

# Well-Being and Jesus' Healing Ministry in Relation to Healing in African Religion

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*ABSTRACT—This paper is premised on the dictum that 'health is wealth'. The issue of well-being is an important matter to all in any society. In the ancient world, health was a highly prized possession, and it is one of the most important considerations occupying our modern society. The study examines the processes of well-being in the ministry of Jesus and in African traditional religion vis-à-vis the advancement of medicine in modern civilization. The study discovered various religious views of illness and explored how Africans utilize healing systems and religious practices to address matters of disease and affliction. Moreover, the element of secrecy in African religion and its healing practices is an issue that cannot be under-estimated. The paper discusses Jesus' healing ministry exhaustively, and its relation to healing in African Religion. The necessity of the healing ministry to Jesus was highlighted. A multi-dimensional approach is recommended in healing all manners of diseases and enhancing well-being for all.*

*Keywords: Well-being, Jesus, Healing, Ministry, African Religion*

## I. Introduction

The word 'well-being' denotes a good or satisfactory condition of existence; a state characterized by health, happiness and prosperity. It is a condition of being contented, healthy or successful. Healing is the

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process of applying preventive and remedial practices to maintain good health. This is why Dairo (1995, p. 6), quoting Benjamin Disraeli, says that “the health of the people is really the foundation upon which all their happiness and all their powers as a State depend”. Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Well-being focuses on alleviation of diseases and promotion of health. To alleviate disease and promote health, it is believed that advancement in medical science and technology is of essence. This is why Gower remarks that since the commencement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the average life expectancy has risen tremendously. To him, much of this increase was as a result of improved medical science and technology, as new drugs and surgical techniques are constantly being developed to combat physical disease. He further stated that: “...there is an ever-expanding range of complementary alternative medicines and therapies available, though the effectiveness of many of these remains as yet unproven” (Gower, 2007, p. 26). What Gower calls ‘complementary alternative medicines and therapies’ to African contextual theology is healing in African religion. In industrial societies, such as in North America, physicians tend to practice medicine without the influence of religion. The interaction between the physician and patient is segregated and private. In Africa, there are two different approaches to medicine and sometimes they both are consulted. In the larger cities, there tends to be a push towards Western practices of medicine: large hospitals and Western medications. In the rural areas, herbal medicine and religion play a large part in the healing process. In Africa, most people believe that religion and healing often work together (Ashley, 2012).

In view of the above, this study investigates into Jesus’ healing ministry in relation to healing in African religion. Jesus Christ is far more than a wonder-worker or primitive psychotherapist. His ultimate purpose stands out as the healing of humanity’s alienation from God, a cosmic task that included the overcoming of sin, death, finitude itself – but also of sickness, body disability, and mental disorder built into this world (Peel, 1987, p. 65).

## **II. Well-Being across Cultures**

Africans are in all things religious and the totality of their life is permeated with religion (Mbiti, 1970: 33ff). The supernatural God

and spirit world are important in African religion. Religious belief and practice are central to all aspects of life in Africa. That is, religious beliefs impact the way people live their everyday lives—from what they eat (or cannot eat), the way they farm, do everyday chores, hunt, make tools and clothes, arrange themselves in families, marry, divide work among family members, educate their children, treat illness, and bury the dead. Among indigenous African religion, religious belief and practice are not restricted to one holy day each week, be it Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, but are present in the most common daily activities as well as in special ritual ceremonies (Mbiti, 1970, p. 33ff).

Adegboyega (2008, p. 80) opines that a critical look at the ancient Yoruba society shows that the traditional African healers possess a great deal of knowledge of potency of herbs and plants. He explains that they have put these into practice even before the advent of Western medical system. Adegboyega concludes that in fact, this is the main source of their health care delivery system. Odejide (1978, p.13) distinguishes three factors as causes of disease in the Yoruba belief system, and they are natural, preternatural and supernatural factors. According to Odejide, the natural factors include bad odours and filthy or unsanitary conditions while witchcraft and human curses are in the category of the preternatural (because humans are involved in the acts), and the supernatural factors are traceable to non-humans with offences against the spirits, ancestors or gods.

