

Healing in the Kingdom of God

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All religions have a healing tradition, and as religion and medicine are linked, so are the roles of priest¹ and physician. These strong associations warrant exploration in Egyptian, Greek and Jewish history because the three traditions converge in Alexandria at the time of Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity takes healing for granted, in the sense that the Christian Scriptures leave no doubt that Jesus (as God) is a healer, that the apostles healed by his direct authority, and that they passed on a tradition of healing in the name of Christ. In our modern era, many Christian churches have liturgies that integrate healing (special prayers with the laying on of hands and anointing) with the Eucharist, but there is no direct reference to this specific practice in the Christian Scriptures or in the known early post-apostolic writings. The objective of this essay is to review the history of the Healing Eucharist.

Early Egyptian and Greek Healing Traditions

Sir William Osler writes that the priest Imhotep, who lived in Egypt nearly 5000 years ago, is “the first figure of a physician to stand out clearly from the mists of antiquity.”² The name “Imhotep” means, “the one who comes in peace.” In addition to being a physician-priest who healed body, mind and soul, he was also a poet, chancellor to the king, and an architect of the pyramids. More than 2000 years after his death, he was deified, and was worshipped as a god-physician to humanity and to the other gods themselves. Sick people came to the temples of Imhotep to receive comfort and cure from his physician-priest successors. These temples were in essence the first hospitals and medical schools; the priests of Imhotep wrote the first medical and surgical texts.

¹ Priest in the sacrificial sense, as well as rabbi, minister (including the laity), pastor, presbyter, bishop, witch doctor, and related terms.

² William Osler, *The Evolution of Modern Medicine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921), Page 10

In Greek mythology, Asklepios was the son of Apollo and Coronis. He learned the healing arts of medicine and surgery from the wounded centaur Chiron,³ and taught these skills to humanity. The ancient legends write that he consulted both his father and the oracles to prescribe treatment. Slain by Zeus, he became identified as a god of healing, analogous to Imhotep. His sons Machaon and Podalirius were military physicians, and his son Telesphoros was a deity associated with recovery from illness. To this day, his daughter Hygieia is associated with cleanliness and sanitation. Panacea is associated with healing and cure, and Iaso with recovery from illness. As was the case in Egypt, the temples to Asklepios were early hospitals. There, patients used snakes in elaborate healing rituals that involved dream interpretation by physician-priests called *therapute*. Eastern Christianity adopted this practice of incubation (without the use of snakes), which was still in use one hundred years ago.⁴⁵ Various shamanistic religions also use dream incubation, called the “dream quest” or “vision quest” in the practice of North American Indians. The dream quest is also associated with New Age practices.

The Jewish Healing Traditions

The oral tradition (including the Talmud) has many references to healing, including non-Scriptural stories about Adam, Noah, Abraham, Joseph and Solomon; there are also references to the anointing of the sick with oil, along with a whispered prayer based on Ex 15:26 (*vide infra*).⁶ A Qumran manuscript reports that Abram healed Pharaoh by prayer and the laying-on of hands.⁷ The written, canonical Hebrew Scriptures provide much guidance on matters of health and hygiene, but say little about a priestly healing tradition. They teach that health is God’s blessing, that disease is generally a punishment for sin,⁸ and that God is the physician for humanity.

³ Stanley W. Jackson, “The Wounded Healer,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 75 (201): 1-36. The story of Asklepios and Chiron is the basis of the Jungian concept, “the wounded healer.”

⁴ Osler (“Evolution”), p. 58.

⁵ Percy Dearmer, *Body and Soul* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1909), p. 312-314. Presumably, there are still Christian practitioners of incubation, but I have not found evidence that this practice is prevalent. See <http://www.kosovo.net/miracle.html>

⁶ R. J. S. Barrett-Lennard, *Christian Healing after the New Testament* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1994), pp. 240-241. He cites Harris, who describes passages in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud.

⁷ Barrett-Lennard (“Christian Healing”), p. 123. He cites an article by Flusser.

⁸ See Deut 28 for a series of examples that are not unique in the Torah. In the Book of Job, however, illness comes from Satan as a test, albeit with God’s permission, or a means for spiritual advancement.

