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Sickly Saints: Religion as a Source of Hope through the Stages of Grief

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Repository citation: Matheny, Erin, "Sickly Saints: Religion as a Source of Hope through the Stages of Grief" (2024). *23rd Annual A. Paul and Carol C. Schaap Celebration of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity (2024)*. Paper 59.

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Sickly Saints: Religion as a Source of Hope through the Stages of Grief

Erin Matheny
Mentor: Dr. Tatevik Gyulamiryan

QUESTION

What makes people turn to religion in the face of illness, mortality, and grief?

CONTEXT

How can healthcare providers understand the role and importance of psychospiritual integrity with the aim of promoting holistic wellbeing for their patients?

PURPOSE

Examine the process through which early modern Spanish mystics made peace with their own illnesses, grief, and mortality, while maintaining their spiritual beliefs and practices.

THEMES OF THE MYSTICS

Sister Teresa of Cartagena: illness, disability, isolation, anger, reconciliation with God, internal peace

Saint Teresa of Avila: longing for oneness and reunion with God, depression, seeking internal peace, introspection

Saint John of the Cross: reunion with God, love of God, life after death, eternal life

Sister Teresa of Cartagena

Isolation:

- “when I see myself in the company of others, I am completely forsaken, as I do not enjoy the consortium” (39)
- “these two damages, which are solitude and isolation” (38)

Anger:

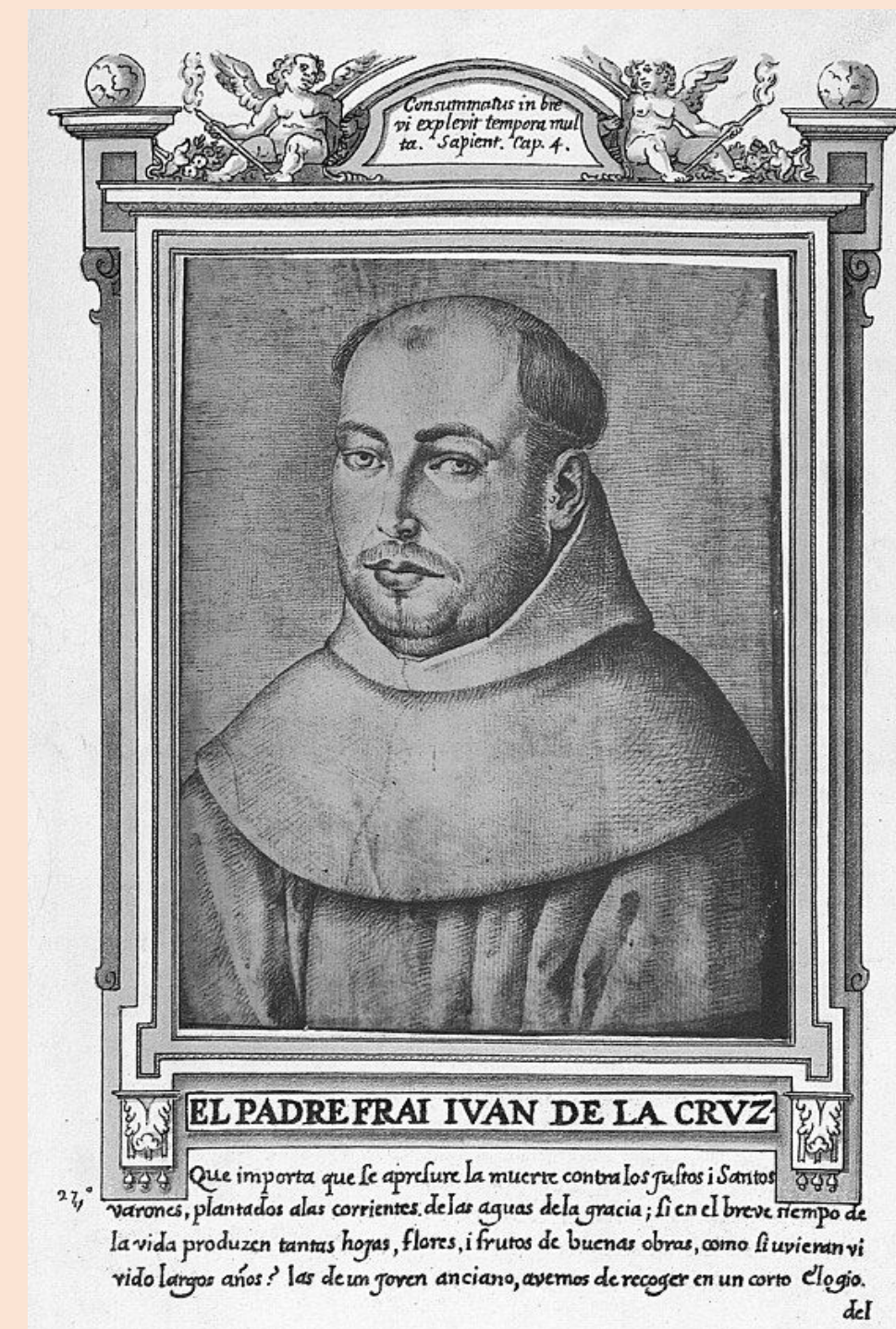
- “our health is a loss, our friends forget us, our relatives get angry, and even our own mother gets angry with her sick daughter” (63)

