



# An Analytical Study on Church as Therapeutic Community

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## I. Introduction

Healing is the gift of God to the sufferer who is in need. Healing means not just relaxing from physical and emotional problems but allowing God to accept our faith and love to accomplish His perfect will in us and in others. Church is the transforming agent in liberating the broken, the oppressed, the healing and the wounded. Potentiality of the church can be seen both within the church and in the society.

### 1. Meaning and Definitions of the Terms

#### 1.1. Healing

The term "healing" can be used narrowly to refer to God's treatment of the body from disease or injury, or to God's gracious transformation of other aspects of disordered and fragmented human existence. "Healing" in the sense of bringing an individual into a greater wholeness of body, and mind can be understood to include "cure". "Cure" of specific conditions includes cures brought about by medical means using the God given properties and capacities of God's creatures; it also includes cures given after prayer, Word and Sacrament.<sup>i</sup> In some cures, both approaches are associated. In all cures, we see the hand of God.

Graham presents a definition of the term healing as the process of being restored to bodily wholeness, emotional well-being, mental functioning and spiritual aliveness. He further expands it as healing may also refer to the reconciling broken human relationships and the development of a just social and political order among the races and nations.<sup>ii</sup>

Thomas J. Csordas described it as a "system of ritual performance constituting of a healing event, genres or forms of healing prayer, and ritual acts of empowerment."<sup>iii</sup> Along similar lines, James Opp defined healing as "a series of performances, a way of understanding religion acting through the body.

#### 1.2. Church

The term church in English is derived from Kuriakos. This term is derived from the Greek form and they basically mean the Lords house. In the old testament community of gathering was called 'Qahal'. The new testament word translated as church is Ekklesia.<sup>iv</sup> The church in the words of Archbishop William, temple "is the only great human society which exists for the sake of the people who are not its members".<sup>v</sup> Watne E.Oates says that "Church is a school where men learn to live in new life".<sup>vi</sup>

##### 1.2.1. Foundation of the Church

The church and its mission began in the gospel of St. Mark, stated that the mission of Jesus Christ was to inaugurate the kingdom of God. He said that the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news. The church is founded on Christ, and on the witness of the apostles. Christ, on whom the church is founded has been called the man for others and his church has been called as church for others.<sup>vii</sup>

## 2. Historical View of Healing in the Church Life

### 2.1. Healing ministry of Jesus

In the book, Spirituality, Health and Wholeness, Richard states that Jesus' miracles affirm the value of physical health and provide a basis for endeavours to relieve suffering and heal the sick. Physically Jesus cured blindness, deafness, leprosy, and paralysis.<sup>viii</sup> Jesus also provided physical food for the 5,000 plus multitude. Rice goes on to address the spiritual dynamics of Jesus' healing when He dealt with spiritual and physical needs together. For example, the healing of the paralyzed man in Mark: 2 show both the physical and spiritual healing of Jesus. Jesus healed the man from paralysis (physical) and he said to him "Your sins are forgiven" (spiritual healing). Jesus' entire ministry was directed towards spiritual ends. Its primary



objective was to restore human beings to proper relationship with God.<sup>ix</sup>

Emotional needs and social aspects of people were also addressed by Jesus. Jesus showed his feelings to the woman who had an issue of blood, He called her daughter, and listened to her story. Rice states, "We see the healing of communities in a number of Jesus' miracles, as well as his teachings on forgiveness. Each of the individuals He raised from the dead was restored to a bereaved family Jairus' daughter, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus of Bethany". Jesus healed diseases that caused social discrimination.<sup>x</sup>

## 2.2. Healing Ministry in the Early Church

For the first three centuries, the ministry of healing was made center in the worship and mission of the apostolic church. The early church affirms the goodness of the body and regarded as human being as a unity of mind, body and spirit. Healing was more sacramental in the nature combined with anointing and exorcisms. Beginning of the fourth century, the emphasis began to change and body was seen less important than spirit and illness was regarded as the result of divine chastisement.<sup>xi</sup> There is evidence of prayer for healing and anointing with oil in Tertullian, Origen, Jerome, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Augustine. After the fourth century a growing split between body and spirit in the understanding of human life became so emphasised that less value was placed on bodily health. Eventually anointing for healing was in many ways overshadowed by anointing for death, at least in the western Church.<sup>xii</sup>

## 2.3. Ministry of Healing in the Medieval Church:

By the ninth century, the practice of anointing for the healing gave way to the practice of anointing for death. During the later middle ages, under the influence of Aquinas and Aristotle, the body and the reason were regarded as instruments of this world. Soul, mind and body were ordered hierarchically and had little to do with one another. But on the other hand, there were monastic orders of healers, and used relics and shrines as means of healing. Healings were reported at the hands of some of the great saints and leaders of the Church. Towards the later parts of the middle ages, the welfare of the spirit became more important than that of the body and physical healing. It became no longer as an integral part of the church's life and mission. By 1551, there was no longer room in the churches understanding for a rite of healing.<sup>xiii</sup> At this time also, the split between body and spirit led

to growing division between the Church and medical practice.

