

The Societal, Clinical, and Medical Necessity for the Church to Restore Her Healing Ministry *

Charles L. Zeiders, Psy.D. and Veruschka DeMarici, Psy.D.

The authors propose that the church should aggressively reinvigorate her healing ministry. It is believed that healing of persons will culminate in evangelism. Societal, clinical, and medical reasons necessitating the increase of the healing ministry are discussed. It is argued that the healing ministry is legitimized by scripture, tradition, and reason. This article is based upon a paper that the authors presented to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

As Christian clinicians, we have become aware of the great need for the church to reassert her ministry of healing in the power of the Holy Spirit. We have developed a three-fold vision of the healing ministry and have analyzed societal, clinical, and medical trends that recommend the urgent need for the church to aggressively increase the healing ministry. It is our contention that the healing ministry remains supported by scripture, tradition, and reason. Nothing should impede this way of imitating Jesus Christ.

Components of the Healing Vision

The vision has three components that culminate in evangelism: (1) Priests and many lay persons are gifted with the tremendous healing power that the Holy Spirit has made available since the time of Our Lord. The great spiritual genius, St. Paul, tells us that these spiritual gifts come to the church through the pleasure of the Holy Spirit and that this gifting is to be used for the general good of the people (1 Cor. 12: 4-11). (2) Persons still need healing. Luke tells us that the crowds flocked to Jesus, because he made such beautiful healing available to them. The people came to him “to be cured of their diseases. Persons tormented by unclean spirits were also cured and everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him, because power came out of him and cured them all” (Lk. 6:18-19). Today, as in the first century, broken humanity yearns for divine healing. (3) As persons heal, the gospel will be demonstrated. People will realize that their God and their church are proactive, relevant, and excitingly kind. The healed will tell others how God has healed them, and some will pray for the sick who will be healed and motivated for deeper conversion. As this dynamic increases, the population at large will become curious and spiritually aroused to investigate the church. In this way, the healing ministry will “proclaim the gospel to all creation” (Mk. 16:16), as Our Lord commanded us to do for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

The Urgency for Healing

Societal, clinical, and medical factors point to the urgency for the church to aggressively pursue her healing ministry.

Societal Reasons

Societal reasons involve the fact that people are religiously minded without having Christian religious training. While people are as religious as ever, they are less and less “churched,” making them vulnerable to harmful occult influences. Evidence that people are still religious is based on polls that show:

- 82% of polled people pray for health or success
- 75% pray for strength to overcome personal weakness
- 87% say that God answers prayers
- 29% pray to God more than 1x a day
- 25% pray 1x a day
- 79% believe that God answers prayers for healing someone with an incurable illness
- 73% think that God answers prayers for help in finding a job (Woodward,1997)

Further,

...80% of Americans - of various religious faiths and of none - say they believe in life after death, and two thirds are certain there is a heaven. This may be explained by the religious nature of society today. By almost every measure, the United States is a nation steeped in religion, more so than all other Western nations except Poland and Ireland (Sheler, 1997).

Various other polls show conclusively that Americans maintain religious practices and beliefs in large numbers.

Clinical Reasons

As practicing psychotherapists, we have come to appreciate that the core of psychopathology is the absence of love. We believe that the church has the doctrinal, sacramental, and spiritual armaments best suited to attack the core of psychopathology. We further believe that the Holy Spirit is real and, when experienced, is recognized immediately by patients as a healing presence more natively satisfying than any other healing attempt or experience.

Much psychopathology has a spiritual component best treated within a Christian context. For instance, the church has always recognized that doing what is morally good is always therapeutic. Psychology and psychiatry need to learn this from the church and the church can educate them simply by continuing to operate from this timeless principle.

Many young Christians have fallen away from the faith and have become wounded as the result of engaging in behaviors consistent with the post-modern *Zeitgeist*. In therapy we find a preponderance of Christians in their twenties who are devastated from abortions, drug use, illicit relationships, and occult involvement. We need to be able to refer them to appropriate, loving, healing authorities.

Our clinical experience and scholarly research indicate to us that Christian prayer is effective in healing both psychological and somatic disorders. While we will not cease from praying for our clients nor advocating that other care providers do the same, there is no substitute for a church that is fully grounded in her healing ministry to accomplish healings in Christ's name.

Medical Reasons

The emergence of alternative medicine is another reason that points to the urgency of the church's need to advance her healing ministry. Alternative medicine includes healing treatments not generally found in mainstream medical schools or psychology programs. The field includes aromatherapy, color healing, light healing, sound healing, reflexology, acupuncture, energy medicine, and meditation.

Important thinkers in this field have gained credibility among care givers as a result of their scientific research. They have then gone on to advocate religious practices and doctrines which they treat as technical advances over orthodox Christianity.

Of concern is the emerging field of psychoneuroimmunology. This field studies and applies ways that the mind and body interact, causing health and illness. Researchers have convincingly shown that constant arousal tends to cause a variety of stress-related disorders like degraded immunity and cardiovascular problems. To intervene psychoneuroimmunologists urge physicians and psychologists to teach their patients ways to trigger the relaxation response. The relaxation response is a mental and physiological state opposite to the fight/flight response. It is characterized by psychosomatic calm and long-term health benefits. In and of itself this new medical field is spiritually innocuous—no better or worse than an antibiotic. Many of its proponents, however, advance a spirituality that in practice amounts to syncretism. Because many of these health-care providers are not churched, they train their patients to enter relaxed states, often induced by non—Christian meditation techniques like TM or mindfulness meditation.