Acceptance:

- “The grace of God...I came to know it when it was my health that was connected to those words that I better came to understand what my salvation meant” (40)
- “this such joy and [or] I invite the sick and I wish to be invited, because we are equal in the passions let us be in the resurrections” (59)



<https://amedievalwoman.companion.com/teresa-de-cartagena/>



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fray_Juan_de_la_Cruz_O.F.M._%281596%29.jpg

Saint John of the Cross

Denial:

- “Oh delicate touch/ that tastes of **eternal life**” (Living Flame of Love)
- “in **killing**, you **changed death to life**” (Living Flame of Love)
- “in your fragrant **breathing**” (Living Flame of Love)

Depression:

- “Without light or guide” (Dark Night of the Soul)
- “I remained, lost in oblivion;/ My face I reclined on the Beloved./ All ceased and I abandoned myself” (Dark Night of the Soul)

Acceptance:

- “How meek and loving / you remember in my bosom / where secretly alone you dwell, / and in your savory aspiring / of good and glory full, / how delicately you enamor me!” (Living Flame of Love)

Saint Teresa of Avila

Bargaining:

- “How can we desire such a miserable life, that it is not possible to stop loving and asking you to take us out of it, if not in the hope of losing it for you?” (35)
- “Oh Jesus, what a mess the demons make here, and the afflictions of the poor soul, which does not know whether to go forward or to return to the first piece!” (30)

Depression:

- “There can be no remedy to remove this sorrow until the Lord himself hears her... where the true Consoler consoles and strengthens her so that she may want to live as long as he wills” (148-149)

Acceptance:

- “it will not be much that the Lord has wanted to give me this bad headache to understand it better, because with all this jumble of it does not hinder me in prayer or in what I am saying, but in the soul it is very whole in its stillness and love and desires and clear knowledge” (51)
- “this little butterfly has already died, with great joy that she has found rest, and that Christ lives in her” (161)



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/5d/Teresa_de_Avila_C3%BA_s_%28cropped%29.jpg

CONCLUSIONS

The Spanish mystics Saint John of the Cross, Saint Teresa of Avila, and Sister Teresa of Cartagena demonstrate how religion can be a source of hope as one navigates the stages of grief on the journey to holistic healing.