Speaking in this vein, Adegboyega argues that in traditional African society, and the Yoruba culture in particular, causes of sicknesses and other related issues are not sought by appealing only to common sense but also by appealing to empirical reasons. However, because of their religious belief, when the Yoruba are sick or in trouble, the answer they receive involves a god or the ancestor or other spiritual agency. Naturally then, the remedy or healing process prescribed involves the propitiation of that being (Wilson, 1977, p. 6). Dairo (1995, p. 6ff) corroborates the fact that among the Yoruba, the art of healing has divine origin. He states further that it is believed that without sacrifice, one cannot enjoy good health, and that sacrifice can be directed by any *orisa* (god). According to Lucas (1948:21), *sacrifice may be truly described as the kernel of Yoruba religious worship*. Awolalu (1970, p. 52) also describes sacrifice as the *essence of Yoruba religion*. To emphasize the importance of sacrifice, Dairo reveals that in Yoruba thought, diseases that cannot be cured do not exist. He also posits that the people believe in the

existence of the devil or the witches in the society. This view is expressed by Roland as cited in Dairo (1995, p. 8) as follows: "...the forces of fight against God and good healthy life, in their view, disturbed relations between man and God or the divinities and are the main cause of disease and accidents".

Dairo then concludes that:

These problems are solved on a religious level. Good health within the traditional Yoruba cultural system depends primarily on a good unbroken relationship with God and the deities. Good health is a gift of God. Disease reflects broken and bad relations. Diseases, then, to some extent, become a consequence of sin.

Africans also believe that when the environment is sick, diseases become inevitable, and when diseased materials are removed or the environment is spiritually fumigated, human health and well-being are guaranteed (Nzewi, 2002, p. 18). Nzewi, in support of other scholars above, views the traditional African concept of illness as coming from natural and supernatural causes that ordinarily act together. He asserts this with the maxim, "*When herbs fail, heal the spirit*".

Scientific research has shown that the genes we inherit provide us with the basic blueprint for life and death (Gower, 2007, p. 28). Gower observes further that research is increasingly showing that the time we spend in our mother's womb, is the time when much of what will happen during the decades ahead is determined. Hence, modern scientists are presently looking for ways to eradicate major diseases at the source.

### **III. Healing in African Traditional Religion**

When Europeans first observed African medicine and healing practices, they often had a negative reaction. They viewed these practices as being based on magic and not on science. These judgments were based on a misunderstanding of African views on disease and healing. Indeed, like western medicine, African healing is based on close observation of the patient and his or her disease and on the use of remedies—medicines—that have a track record for successfully treating a particular ailment. According to Nabofa (1996, p. 16), one major pitfall of the western kind of healing is that their

medicine does not do justice to the spiritual aspect of illness. He declares that among the Urhobo of Nigeria, expiatory rituals have more direct effects on the soul personality that has been defiled than the physical body, which could be washed clean with soap, a sponge and water. This reiterates Wilson's (1973, p. 30) assertion that healing is more than merely restoration of physical and mental well-being.

Some illnesses have psychosomatic causes because a sick mind can produce a sick body. Western trained doctors have gained a greater appreciation for African healing techniques and practices. Indeed, throughout Africa, it is now fairly common to have Western trained doctors working with traditional healers in the treatment of patients.

#### **IV. African Traditional Healers**

It is difficult to separate African medicine from African religion. Gordon L. Chavunduka, who is president of Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers' Association, explains in *Christianity, African Religion and African Medicine* (1999, p. 3) that there are two reasons for this difficulty. Firstly, the African general theory of illness is very broad and includes African theology. That is, the theory does not only attempt to explain illness and disease but also the relation between God and the universe. Secondly, many traditional healers are also religious leaders and vice versa.