There are some noteworthy healing stories. The Hebrew Scriptures report that, in response to Abraham's intercessory prayer, God healed Abimelech and his family so that they could have children (Gen 20:17-18). Shortly after Abraham circumcised himself at the age of 99 years, God appeared to him. The Greek Orthodox tradition asserts that the three visitors were the persons of the Trinity, but Jewish folklore indicates that the three men were Raphael, Michael and Gabriel, who had come to heal the patriarch of his wound.⁹ The Book of Tobit¹⁰ describes Raphael (רפאל, "God heals") as a messenger (angel) of God, and the noncanonical Book of Enoch prominently mentions him by name. The medieval mystics compared the attributes of Raphael to those of the Roman Mercury and Greek Hermes. To this day, Raphael has a strong tradition in Judeo-Christian folklore as the archangel associated with medicine and healing. The Roman church considers him to be a saint whose feast day is October 24, and associates him with the angel at the Bethzatha healing pool (John 5:4).

Neither the Hebrew nor the Christian Scriptures advocate use of pagan healing practices. In the context of the story of the complaints about the bitter water in the wilderness (Ex 15:23-26), YHVH states, "I YHVH am your healer (רפא, *rapha*)." Moses, if "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22), would have known about the Egyptian healing tradition, but it does not appear that he used it. The story of King Asa (2 Chr 16:12-13) states that he died because "in his disease he sought not to YHVH, but to the physicians (רפא, *rapha*)." The story of the fiery serpents sent by YHVH to punish the grumbling people in the wilderness (Num 21:4-9) indicates that on YHVH's direction Moses made a copper (or brass) serpent, mounted on a pole, that could heal on sight.¹¹ The Psalms carry on the theme of God as healer, as does Isaiah. The written Scripture (Lev 13) notes that a person with skin disease should be brought to the priest to determine whether the patient

⁹ Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (New York: Schocken Books, 1949), p. 52.

¹⁰ The Book of Tobit appears in the Septuagint (LXX) and the Christian Apocrypha, although it is not part of the official Hebrew canon.

¹¹ The staff of Asklepios bears a single snake. The staff of Hermes, more associated with commerce than with medicine, has two snakes. The brass serpent on a staff has been a healing symbol in Jewish folklore.

has “leprosy” (צָרַעַת, *tsara'ath*), and also to certify that the disease has resolved. There is no provision for bringing about healing. The cure of leprosy belongs to the prophet Elisha, who as an agent of God healed Naaman (2 Kings 5:10-14), and to Jesus, who was God.¹² Thus, healing is God’s work, not the work of human hands.

Christian Scripture

Athanasius viewed Jesus’s healing miracles as evidence of divinity. The Christian Scriptures are replete with stories about healing miracles and clearly indicate that Jesus empowered his disciples and others (John 14:12-13; Mark 9:38-40) to continue that practice. It would be difficult to prove that these healings were anything other than healing of body, mind and soul. Dearmer enumerates 41 healing episodes in the Gospels, noting, “it would be vain to attempt an estimate of the number of people who were healed by our Lord.”¹³ These acts are not associated with any kind of liturgy. Some involved application of a substance (such as saliva or clay) followed by washing in a river (Dearmer Miracle #40, John 9), others involved the saying of a word (Dearmer Miracle #15, Mark 7) or a simple touch. Some of the healings occur from a distance (Dearmer Miracle #14, Mark 7).

There are many additional accounts of healings by the Apostles and other individuals acting in the name of God or Jesus; Dearmer counts 24, mostly recorded in Acts.

Furthermore, there are numerous references to the gift (χάρισμα; *carisma*) of healing (ἰαμα, *iama*).¹⁴ The healing tradition clearly entered the practice of the early church, for James writes, “Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord... (James 5:14).”¹⁵ None of these healing episodes is associated with the Eucharist, although Paul notes that reception

¹² The term “leprosy” does not necessarily describe the skin disease caused by *Mycobacterium leprae* called leprosy in modern times. Additionally, it can be a metaphor for a person’s sins.

¹³ Percy Dearmer, *Body and Soul* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1909), p. 143. Dearmer has extensive tables describing the healing miracles.