## 2.4. Healing during Reformation Period:

Although the reformers carried on the medieval thinking of health as a blessing and sickness as God's punishment, they encouraged compassion, support and prayers for the healing of the afflicted. Luther and Calvin by affirming true miracle as the spiritual healing of the soul by God's grace through faith, they personally did not believe in miraculous physical healing.<sup>xiv</sup>

Many Christians at the Reformation continued this split, attempting to take the magic out of religion. Many believed that illness was sent from God, and that suffering was to be endured patiently. Neither Luther nor Calvin believed in miraculous physical healings, but concentrated on the miracle of the spiritual healing of the soul through the grace of God. Archbishop Cranmer provided an Order for the Visitation of the Sick, drawn from the Sarum Rite. It included a long exhortation reminding the sick person, that sickness is 'God's Visitation. The Council of Trent refused to recognise a rite of healing in the Roman Church, though it did promote the sacramental practice of extreme unction.

Since the Reformation, the split between the Church and medical practice, fed by a dualistic view of human nature, has gone through various phases. Through the influence of the Cartesian model, in which nature was thought to work according to mechanical laws, there arose a new emphasis in the medical profession on the health of the body and on physical healing.

## 2.5. Ministry of Healing in the Modern Era:

When seventeenth and eighteenth century witnessed the development of reason and science, things were interpreted in mechanical/mathematical and natural way, where God was viewed as a transcendent monarch who orders things from high above. Based on this worldview, the modern medical practice was developed, which led to the separation of secular and sacred. Doctors attended matters of the body, Psychologists gave attention to mind and emotions and ministers had little to do with the life of the body and its processes. Twentieth century witnessed a reversal from the dualistic/compartamental understanding towards Jewish and early Christian understanding of unity of personhood and holistic healing. World Council of Churches gives a religious call for a healing presence of the Church in the world. Healing has once again connected to its biblical roots of



salvation, shalom, holiness with the transformation of the personal and social fabric of existence.<sup>xv</sup>

### **3. Church as a Healing Community: Intrapersonal Relationship**

By theologically examining certain passages of Jesus healing ministry in the Gospels of Mark and John, I was able to develop a scriptural theology of healing. The elements of this theology include the healing power of Jesus, finding Jesus in sickness, following Jesus through sickness, the support of the community, and the importance of prayer. When sick people come to know and experience these five elements, they can experience healing in the midst of their sickness. In addition to reflection on the Bible, the Catholic Church offers a particular ministry to help people in times of sickness.

The healing ministry of the Church flows out of Jesus' healing ministry. This can be seen in James 5:13-15. Here, the members of the early Church are sent out to pray with and anoint the sick "in the name of the Lord."<sup>xvi</sup> This passage provides the biblical foundation of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. I will now turn my attention to the celebration of this Rite.

#### **3.1. Healing Through Prayer**

Prayer is the direct way to open oneself to the creative power of God's love. When prayer is used therapeutically, it can generate hope and can be a powerful tool in redirecting broken, hurtful and confused lives.

In the times of Old Testament, the sinner had to go and confess his sin in front of the priest, and the priest used to confess the sin through burnt offering in the presence of the Lord instead of the concern person. But in the New Testament, the ideology has totally changed through Jesus Christ. The sinner can confess his sin secretly through prayers and can be healed in the presence of the Lord without any wage.

#### **3.2. Healing out of Sacraments**

Through the sacraments of Christian initiation, man receives the new life of Christ. We are still...subject to suffering, illness, and death. This new life as a child of God can be weakened by sin. The Lord Jesus Christ, is the physician of our souls and bodies has willed that his Church continue his work of healing and salvation.