Every religious tradition has individuals who perform specific religious tasks and duties. Each religious tradition has special titles for religious officials—rabbi, imam, minister, pastor or priest. In African religious traditions, there are different religious roles, including priests, rain-makers, and healers (diviners, herbalists). In some cultures, these various roles may be served by the same individual; in other cultures different persons may serve each position.

African traditional healers, often referred to as “traditional doctors”, are important in all African societies. Good health is believed to be the result of appropriate behaviour; that is, living in accordance to the values and norms of traditions of the society. It is generally believed that one of the primary causes of illness is inappropriate behaviour. Illness can also be the result of the work of bad spirits. In either case, illnesses have a spiritual basis that in turn, requires a spiritual remedy. In most African religious traditions, there are two methods of healing. In some traditions, these two methods are

practiced by the same healer. In other traditions, there are separate practitioners. To be a practitioner of either type of healing takes experience and great skill that is developed over many years of training. Training to be a healer in Africa takes time and effort just as does training to be a medical doctor in Europe or America.

**Herbalists and Healing:** Extracts from plants—fruits, berries, roots, leaves, bark—provide the basis of the medicines used by traditional healers in Africa. Herbalist healers go through a rigorous training through which they learn about the healing properties of a wide variety of plants. When they finish their training, herbalist healers will be able to prescribe herbal remedies for many different illnesses. On occasion, a healer will be confronted with a new and strange disease. In these situations, the herbalist will seek assistance from the spiritual world. The healer will enter a trance in which she or he is possessed by a spirit. The spirit will lead the healer to an appropriate remedy (Helwig, 2010).

**Healing by Spiritualists/Diviners:** Diviners treat illness primarily by facilitating the direct intervention of the spiritual world. If an illness is believed to be caused by inappropriate behaviour on the part of the patient, a remedy or cure for the illness can only come through spiritual intervention. While a herbal healer uses plants to treat diseases, a diviner seeks input from the spiritual world to understand the cause of the illness and prescribe a cure. Usually a diviner is possessed by the same ancestral spirit with whom she or he has developed a special relationship (Helwig, 2010).

In addition to treating specific illnesses, African healers—herbalist and diviners—also practice preventative medicine. Patients may come to the healer seeking protection from misfortune or a person undertaking a long journey may want a remedy that will provide safety on her trip. Another patient may want a remedy that will provide wisdom and clarity in making an important decision.

## V. Healing in the Old Testament

The number of specific healings recorded in the Old Testament bears no comparison with those recorded in the Gospels and Acts. In fact there are only twelve recorded in the four millennia of Old Testament history—far less than Jesus sometimes did in a single day!

Healing is part of the great plethora of divine activities recorded between Genesis and Malachi. Each of Israel's historical eras is

peppered with angelic visitations, divine revelations, anthropomorphic appearances, acts of judgment, supernatural manifestations and miraculous deliverances which are purposefully recorded as evidence of God's interaction with mankind, but especially his people, Israel (Cauchi 2011). These miraculous occurrences provided Israel with confidence in their leaders and in the Scriptures that recorded their stories.

There are twelve occurrences of individual healings and three corporate healings recorded in the Old Testament. Mention will be made of a few of them:

1. 'Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his slave girls so they could have children again, for the Lord had closed up every womb in Abimelech's household because of Abraham's wife Sarah' (Gen 20:17-18).
2. God inflicted Miriam with leprosy and Moses interceded for her saying, 'O God, please heal her!' Though there is no record of her healing, it must be assumed that the Lord exchanged this act of judgment with the lesser penalty of seven days of disgrace outside the camp. There is no further mention of her having leprosy (Num. 12:1-15).
3. Hannah received healing from barrenness in response to her personal prayers and Eli, the priest's, declaration (1Sam1:9-20).
4. King Jeroboam pointed his hand in judgment at an unnamed prophet and it 'shriveled up.' The prophet interceded for Jeroboam and his hand was restored to health (1 Kings 13:4-6).