¹⁴ Dearmer notes 1 Cor 12:9, 1 Cor 12:28, 1 Cor 12:29, and James 5:14

¹⁵ It would not be difficult to argue that this passage refers to sickness of the soul, rather than the body.

of the Eucharist in an unworthy manner might bring about weakness (illness, perhaps) and possibly death (1 Cor 11:27-30).¹⁶

In *Dining in the Kingdom of God*, an analysis of the Gospel of Luke, LaVerdiere writes that the journey pericopes are “ascent” stories¹⁷ about healing events, shared meals, and teaching. Each story illustrates some aspect of Eucharistic theology. For example, the story of the meal at the House of Levi the tax collector (Luke 5:1-6:11) is a call to repentance, conversion, and discipleship.¹⁸ There are two healings before the meal, each associated with the idea of the forgiveness of sin. The first is healing of a “leper”, and the second is the healing of the paralyzed man lowered through the ceiling of Levi’s home. Jesus explicitly forgives the sins of the latter, an act viewed as blasphemy by the Pharisees who knew that only God forgives sins. They also criticize the disciples for socializing with “publicans and sinners” (Luke 5:30), and Jesus responds (Luke 5:31-32), “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” LaVerdiere notes, “The Last Supper brings Luke’s story of meals to a great climax, recapitulating the basic themes of the seven previous meals, holding them in the light of the passion-resurrection and presenting them in a new Christian synthesis.” Furthermore, LaVerdiere writes that the statements of Jesus at the Last Supper about the Kingdom of God imply that the assembly of Christians gathered for the Eucharist ascends into the Kingdom to dine with a risen Lord.

If one views this ascent as eschatological, then our common Eucharistic meals on the way to that time, meals that always use the phrase, “give us this day our daily bread” (Matt 6:11), are perhaps an “antipast of heaven”.¹⁹ In contrast, Schmemmann writes that every service of Holy Communion is a mystical ascent into the Kingdom of God, “the Church’s entrance into heaven,”²⁰ and in using the term “Church”, he means the assembly or gathering of the people. He cites Hebrews 11:1 in noting that faith is the evidence of things

¹⁶ No doubt, *spiritual* weakness or death. Interpretations abound, however.

¹⁷ That is, the ascent from Bethlehem to Galilee, to Jerusalem, to the cross, to Emmaus, and to the Father.

¹⁸ Eugene LaVerdiere, *Dining in the Kingdom of God* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994), pp. 36-47.

¹⁹ Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (Akron: OSL Publications, 2002), p. 37.

²⁰ Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003), p.27.

unseen.²¹ Thus, while a rationalist might observe that the Christian Scriptures do not overtly associate physical healing with the Eucharist, a mystic would have no difficulty making the association between a here-and-now ascent into the Kingdom of Heaven and Christ's working of healing miracles prior to his Supper with the assembly.

Healing and the Eucharist: Early Traditions

It is not clear why the apostolic and earliest post-apostolic traditions do not appear to combine healing rituals (including prayers, anointing with oil and the laying on of hands) with the Eucharist. One might speculate that there was such a liturgy, but it was so common that none of the writers of the era felt that it needed to be mentioned. Or, the liturgy was considered so sacred that it could not be written about. It is also possible that, based on Gospel precedents, there was no perceived need to perform rituals of healing as part of the Eucharistic liturgy; in general, the earliest liturgies are simple and straightforward in form. Perhaps, healing continued as a separate action or service conducted by laity or clergy. Regardless, the early church placed great importance on ministry to the sick. Barret-Lennard identifies three aspects.²² First, drawing on Matt 25:34-46, all Christians are called to visit the sick. Second, Paul recognized individuals with a healing gift as having a special ministry (1 Cor 12:28). Third, the elders also had a responsibility to minister to the sick (James 5:14).

In the post-apostolic era, Justin Martyr (100-163 AD) notes the gift of healing,²³ and also that the deacons take "bread...and wine mixed with water over which the thanksgiving was pronounced...to those who are absent."²⁴ The Greek Hippolytus (170-236) was a disciple of Irenaeus. His *Apostolic Tradition* may well reflect the early Roman tradition; it probably dates from 215 AD, and it probably reflects earlier practices.²⁵ The document contains

²¹ Ibid., p. 39.

²² Ric Barrett-Lennard, "The Canons of Hippolytus and Christian Concern with Illness, health, and Healing," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 13 (2005): 137-164. p. 143-

²³ Dearmer ("Body and Soul"), p. 243. He cites the "Dialogue with Trypho".

²⁴ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* (http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-01/anf01-46.htm#P3593_620967), Chapter 64.