“Hope is essential for people who are coping with serious and prolonged psychological stress; however, hope is not a perpetually self-renewing resource because it has ups and downs, and therefore, it has to be empowered by the system in which the patients live.” (Marini 165)

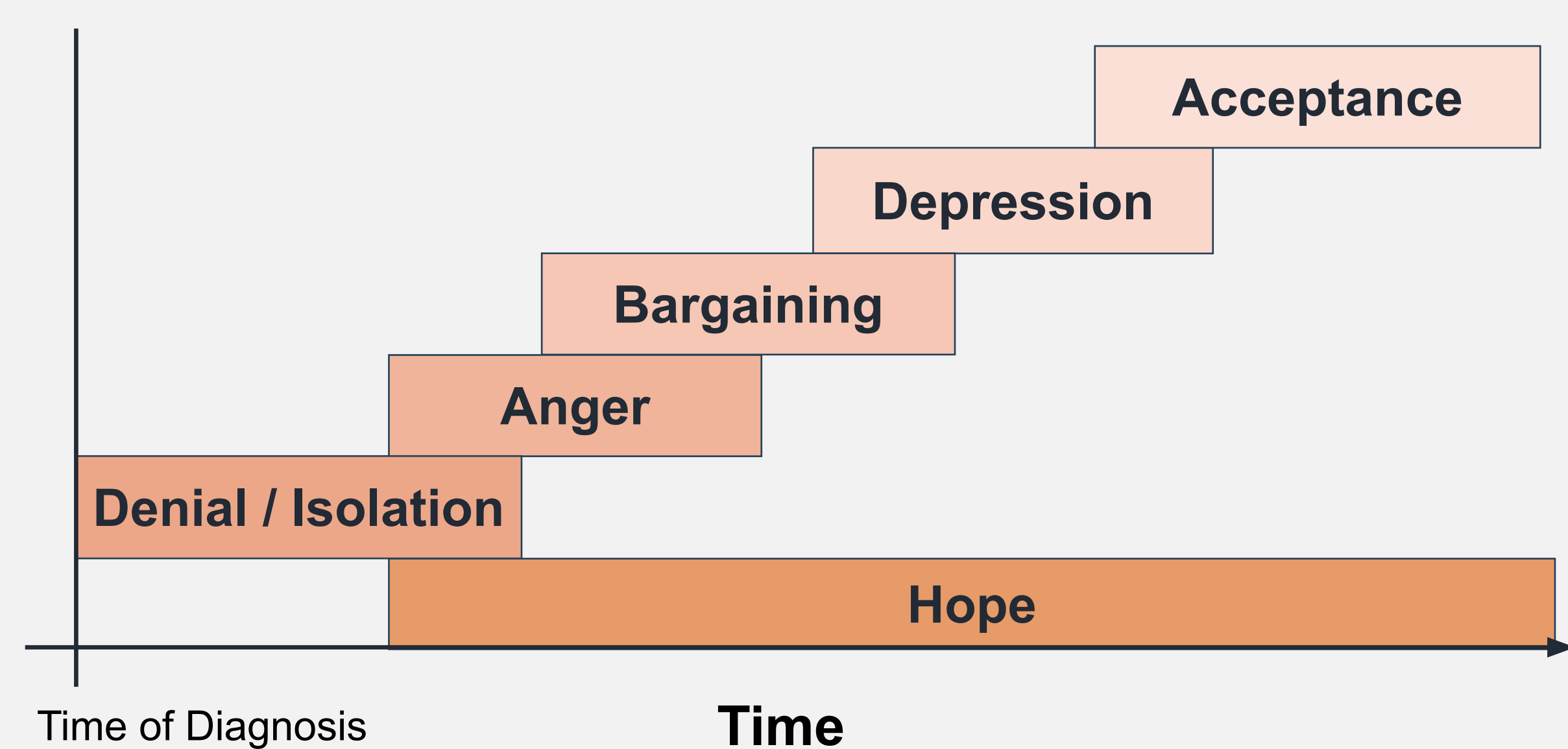
APPLICATION

Health care providers should recognize that religion can be a source from which patients derive hope. Promotion of spiritual integrity may assist a patient in the process of reaching state of psychosocial integrity. Using religion as a source of hope may include periods of negative emotions and wrestling. However, these are part of the process on the journey of reaching a stage of acceptance.

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Kübler-Ross Stages of Grief



Adapted from *On Death and Dying* (Kübler-Ross, 1969), p. 251