Health is usually associated with the efficient functioning of the body, and healing with curing sickness and disease. Christian healing is not just about recovery from physical illness. A biblical understanding of health involves a close relationship between healing, wholeness and salvation (Gower, 2007, p. 30). The New Testament word for salvation—*soteria*—conveys the idea of soundness of health in body, mind and spirit. So much unhappiness and ill-health is connected with our own mental well-being and the state of our relationships with each other, our environment and with God.

In the beginning everything was perfect. God saw everything that he had made, and was pleased that it was very good. Satan, however, deceived Adam and Eve to disobey God, which brought sin, sickness, and disease into the world. God told His people in Exodus 15:26:

If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His

commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you.

When the people sinned, they were afflicted with diseases, and were healed when they turned back to God in faith. God remains faithful to His promises because He cannot lie: “You shall serve the Lord your God, and I will bless your bread and your water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of you” (Exodus 23:25).

## **VI. Jesus’ Healing Ministry**

Healing the sick was the hallmark of Jesus' ministry. Wherever he went, people brought the sick to him, and he healed them. There are general references to Jesus' healing (Mark 1:32-34, Matt 8:16-17, Luke 4:40-41; Matt 14:14 and Luke 9:11; Matt 4:23-25; Luke 6:17-19; Mark 3:10; Matt 9:35-36; Matt 12:15; Matt 19:1-2; Matt 21:14). In several of these it is stated explicitly that Jesus healed *all* of those who came to him for help (Cauchi, 2011).

Luke 4:40: “And laying his hands on each one, he healed them”.

Matt 4:23: “And healing every disease and sickness among the people”.

Matt 8:16: “And he healed all the sick”.

Matt 9:35: “And healing every disease and sickness”.

Matt 12:15: “And he healed all their sick”.

(Mark's use of “many” [*pollous*] [1:34] could be Semitism, meaning “all”.)

The Gospels show us that He did this throughout his earthly ministry. Jesus’ healing ministry is a holistic ministry; it involves the total being – soul, spirit, and body. The healing ministry of Jesus is one of the most acknowledged and most controversial parts of His redemptive work. There are those who see healing as a blessing of Calvary already perfected on the cross, and thus automatically and instantly available to all believers. Others see physical healing as outside of redemption which they confine to dealing with sin (Edmiston, 2010, p. 14).

The healing ministry of Jesus can be divided into two parts:



1. That which He did before the cross and which He taught His disciples to do (Matthew 10:8, Luke 10:1, 9, Acts 5:16) and which we can participate in by faith today (John 14:12, James 5:13-15).

2. That which He did on the cross itself. This is a unique and complete work and we simply proclaim its benefits. This is the healing of our spirits from sin, death and going astray (1 Peter 2:24, 25).

Even among non-Christians there is a general perception of Jesus as a healer of the sick. This is closely connected with who he is and how he ministered to those who are in need. People see Jesus as someone who is supposed to meet their deepest needs, including the need for physical healing. When people see healing take place in Jesus' name it strengthens their faith in His nature and in the gospels, thus enabling many to believe in him for salvation.

Healing the sick and preaching were often connected in Jesus' ministry. Jesus was genuinely moved out of compassion for the sick. For Him, healing was an essential part of His ministry to hurting people and not merely as an opener before the message. Jesus associated healing with the Presence of His Kingdom (Luke 10:9). The Kingdom has not yet arrived and still needs to be proclaimed with power and authority. Jesus, through His body the Church, needs to confront evil in all its forms—physical, emotional, and spiritual. Thus we can expect His healing ministry to be manifested today to some degree in the redemption of our physical bodies from the effects of evil. This will be finally accomplished at the resurrection but is accomplished in part and as a foretaste through His healing ministry today (Edmiston, 2010, p. 14).

In Matthew 12:22-29, we have it recorded thus:

The blind and dumb demoniac was brought to him, and He healed him, so that the dumb man spoke and saw. And all the people were amazed and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard it they said, "It is only by Be-elzebul, the prince of the demons, that this man casts out demons". Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand; and if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Be-elzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if it is by the

Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.