²⁵ Barrett-Lennard ("Christian Healing"), pp. 235-237. MH notes, "Scholars are now raising questions about this date, authorship, and reconstruction."

many noteworthy references to the practice of Christian healing. Concerning oil, he writes (Passage 5):

If anyone offers oil, (the bishop) shall render thanks in the same way as for the offering of bread and wine, not saying it word for word, but to similar effect, saying, "O God, sanctifier of this oil, as you give health to those who are anointed and receive that with which you anointed kings, priests, and prophets, so may it give strength to all who taste it, and health to all who are anointed with it."²⁶

The *Apostolic Tradition* also affirms the idea of the gift of healing, and indicates that the Christian healing ministry was not restricted to the clergy. In Passage 14, he states, "If anyone says, 'I have received a gift of healing by a revelation,' hands shall not be laid on him for the facts themselves will show whether he has spoken the truth."²⁷ Barrett-Lennard goes on to argue that the gift of healing was not necessarily restricted to the laity or the clergy. He notes that Canon 8 of the Canons of Hippolytus states, "If someone asks for his ordination, saying, 'I have received the gift of healing,' he is to be ordained only when the thing is manifest and if the healing done by him comes from God."²⁸ Hippolytus also notes that widows and the catechumens were expected to visit the sick and implies that the deacons took consecrated bread to the sick in the absence of the presbyter. He also writes:

"Let each deacon, with the subdeacons, attend on the bishop. Let it also be told to him who are sick, so that, if it is pleasing to the bishop, he may visit them. For a sick person is greatly comforted when the high priest remembers him."²⁹

The fourth century *Sacramentary of Serapion* contains a blessing for the oil, prayers for healing, and a special prayer for healing contained in the anaphora. Serapion of Thmuis was an Egyptian bishop, "a friend and confidant of St. Anthony and Athanasius."³⁰ Scholars disagree on whether the prayers are original or are taken from earlier sources, but the theme of healing is so pervasive that one must assume that these prayers were in use in the first liturgy known in history for special Healing Eucharist services. Furthermore, the

²⁶ Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*. Translation by Botte, cited by Barrett-Lennard ("Christian Healing"), p. 240.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

²⁸ *Canons of Hippolytus*. Translation by Bradshaw, cited by Barrett-Lennard ("Christian Healing"), p. 252.

²⁹ *Apostolic Tradition*, Translation by Botte, cited by Barrett-Lennard ("Canons"), p. 151. The phrase "him who are sick" is a quote.

³⁰ Barrett-Lennard ("Christian Healing"), pp. 277.

prayers might easily be adapted for modern use. The oil blessing (Prayer #17), which a rubric states may also be used to bless water or bread, reads:

“We invoke you...father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and pray you to send healing power...upon this oil, that it may become to those who are being anointed (with it)...for a throwing off of every sickness and every infirmity...for good grace and remission of sins, for a medicine of life and salvation, for health and soundness of soul, body, spirit...”³¹

Other sections of the *Sacramentary* indicate that the sick were brought to the church to receive the blessed water and oil. The clergy were to visit a patient who was too sick to come. Barrett-Lennard argues that the assembly of the church was the primary venue for reception of the blessed water and oil, although he does not exclude the possibility of private reception. He suggests that Prayer #22 was to be used at the offertory.

“We beseech you the overlooker and Lord and fashioner of the body and maker of the soul, you who fitted together man, you who are the steward and governor of the whole race of men, you who are reconciled and made gentle because of your own love of men: be propitious Master: assist and heal all that are sick. Rebuke the sicknesses: raise up those that are lying down: give glory to your holy name and to that of your only-begotten Jesus Christ, through whom...”³²

Another offertory prayer, Prayer #30, may have been used with Prayer #22. It is the prayer for “Laying-on of hands of sick persons”. For modern use in worship, it would only need minor adaptations.

“O Lord God of compassions, stretch out your hand and grant that all the sick may be healed. Grant them to be counted worthy of health. Free them from the sickness which lies upon them. Let them be healed in the name of your only-begotten. May his holy name be to them a medicine for health and soundness, because through him to you (is) the glory and the strength in Holy Spirit both now and to all the ages of the ages. Amen.”³³

A petition in the “Prayer on Behalf of the People” prior to the anaphora reads, “We pray for the sick, grant (them) health and raise (them) up from their sickness, and make them to

³¹ Ibid., p. 285. Barrett-Lennard quotes the entire prayer, which also includes petitions for exorcism, from the Wordsworth translation.

