them most of what he earned [9]. Giuseppe Moscati was a man rich in intellectual, spiritual and human gifts, surrounded by authority and fame, awarded with high academic degrees, performing work that could bring much material wealth. In spite of this, the saint showed an example of spiritual detachment from these goods. He was truly the one who had the angelic spirit “who came down to the earth to reveal miracles”, to give generously the limitless treasure of his goodness to his neighbour. Moscati was the perfect embodiment of the spirit of charity. The words of his friend, Professor M. Landolfi can confirm this: “He could become a millionaire, if he wanted, because he held Naples in his hand; however, in the realization of his profession, which for him was – and this is not rhetoric – the priesthood and ministry, he preferred mercy” [6]. Giuseppe Moscati earned so much that he could live a luxurious life. However, almost none of that money was used for personal or family needs. His friend described the doctor’s selflessness: “The money collected by the sister, for his tacit consent, mostly was spent on charity. Even for house calls, when they referred to the poor, he did not take money, and on the contrary, often left them a certain amount to purchase prescribed drugs. He did not take any fees from vergers; from others he could take some moderate fee but he also could return it if he considered it unreasonable” [10].

The Holy One was able to heal not only the body, but also the soul. Moscati never perceived the body of the patient separately, but always took the patient in the fullness of his human and Christian vocation. Taking into account the needs of the ill body, he took care of the patient’s integrity and, when he considered it necessary, offered remedies to restore not only the health of the body, but also the health of the spirit. Divine inspiration led the saint Giuseppe, especially in his medical profession. His contemporaries have repeatedly confirmed that he was gifted with an exceptional talent of spiritual advice and extraordinary diagnostic ability in identifying illnesses and the purpose of treatment [7]. One of the patients said: “He was rather a doctor for a soul than a body. If thanks to his great academic culture, intensive and long-lasting practice in hospitals, he was able to make accurate diagnosis and prescribe the necessary treatment, so only because of the boundless kindness of his soul, his sense of mercy and Christian love, he drew superhuman power to say a gentle and humble word, which could soothe and relieve pain”. If necessary, he was able to support the others, to set on the right path. Here’s the words of support Moscati addressed his colleague in a difficult life situation: “No matter how much you feel yourself alone, abandoned, neglected, little understood, and how much you feel that you are falling under the burden of great injustice, you will definitely feel the boundless secret power, which supports you, which makes you capable of good intentions and courage, the strength you will be amazed when returning to eupathy. This is the power of God!” [4].

Saint Giuseppe Moscati was a great workaholic, but his medical activity was marked by deep spirituality, as well as his ability to deepen into the suffering of a person, to take interest in the sick and to meet them. He can be an example of a Christian worker. His time, as a rule, was divided between prayer and labor. He used to combine God devotion with diligence and vice versa [2].

Dr. Moscati, as a manager, has shown himself as a father and teacher for everybody, full of humanity and good sense, able to awaken and exalt the best virtues of those who are nearby, and to neutralize bad habits in them, defeating evil with good. He never hid from his students and colleagues any of the treasures of science and experience that he has gained [3]. In this way, those who were next to him have always multiplied Moscati’s goodness. One of his students wrote: “His look was always warm, calm, friendly, clear, fascinating, which penetrated our hearts. He was for us as a “living oracle”, a constant scholar of the truth. He always accompanied us, students, in teaching and medical practice. As he could, he gave us wisdom, the treasures of science, his medical knowledge, and captured the humanity and light of his soul” [6].

Moscati was like the Guardian Angel of Naples, because when the news of his death spread to the city, everyone was crying for him, because he was honored and loved too much. The articles of that time in the Naples newspaper about his death can impress us today: “Around Giuseppe Moscati’s remains gathered all the inhabitants from different layers, from the poorest to the most significant. It is uncommon for Naples to see such a spectacle that causes such big grief and shows
how much love, honor and enthusiasm was gained by him. He was able to make his profession the noblest apostolate, through his knowledge, his extraordinary goodness to the suffering creatures he showed how wonderfully religion and science could combine in the noble soul” [11].

Charisma of Giuseppe Moscati is that he has outlined a certain way of Christian life not only for doctors, but also for those who are distressed and afflicted by this world, to which, to a certain extent, we all are. In life, he became a teacher of Christian life and continued to exist after his death.

Finally, we would like to cite Giuseppe Moscati’s words, he welcomed young doctors in obtaining diplomas with them, but they remain relevant for current graduates of medical universities: “Remember that, following medicine, you took responsibility for a high mission. Be persistent, with God in your heart, with the guidance of your parents in memory, with love and mercy for the poor, with faith and fervor, deaf to praise and criticism, resistant to envy, prepared only for good” [4].

The light of spiritual wisdom with which Giuseppe Moscati carried out his high mission of the physician continues to shine to us nowadays.

**References**


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