There is increasing recognition today of an evil spiritual kingdom arrayed against the Kingdom of God. The horror movies and bombardment of information on demonic oppression and possession have not done much good to the church. They have instead created a paralyzing fear of tackling the demonic realm. Yet for Jesus His authority over the demonic realm was undisputed and absolute. He cast out demons with a word (Matthew 8:16, Mark 1:27) and relieved the symptoms of their possession (Luke 13:11-13). He also passed this authority to the twelve apostles and later to the seventy evangelists. Luke 10:17-22 says:

The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven". In that hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. "All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.

This is a great perspective statement. It puts authority over spirits in the second rank of blessings just behind those associated with salvation. Yet it clearly states that even babes—the ordinary Christians who are neither wise nor prudent—can operate in spiritual power and authority, providing they operate within the scope of Jesus' redeeming Name. Demons do not respect knowledge. They only respect authority and power. God gives His authority and power to all who believe and operate in his name. The humblest believer can be

endowed with great authority from God. The apostles were certainly “uneducated” miracle workers (Acts 4:13, 14).

The power to deal with the demonic comes from God through faith in the name of Jesus and is part of His works that He trained His Church to do (Matt 10:8). The Presence of the Kingdom demands the absence of the demonic and evicting evil powers is a battle of heavenly proportions that the Church is called to wage. We should remember that Jesus is the Lord of Life in all its forms, not just spiritual life, and that He can raise the dead and give people a second chance of life. After all, “nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). The possibility of the dead being raised in answer to prayer exists because Jesus has chosen to confront and defeat Death, “the last enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26). While Death will be the last enemy to be defeated some victories are possible here and now though most will undoubtedly wait until the resurrection of the dead when Christ returns (Edmiston, 2010, p. 14).

Jesus' redemption of mankind has opened up possibilities for the believer in healing the sick, raising the dead and in casting out demons. Two of these—healing and exorcism—seem to have been commonplace in the early church while raising the dead seems to be much rarer. Jesus confronted evil in all its forms and has borne not just our spiritual afflictions, such as sin and judgment, but our physical illnesses and emotional grief. All these were perfected for us on the Cross at Calvary. Since then he has continued to heal the sick through the ministry of His body, the Church.

Healing is a merciful act of God towards the sick. This is shown in numerous Bible verses. God shows us mercy and He says, “I will have mercy upon which I will have mercy and compassion upon whom I will have compassion”. Healing was essential to the ministry of Jesus because he had the power to perform miracles. They flowed from within Him as heat does from the sun. He knew it, people sensed it, and to Him they came in droves and multitudes. Jesus welcomed the blind, crippled, leprous, even dead people into his presence. No problem looked too big for Him to handle; none intimidated him into silence.

## VII. The Necessity of Jesus' Healing Ministry

Healing was essential to the ministry of Jesus because he had compassion equal to his power, as Matthew 8:17 and Matthew 14:14 illustrate. When the burgeoning throng interrupted His plans for a quiet retreat with His disciples, He healed their sick, and then fed them. That contrasted starkly with the disciples, who wanted the disturbing crowd dispersed. Knowing they could receive help if only they could access him, people responded to that compassion in bold, unorthodox ways. The Canaanite woman persisted through Jesus' disciples' desire to dismiss her and his own initial, courteous refusal, to get what she knew she could trust him to grant (Matthew 16:28). The woman with a haemorrhage crept silently through the crowd to merely touch His clothes (Mark 5:28). The crowd begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his garment; and as many as touched it were made well (Matthew 14:36).

Healing was essential to the ministry of Jesus because it symbolized His success in the spiritual warfare between himself and Satan. In ongoing discussions about evil, all secular thinkers, including many Christian ones, fail to mention Satan as the agent by which illness, disease, and disaster entered the world. Yet, in Luke 13:16, Jesus identified Satan as the enemy responsible for the harm done to humanity. Satan hates God compulsively, but has no recourse but to harm the humanity made in God's image. He unrelentingly attacks humanity, knowing His time to oppose God's creation is short (Revelation 12:12).