³² Ibid., p. 304.

³³ Ibid., p. 309.

have perfect health of body and soul...”.³⁴ Following the invocation of the Logos, the anaphora itself uses the words, “...and make all who communicate to receive a medicine of life for the healing of every sickness and for the strengthening of all advancement and virtue, not for condemnation,” and at the end of the anaphora, “...and grant health and soundness and cheerfulness and all advancement of soul and body to this whole people.”³⁵ Thus, there is little doubt that the *Sacramentary of Serapion* contains prayers intended for use in a Healing Eucharist liturgy.³⁶

Barret-Lennard notes that the extant works of Irenaeus (130–202 AD) contain contemporary accounts of healing, but that he “does not refer to anointing with oil for healing anywhere in his work.”³⁷ Tertullian (c155-230 AD) writes that the healing miracles of Jesus have a “spiritual meaning,” but also notes that Jesus “literally” fulfilled the prophecies of healing.³⁸ Athanasius (298-373 AD), Bishop of Alexandria, was a colleague of Serapion in Egypt, yet he does not write about the Healing Eucharist.³⁹ He does acknowledge the gift of healing in others. In the *Vita Antonii*, a biography of St. Antony, he notes, “It was as if he [Antony] were a physician given to Egypt by God,” and describes the saint’s healing activities in some detail.⁴⁰ Athanasius writes that God frequently, but not always, answered Antony’s prayers for healing, but that Antony nonetheless always gave thanks. He always indicated that thanks for healing should be given to God, not to the healer. Tatian (died c185 AD) writes, “Even if you are healed by drugs...yet it behooves you to give testimony for the cure to God.”⁴¹

After the fourth century, the Roman church began to place more emphasis on healing of the soul, rather than the body, increasingly viewing illness as a punishment for sin. In writing

³⁴ Ibid., p. 316.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 318.

³⁶ It would be interesting to study whether the wording of the prayers is original or might be traced to prayers of Jewish, Greek or ancient Egyptian origin.

³⁷ Barrett-Lennard (“Christian Healing”), pp. 122.

³⁸ David W. Bercot, editor, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1998), p. 328.

³⁹ Barrett-Lennard (“Christian Healing”), pp. 167-184.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 184-194.

⁴¹ Bercot (“Dictionary”), p. 444.

about James 5:14, Hilary of Arles (403-449 AD) notes that the “sickness is the sickness of sin,” although the Bede (c672-735) interprets the passage as referring to sickness “either in body or in faith.”⁴² He writes that the custom of healing is “retained in the church” and that

priests will anoint a person who is ill and pray for his healing. And this is not the prerogative of the priests only, for in cases of necessity any Christian may do this, provided that he uses only oil which has been consecrated by the bishop. And of course anyone who anoints a sick person in this way must invoke the name of God over him while doing so.⁴³

Caesarius of Arles (c468-542) writes of reception of the body and blood of Christ with unction and prayer, although probably not in the context of a healing Eucharist.

Whenever some illness comes upon a man, he should hurry back to the church. Let him receive the body and blood of Christ, be anointed by the presbyters with consecrated oil and ask them and the deacons to pray over him in Christ’s name. If he does this, he will receive not only bodily health but also the forgiveness of his sins.⁴⁴

The custom of taking consecrated bread and wine to the sick diminished by the 8th century. By the Middle Ages, the anointing of the sick (unction) became part of the ritual of forgiveness of sins (absolution) in preparation for death.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, the medieval church did establish hospitals maintained by orders of monks, and it appears that some sort of healing tradition did continue in the monasteries. Furthermore, healing Eucharists did occur in some places, particularly between the 8th and 12th centuries.⁴⁶ Hatchett writes that the “Eastern and Gallican rites contain forms for visitation and anointing of the sick, dating to the early middle ages,”⁴⁷ and that the Mozarabic form and Celtic rite likewise made provision for healing prayers. Many legends of saints report healing miracles. Saint Malachy of Ireland, known for his prophecies about the Roman papacy, could cure by laying on of hands.

⁴² Gerald Bray (editor), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 60.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ This practice became one of the seven sacraments of the Roman church. Although anointing technically remained available to the sick, it did not really return to common use until after Vatican II.

⁴⁶ Jennifer Glen, “Pastoral Care of the Sick” in Peter E. Fink (editor), *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990), p. 1172.