##### **3.2.1. Baptism**

This is the first great sacrament of healing. Through baptism, sick man is already a member of

the regenerated creation and the healing church. It is only required that he /she should of his own free will appropriate the free gift of healing earned by Christ for him/her. He /she is admitted as a healer and one in the need of being healed. Baptism lies very close to the healing miracles of Christ.<sup>xvii</sup> Baptism calls us to reject death and embrace life and dignity for all. Baptism is a victory of life over the power of darkness. It lifts human beings up and ends their separation from God.<sup>xviii</sup>

##### **3.2.2. Holy Communion as Sacrament of Healing**

This is the routine preventive and healing sacrament of the church for the maintenance and restoration of health. In the period of historical church many terms have been used for Eucharist like communion, breaking of bread, Lord's Supper etc. the bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper are to be seen as signs or symbols of the New Covenant.<sup>xix</sup> Holy Communion is a remembrance of the Christ's great healing life, death and resurrection in which all participating receive the life giving spirit, it is a healing service. Because, it is an act in which all gathered, participate, receive one spirit, it is a healing service which is particularly appropriate for showing forth the communal aspects of everyday sickness and health.<sup>xx</sup> In the communion, Lord provided two elements, wine and bread as we take the wine, which represents His blood we are forgiven of our sins. As we eat the bread, we are healed in our bodies. God gave us this physical ceremony in communion, for the healing of our physical bodies and forgiveness of our sins.

##### **3.2.3. Anointing with Oil as Sacrament of Healing**

Jesus gave power to heal and anointing of the sick to his disciples. Laying of hands and anointing oil symbolize our recognition of God's divine power needed for our healing. In James 5:14-15, if one of you is ill, he should send for the elders of the church, and they must anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord and pray for him. This statement is the key text for claiming that the sacrament of anointing was instituted by Christ.<sup>xxi</sup>

##### **3.2.4. Laying on Hands**

Although the Laying on of Hands does not have any explicit reference to the community, Larson-Miller explains that the importance of touch should not be underestimated because it is a way for people to communicate.<sup>xxii</sup> She contends that touch manifests the sick and the community's prayer to God.<sup>xxiii</sup> She also understands gesture as the



culminating moment in which all present there pray for the healing of the sick. Therefore, the element of community is present in the Laying on of Hands.

The Laying on of Hands recalls one of the gestures that Jesus used to heal people. It also serves as a blessing that asks God to restore the sick's health and give them strength.<sup>xxiv</sup> Since the celebrant's hands that represent the work of God touch the sick's head, which represents the whole individual, this act brings together God and the whole person. In this way, the gesture has a holistic quality.

#### **4. Church as a Healing Community: Interpersonal relationship**

##### **4.1. Ministry of Healing Among Addicted Groups**

Addiction is one of the growing problems in the society. Addiction is losing control over the use of a substance or an activity. Addiction refers to imbalance of human behaviour of life dependency to chemical substances like alcohol, tobacco etc. And dependencies to behavioural addiction like gambling, eating, mobile phones and internet. Addicts are good persons with bad disease. Therefore, as a church, we have to approach in the same way Jesus approached the sick persons. Jesus was compassionate in his dealing with the sick people. Care and compassion are the two elements of ministering to addicted persons.<sup>xxv</sup>

##### **4.2. Healing Ministry to Disabled Personalities.**

God is the creator of the person with abilities and also the persons with disabilities. Disability can be defined as a permanent condition of limitation in the ability to perform essential tasks. Humans understand god as beauty, strength and perfection. On the other hand, God portrays at times as disfigured, rejected and homeless. Disabled persons are treated as persons who are unfortunate, cursed, useless, and thus objects of charity. Their abilities are often underestimated and chances not given to exercise and contribute in the society. Their divine right as bearing the image of god and their social right as equal citizens are often overlooked. The church changes its attribute towards the PWD and it has shifted its mission paradigm from cursed to accepted.<sup>xxvi</sup>

##### **4.3. Healing Ministry of Church Towards Family**

Family is an institution and important challenge for the church in the present world. Family is facing different levels of stress and

changes in marriage and family life. Churches need to develop innovative programs. The church must formulate the context relevant ministries to reach out the family in terms of meeting their psychological, emotional, and spiritual aspects of life. Such programs should be arranged through trusts under pastoral care with education, dimension consisting of attractive family strengthening events including classes, workshops and camps pre and post marital care.<sup>xxvii</sup>