Whenever Jesus confronted Satan's presence in illness, disease, or demon-possession, He overcame the symptoms of Satan's presence to prove His conquest of Satan personally. Since the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy devil's work, he had to dismantle the apparatus of illness, disease, and demon-possession by which Satan exercised control over creation. The victory he won in the wilderness could be authenticated in ministry only by evicting Satan's power from the lives he had plundered.

By healing all bodily systems, and every bodily dysfunction, Jesus reclaimed and recovered for God all that Satan stole. Healings proved that Jesus had invaded Satan's realm, shackled him and, despite his unavailing protests, plundered and snatched from his malevolence any victim he wanted. Healing was essential to the ministry of Jesus because he envisioned healing as a physical symbol of forgiveness. He guaranteed the ultimate glory of the human body through his

personal resurrection, but forecast that restoration by healing twisted, shrunken, blinded limbs and organs. The paralytic's restoration is but one of many such examples (Mark 2:1-12). All of our physical ailments, limitations, and adversities have their final removal in the Master's initial healings and ultimate victory over death. The perfected result of forgiveness is the new, imperishable body Paul described in 1 Corinthians 15:35-57.

Healing was essential to the ministry of Jesus because healings offered indisputable evidence that He is the Christ of God (John 21:30-31). He considered healings as credentials, but only as extensions of himself as his own best defense. Since Jesus expected healings to recruit faith in him, he wouldn't heal gratuitously. Thus, when the Pharisees wanted to see a miraculous sign, he instead figuratively preached his death and resurrection. On His second visit to Nazareth, he performed but a few miracles because the people doubted him; and he frustrated Herod's hope for a miracle (Luke 23:9). Nonetheless, we see in Christ the evidence that God Almighty lived in human form and loved the humanity created in His image.

### **VIII. Healing as God's Provision**

God has always been opposed to sickness, and never in favour of it. In the Old Testament, He made provision for His covenant people to be healed (Exodus 15:16; 23:26). As long as the Israelites walked in the covenant, there was no sickness among them. Healing is God's will for Christian believers. The word of God settles the issue of God's willingness to heal the sick. God's word declares that healing is in God's plan of redemption. There is a divine health package for all His people. According to the Bible, anything which kills or destroys is from the enemy. Satan is the author of many terrible things in our world, including diseases. Jesus came to give us good life and divine health (John 10:10; Acts 10:38).

The Bible reveals the nature of God to us. It also reveals the attitude of God toward sin, sickness and disease. We refer to two portions of the Bible as follows:

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that

made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:4, 5).

This was to fulfill what was spoken by the Prophet Isaiah, “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases” (Matthew 8:17).

Hagin (2007, p. 66) explains that Jesus did not only redeem us from sin, he redeemed us from sickness. It is God’s will to heal us because healing is in his redemptive plan. Healing is not only in God’s redemptive plan. Because Jesus has sealed the New Testament covenant with his own blood, we have a legal right to divine healing (Heb. 8:6; 12:24). The covenant guarantees us the right and privileges that Jesus secured for us, which include divine healing.

Healing has always been in God’s plan of redemption, but many people do not receive their healing because of unbelief. The emphasis on faith is repeated again and again in the ministry of Jesus. We have three specific examples in the healing of the blind men in Matthew chapter nine, the healing of the woman with the issue of blood in Mark chapter five, and the healing of the centurion’s servant in Matthew chapter eight. The people received healing through their spirits, because they believed with their hearts.

## **IX. Spiritual Healing in Contemporary Christianity**

There is a growing understanding that mental factors underlie illness and health. This is why Peel (1987) asserts that there is continuing interest in Christian healing on the part of some reputable and theologically responsible Christian groups. He however states:

The general tendency of our scientific age is to write off all successful Christian healing as the result of suggestion or the placebo effects, and the diseases healed as being undoubtedly psychosomatic or hysterical. Wherever a reductionist explanation of this kind is transparently insufficient to explain a particular healing, the recovery is apt to be dismissed by the scientific skeptic as an instance of spontaneous remission. There is little likelihood that even physical evidence will convince the adamantly skeptical mind. It did not do so in Jesus’ time.