⁴⁷ Marion J. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 459

The Book of Common Prayer

The Sarum *Manuale* contained a forbidding “Order for the Visitation of the Sick” intended for use at impending death.⁴⁸ Following recitation of the seven penitential psalms, there are nine collects for recovery, although it is quite clear that one is to accept illness with patience and that the collects are actually a preparation for death. Cranmer adapted the texts for use in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer and included an optional rite for anointing with oil. The original words used with the anointing are:

As with this visible oil thy body outwardly is anointed; so our heavenly Father, Almighty God, grant of his infinite goodness, that thy soul inwardly may be anointed with the Holy Ghost, who is the spirit of all strength, comfort, relief, and gladness. And vouchsafe for his great mercy (if it be his blessed will) to restore unto thee thy bodily health, and strength, to serve him, and send thee release of all thy pains, troubles, and diseases, both in body and mind. And, howsoever his goodness (by his divine and unsearchable providence) shall dispose of thee: we, his unworthy ministers and servants, humbly beseech the eternal majesty, to do with thee according to the multitude of his innumerable mercies, and to pardon thee all thy sins and offenses, committed by all thy bodily senses, passions, and carnal affections: who also vouchsafe mercifully to grant unto thee ghostly strength by his Holy Spirit, to withstand and overcome all temptations and assaults of thine adversary, that in no wise he prevail against thee, but that thou mayest have perfect victory and triumph against the devil, sin, and death, through Christ our Lord: Who by his death hath overcome the prince of death, and with the Father and the Holy Ghost evermore liveth and reigneth God, world without end. Amen.⁴⁹

Subsequent prayer books omitted the unction, apparently due to Martin Bucer’s opinion that it was more associated with Roman practice of extreme unction than with the Christian practice of healing.⁵⁰ The Nonjurors kept the anointing tradition alive in England and Scotland, viewing it as a means for restoring health to the sick, rather than as extreme unction. The 1718 Nonjurors’ Liturgy states, “The Anointing with Oil in the *Office for the Sick* is not only supported by primitive practice, but commanded by the Apostle St. James. It

⁴⁸ A. Jefferies Collins (editor), *Manuale ad usum percelebris ecclesie Sarisburiensis* (London Henry Bradshaw Society, 1960), pp. 97-107.

⁴⁹ *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons LTD, 1968), pp. 264-265. Modernized spelling. These words were extensively adapted for use in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

⁵⁰ Charles W. Gusmer, *The Ministry of Healing in the Church of England* (Great Wakering, England: Mayhew McCrimmon LTD, 1974), pp. 71-72

is not here administered by way of *Extreme Unction*, but in order to recovery.”⁵¹ Beginning with the 1908 Lambeth Conference, the Church of England has revived the practice (only approved in the 1930s), influenced by persistence of the Scottish tradition, as well as writings of Dearmer and others. The anointing of the sick returned to the American book only in 1928,⁵² although in practice the service was not frequently used.

In England, healing by the laying on of hands became a ritual administered by the reigning monarch. The ceremony of “Touching for the King’s Evil”⁵³ began in the reign of Edward the Confessor, and continued to the time of Queen Anne. Dearmer reports that “Charles II laid hands on nearly a hundred thousand persons.”⁵⁴ William and Mary did not use the service; instead, William remarked to one of his subjects, “God give you better health and more sense.”⁵⁵ In the ritual, the monarch used the words, “*Super aegros manus imponet, et bene habebunt*” (Let them place their hands on the sick and they shall be well), taken from a healing ceremony in the Roman Ritual, as a healing formula.⁵⁶ The ceremony did not become an official part of the Book of Common Prayer, although it was bound with some editions.

William Augustus Muhlenberg (1796-1877), spent his career in urban ministry. While pastor of the Church of the Holy Communion in New York, he developed social programs for the poor, including a parish nurse ministry. He and Anne Ayers, a parish nurse, founded the Sisterhood of the Holy Communion, an Episcopalian order of nurses. The parish’s drug dispensary expanded into an infirmary, and in 1858 they established St. Luke’s Hospital. He called this his “Church Hospital.” Because the patient wards opened onto the central hospital chapel, bedridden patients could participate in the services. He lived in the hospital, taking meals with the sisters.⁵⁷ Given Muhlenberg’s fondness for liturgical

⁵¹ Quoted by Gusmer (“Ministry”), p. 75.