A need exists for the church to take a leadership role in educating persons that all the benefits of the relaxation response are available without putting them in spiritual peril via occult practices. The rosary, the Jesus prayer, and other Christian contemplative techniques are psychoneuroimmunologically beneficial, while pointing the people away from antichrist and toward the Holy Physician.

Other Reasons

The Holy Spirit has ministered healing from the first century to the present. In the present era, the age of science, the church—if led by the Spirit—stands poised not only to continue her healing mission, but also to inform the scientific community about the nature and means of true healing. A look at the early church, church history, and the present scientific age show that God has always healed and offers the possibility of more healing and a fuller understanding of its nature.

The Gospels are full of Jesus' healing stories. The Book of *Acts* shows the Apostles healing a variety of illnesses in a variety of contexts. And the epistles show the apostles explicitly advancing the idea that the Holy Spirit gifts the church with healing (e.g. I Corinthians 12:7-11), and provides practical "how to" advice to those who need to avail themselves of the healing grace which flows from the Spirit of Jesus Christ (e.g. James 5:13-16, recommending prayer of faith, oil, confession). Scripture supports the healing ministry.

Church history abounds with stories of people healing in Christ's name. It is known that Church Fathers from Justin Martyr (AD 165) to Clement (AD 275), important Christian thinkers recognized healing as a function that the Church exercises in the Holy Spirit. Augustine came to recognize that God heals prior to his death in AD 430. St. Patrick (AD 461) healed the blind. St. Bernard (AD 1008) healed the lame, the dumb, and the deaf. Edward the Confessor (AD 1042) healed scrofula. Valentine Greatrakes (AD 1600's) healed epilepsy, pain, and fever through the laying on of hands and praying. Following W.W.II, a revival in healing came upon the church. Katherine Kuhlman, Agnes Sanford, and Francis and Judith MacNutt have all been leaders in this regard. Tradition supports the healing ministry.

Social and medical science has begun to demonstrate the positive relationship between religious and spiritual practices and human well being. While the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* cautions that science by itself "cannot disclose the meaning of existence and of human progress" (p. 611) science increasingly demonstrates to the church her importance in the maintenance of health. For example, a review of more than a decade of research published in two leading psychiatry journals by the National Institute for Healthcare Research found that religion had a positive impact on clinical results very much of the time (Matthews, Larson & Barry, 1993). Encouraged by this positive outcome data, the church can suggest to the health-care community the true mechanism of action through which the measured health of her children is preserved. The church can instruct the community of health scientists that the positive outcome data on measures of well-being points human reason to the fact that the blessed Trinity is the author of human health. Positive outcome data is a measured, outward expression of our ultimate health in Jesus Christ. It represents a data point in the argument that the church has the authority to heal the children of God. Reason supports the church's healing ministry.

The Problem

At the Harvard Medical School's conference entitled *Spirituality and Healing in Medicine II*, held in Boston from December 15-12, 1996, George Gallop cautioned that, while survey data demonstrates high spirituality among Americans, "there is clear evidence that religion of faith is often not very deep." We believe that spirituality without religious training and Christian spiritual fail-safes has allowed people to engage in practices that are harmful to them in body, mind, and spirit. Examples include channeling, spiritism, past life regression, pagan meditation practices, hallucinogenic drugs, nature religions, angel worship, and so forth.

Since our society is very religious but less grounded in orthodox faith than ever, people stray into dangerous cultic endeavors that may hurt them, even as they seek healing. The church can correct this.

Conclusion:

Our vision for the church's healing ministry is predicated on the belief that healing gifts persist in the church, that the people continue to need healing, and that healing will culminate in increased conversion and eventually evangelism. The church needs to reestablish her prominence in healing so that the unchurched but spiritually needy public does not fall into occult practices to satisfy spiritually related healing needs. Psychiatry and psychology are not fully equipped to handle the spiritual aspects of mental illness. A church that is competent to heal in Jesus name is a necessary institution to which Christian doctors and psychologists can refer their patients. The church also has a special ministry to alternative medicine, which has become influenced by occult religious ideas. No impediment exists to prevent the church from assuming a more intense healing effort. Scripture, tradition, and reason support the church's authority to continue Our Lord's supernatural ministry to the psyche and soma. In short, it is time to heal.

References

- Brennan, B (1987). *Hands of light*. New York: Bantam.
- Gerber, R (1988). *Vibrational medicine*. Sante Fe: Bear & Company.
- Matthews, D, Larson, D. and Barry, C. (1993). *The faith factor: An annotated bibliography of clinical research on spiritual subjects* (Vol. I & II). National Institute for Healthcare Research.

Ratzinger, J, Imprimi Potest (1995). *Catechism of the catholic church*. New York: Doubleday.
Sheler, J (1997). Heaven in the age of reason. *US News and World Report*, March 31, 65-66.
Woodward, K (1997). Is god listening? *Newsweek*, March 31, 57-65.

Varuschka DeMarici, Psy.D. practices at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. DeMarici has lectured throughout the world about Christian psychology and the impact of divine grace upon mental suffering. She has a reputation as an excellent lecturer and seminar leader. Her radio show Hope for Healing was considered a fascinating contribution to integrating the field of psychology with Christian spirituality.

* This article was first published in *The Journal of Christian Healing*, Volume 20, #3&4, Fall/Winter, 1998, pp. 30-36.