#### **5. Spiritual, Physical, Emotional Healing Ministry of Jesus**

Richard Rice states that Jesus' miracles affirm the value of physical health and provide a basis for endeavors to relieve suffering and heal the sick. Physically Jesus cured blindness, deafness, leprosy, and paralysis. Jesus also provided physical food for the 5,000 plus multitude. Richard goes on to address the spiritual dynamics of Jesus' healing when He dealt with spiritual and physical needs together. For example, the healing of the paralyzed man in Mark 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter shows both the physical and spiritual healing of Jesus. Jesus healed the man from paralysis (physical) and he said to him "Your sins are forgiven" (spiritual healing). Jesus' entire ministry was directed toward spiritual ends. Its primary objective was to restore human beings to proper relationship with God.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Emotional needs of people were also addressed by Jesus. Jesus showed his feelings to the woman who had an issue of blood; He called her daughter, and listened to her story. Jesus was also attentive to the emotional needs of His closest followers. He once told His disciples to come apart from the crowd and rest awhile (Mark 6:31). Jesus also dealt with the social aspects of healing. Richard states, "We see the healing of communities in a number of Jesus' miracles, as well as his teachings on forgiveness. Jesus healed diseases that caused social discrimination. For example, in Luke 17<sup>th</sup> chapter Jesus healed ten Samaritans who had leprosy. The person with leprosy was excommunicated from society and forced to shout, "unclean, unclean."<sup>xxix</sup>

Ellen White says that during the ministry of Jesus He did more healing than preaching. Jesus dealt with the mind and soul. "The Savior made each work of healing an occasion for implanting divine principles in the mind and soul. This was the purpose of His work".<sup>xxx</sup>





## 6. Implementing the Healing Ministry in the Church Today

There are many off-beat and far out healing ministries, and unfortunately they have received most of the media's attention. Often, they are on television, are sensational and emphasize healing at the expense of the rest of the Christian message. If a church understand a solid creative healing ministry, the leaders need to understand that this make sense both as Christians and as people living in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Acquainting the congregation with Christian healing by inviting one of the well-known leaders in spiritual healing to conduct a healing mission at the church. As preparation for such a mission, a group of people who are convinced that healing is a part of authentic Christian witness can meet together to pray for the openness of the congregation to this aspect of ministry.<sup>xxxi</sup>

## II. Conclusion

The church is the body of Christ through which Jesus Christ present and is continuing his mission through the church, the term restoration is the central mission of the church of both physical and spiritual wholeness of person and communities. The problems may raise from different issues, the church can make an effective healing witness towards those affected in the society. Thus, Christ calls, church to become a healing community by experiencing and sharing the love, care and healing and support in the society.

Among all Church sacraments the Sacraments of Healing, namely the sacrament of penance and reconciliation and the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, have an important role, being an inseparable element of the Church identity. These two sacraments are crucial for the process of building and strengthening the Church community, which is a proof of their ecclesial character. That is why faithful fulfilment of all the obligations resulting from the sacrament of penance and the anointing of the sick is raised to evangelical value, which makes the community of unity, love and peace present in the Church.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>ii</sup> Rodney J. Hunter, "ed" "Healing," in Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 497.

<sup>iii</sup> Thomas J. Csordas, The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1994), 27.

<sup>iv</sup> F. Hrangkhuma, "Local Church Involvement in Mission and Evangelism," in Issues in Contemporary Christian Mission (Kolkata: SCEPTRE, 2013), 187.

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<sup>vi</sup> Watne E. Oates, An Introduction to Pastoral Counselling, (Nashville: Boardman Press, 1959), 28

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<sup>viii</sup> Richard Rice. Toward A Theology of Wholeness: A Tentative Model of Whole Person Care. Spirituality, Health, and Wholeness (NY: Haworth Press. 2004), p. 12-16.

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<sup>x</sup> Richard Rice. Toward A Theology of Wholeness: A Tentative Model of Whole Person Care. Spirituality, Health, and Wholeness (NY: Haworth Press. 2004), p. 15-36.

<sup>xi</sup> Graham, "Healing" Dictionary of Pastoral Care, 498.

<sup>xii</sup> Graham, "Healing" Dictionary of Pastoral Care, 498.

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<sup>xxii</sup> Larson-Miller & Lizette, The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2005), 35

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<sup>xxvii</sup> S. N. Michael & Jose Joseph, The Emerging Challenges to Christian Mission Today, (Pune: Christian Worlds Imprints, 2016), 166.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Maragh Alvin Lloyd, The Healing Ministry of Jesus as Recorded in the Synoptic Gospels (California: Loma Linda University, 2006), 7-8.

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<sup>xxix</sup> Emily Zakhary, The Parable of Holistic Healing: Reflections upon the Parable of the Good Samaritan as it Impacts Holistic Healing (Np, 2016), 23.

<sup>xxx</sup> Lloyd, The Healing Ministry of Jesus, 7-8.

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