⁵² The English Proposed Prayer book of 1928 provided for the laying on of hands.

⁵³ The “King’s Evil” was a term for the disease called scrofula, tuberculosis of the lymph nodes of the neck.

⁵⁴ Dearmer (“Body and Soul”), pp. 294-299.

⁵⁵ Gusmer (“Ministry”), p. 89

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁵⁷ Anne Ayers, *The Life and Work of William Augustus Muhlenberg* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1880), Chapter 19.

experimentation,⁵⁸ it is likely that he composed special prayers, and perhaps services, for his hospital chapel.⁵⁹

Wee Bookies for a Hospital Chapel

The Vatican II reforms made provision for prayers for the sick, the laying on of hands, and the anointing of the sick “within Mass” and also “outside Mass.” Likewise, healing services are now prevalent in Episcopalian and Protestant churches. Some churches, in the context of the Rite II Eucharist, invite persons to come to the altar rail for prayer, laying on of hands and anointing during the offertory, while the deacon is preparing the Table. This practice, although expedient, might discourage the laity from participation in the laying on of hands (although it need not do so), keeps the deacon from participating, and might convey the idea that the healing ritual is an appendage to, rather than an integral part of, the liturgy. However, there is no shortage of ancient and modern liturgical resources for special healing prayers, the laying on of hands, and anointing with oil, with and without the Eucharist. Some of these are intended to be used in a church, and others are more appropriate for private use in a home or hospital room. The *Canadian Book of Alternative Services* summarizes a modern theology of healing:

The church’s ministry to the sick is based on Jesus’ constant concern and care for the sick. It is reinforced by the Epistle of James’ admonition to the sick to call for the elders of the Church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. James expects this rite to have three effects: the prayer of faith will save the sick, the Lord will raise them up, and their sins will be forgiven.

We may draw two conclusions from our knowledge of early Christian ministry to the sick: Christians were not to rely on the multitude of faith-healers and wonder-workers who abounded in their society but were to send for senior members of their own community. Second, the ministry those leaders offered was an extension of the Church’s basic act of worship, i.e., the gathering around the word and the bread and wine each Sunday.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Paul V. Marshall, “William Augustus Muhlenberg’s Quiet Defection from Liturgical Uniformity,” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 64 (1995): 148-172.

⁵⁹ This statement is speculative.

⁶⁰ “Ministry to the Sick”, in *The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985), p. 551.

Clearly, the Christian Scriptures and Christian tradition do not mandate the celebration of the Eucharist as part of a Christian healing service. However, the previously-noted juxtaposition of journeys, healing miracles, teaching, and meals in the Gospels suggests that the Eucharist and Christian healing services are not incompatible, even though the concept of Christ's presence in the Eucharistic meal is difficult to explain in rational terms. Koenig notes, "Paul's writings on the Lord's Supper, for example, do not presuppose visionary experiences."⁶¹ Yet, to many Christians, Jesus is mystically present at all times and in all places, particularly in the Eucharist as the assembly ascends into the Kingdom of Heaven in "union with Jesus in the gift of his own life," and union with each other.⁶²

Hospitalized patients, their families, and hospital staff find it difficult to attend services in their own churches. Thus, many hospitals, whether supported by sacred or secular authorities, have chapels for prayer and for the conducting of worship services. Since hospitals have been associated with healing of body, mind and soul from antiquity, having Healing Eucharist services in hospital chapels makes good pastoral sense if one considers a hospital's staff, patients, and visitors as constituting a community in need of a special ministry. The Eucharist is a "community activity,"⁶³ not an individual one.

Deciding to have such services requires considerable sensitivity. One must take care not to interfere with pastoral visits from a patient's own clergy and church members, and should prospectively address the potential for conflict with the hospital's pastoral care team. Also, there is the possibility of inadvertent, inappropriate evangelism at a particularly vulnerable time in peoples' lives, out-of-place emotionalism,⁶⁴ and attracting "New Age" individuals who believe that they have "special powers" not given by God. Participants, including the celebrant, would be most comfortable in a seated position throughout the service. The service should be printed in its entirety in large type, and it should be in modern English, although most Protestants might be more comfortable with the traditional words of the

⁶¹ John Koenig, *The Feast of the World's Redemption* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), p. 221.

⁶² Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 298.

⁶³ Léon-Dufour ("Sharing"), p. 281.

⁶⁴ Such as fainting, hyperventilation, and being "slain in the Spirit." This, of course, would be a matter of opinion.

Lord's Prayer. A deacon would ideally be part of the service, reflecting the ancient role of this order.

Planning the liturgy itself requires much forethought. As described by Hatchett,⁶⁵ a service must first address pastoral needs. It should communicate a clear message (in this context, a message of Christian healing associated with the Lord's presence in His Supper), and be functional in meeting the specific requirements of the assembly. Those who attend will probably be Christians on different stages of their faith journey, and members of different denominations. The service should be short, 30 minutes maximum, and ecumenical. Next, the service must reflect sound theology in an appropriate context; a chapel service in a secular hospital is not a venue for exploration of the mysteries of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The *via media* of the Anglican tradition provides a liturgical structure upon which theologically and liturgically sound ecumenical services can be planned.⁶⁶ Furthermore, Episcopalian thought permits Christians of other denominations to share in the Holy Communion. Finally, a service should be historical. It could be a venue for "well-grounded", responsible liturgical experimentation without excessive antiquarianism, idiosyncrasy, "dilettantism" or "gimmickry".⁶⁷ Sources for prayers might include updated language versions of ancient Healing Eucharist services, ancient liturgies, and various modern liturgies. There are many others. These various resources ought not to be cobbled together haphazardly in a Word Processor Liturgy so that the service appears to have multiple independent, or isolated, sections. It should flow from beginning to end, in a logical coherent manner, even though multiple sources, from different traditions and different eras, have been used.

Practically, the celebrant should remember that the service is a "family meal,"⁶⁸ and that good liturgy is a dialogue⁶⁹ shared between members of the family rather than a ceremony observed by a passive laity. Schmemmann reminds us of the "mutual dependence of the

⁶⁵ Marion J. Hatchett, *Sanctifying Life, Time and Space* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), p. 11.

⁶⁶ "The Structure of the Eucharist", in David R. Holeton (editor), *Our Thanks and Praise: The Eucharist in Anglicanism Today* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1998).

⁶⁷ Hatchett ("Sanctifying"), p. 11.

⁶⁸ I am indebted to Carolyn Hatchett for suggestions on how a simple, dignified service might be conducted.

⁶⁹ Léon-Dufour ("Sharing"), p. 282.

celebrant of the service and the people.”⁷⁰ There might be an opportunity for fellowship and low-key conversations before and after the service. Members of the assembly should read the lessons. The homily might be a group discussion of the lessons, allowing participants to consider what the readings mean at this point in their lives, and to reflect on what they will be praying for, a few minutes later.

Different churches have differing views on the importance of the relationships of illness with sin, and healing with forgiveness. Mitchell observes, “Forgiveness of sin is an integral part of the healing process” and that “The sick person needs an opportunity to deal with the sense of sin and separation which often accompanies sickness.”⁷¹ Nonetheless, it might be pastorally appropriate not to have a confession and absolution at all, or to place them near the beginning of the service.

Since healing is a gift shared with the laity, all those who are present should be invited to participate in the laying on of hands, if they wish to do so. The celebrant must emphasize that God heals, and that those present are not healers, but are channels for God’s healing power.

For the communion, the celebrant must have decided in advance, in consultation with the Bishop, whether the communion will be open to those who are not baptized. Because of the changing patterns of attendance, the Eucharist should be instructed at each service. Participants must be advised that the chalice contains real wine, but that it is not necessary to receive the wine. Since some in attendance might have a contagious disease and others might fear that this is the case, communion should be by intinction, or the option of intinction should be provided. Wafers or small pieces of bread should be used since some in attendance may have difficulty in swallowing.

Summary

⁷⁰ Schmemmann (“Eucharist), p. 14.

⁷¹ Leonel L. Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1985), p. 209.

In a modern era of spiritual reawakening and renewed interest in ancient traditions, hospitalized patients might welcome a holistic body-mind-soul approach to healing. For Christians, our Judeo-Christian heritage clearly provides motivation and guidance for conducting healing services in conjunction with the Eucharist in hospital chapels, as well as in churches and private homes. Furthermore, our Anglican heritage provides a structure for such liturgies, and there is an extensive and rich library of worship resources that can be drawn from many traditions and eras.

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