Spiritual healing is generally by prayer. It is a treatment in which a healer prays and sometimes touches somebody in order to treat an illness or disorder. Christian healing is not for dabblers. This spiritual healing is not simply to produce physical ease, but rather complete deliverance from sin, Satan, the world and hell. Its purpose is to establish God's kingdom in the heart and life of man and to make him fit for the heavenly kingdom. The promised kingdom of God calls for evidence of our faith by works, and Jesus has promised us that his disciples would do greater works than himself (James 4:12; John 14:12).

In the 4th century, influenced primarily by Western theologians, Christians began to regard illness as punishment or correction from God rather than a manifestation of evil or a condition contrary to God's perfect will. Spiritual and physical health increasingly became divided and compartmentalized. The grim realities of the Dark Ages, and an attitude in subsequent centuries toward faith as an intellectual rather than experiential exercise, further diminished the ministry of healing in the church. The Reformers continued to view salvation as health for the soul, not the body.

Despite these trends, individual Christians continued to receive healing from God, and history records their testimonies. In the mid-19th century, people began to reaffirm the relationships between mind, emotions, body, and spirit, and between faith and health. Today, while a holistic, integrated view of health emerges in medicine, a renewed church is opening up space for the Holy Spirit to move powerfully in the lives of the faithful in the ministry of healing (Peel, 1987).

The apostle Paul believes that healing is one of the special gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:9) and that the possibility exists that certain persons may possess this gift to an extraordinarily high degree. In the Epistle of James 5:14, the faithful are told that to be healed, those who are sick should call upon the elders of the church to pray over and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. After Jesus' death, Peter and Paul healed the sick and cast out demons, made a lame man walk, and raised the dead.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, suffering severe pain, demon-possessed, having seizures, paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, Jerusalem, Judea and

the region across the Jordan followed him. When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases” (Matt. 8:16-17).

## **X. Jesus’ Healing Ministry in Relation to Healing in African Religion**

It is a universal truth that orthodox medicine is a blessing to humanity. The Creator provided the herbs and medical and technical knowledge to harness other raw materials for treatment of diseases, healing and well-being. The traditional method of providing healing and good health in Africa has always been an effective alternative medicine from the beginning of age till today (Awolalu, 1970, p. 35).

The diagnoses and chosen methods of treatment in traditional African medicine rely heavily on spiritual aspects, oftentimes based on the belief that psycho-spiritual aspects should be addressed before medical aspects. In African culture, it is believed that “nobody becomes sick without sufficient reason” (Onwuanibe, 1979, p. 25). Traditional practitioners look at the ultimate “who” (that is, the nature of humanity) rather than the “what” (the actual sickness) when locating the cause and cure of an illness, and the answers given come from the cosmological beliefs of the people. Rather than looking to the medical or physical reasons behind an illness, traditional healers attempt to determine the root cause underlying it, which is believed to stem from a lack of balance between the patient and his or her social environment or the spiritual world—not by natural causes (Helwig, 2010). Natural causes are, in fact, not seen as natural at all, but manipulations of spirits or the gods. For example, sickness is sometimes said to be attributed to guilt by the person, family, or village for a sin or moral infringement. The illness, therefore, would stem from the displeasure of the gods or God, due to an infraction of universal moral law (Onwuanibe, 1979, p. 25). According to the type of imbalance the individual is experiencing, an appropriate healing plant will be used, which is valued for its symbolic and spiritual significance as well as for its medicinal effect (Helwig, 2010).

When a person falls ill, a traditional practitioner uses incantations to make a diagnosis. Incantations are thought to give the air of mystical and cosmic connections. Divination is typically used if the



illness is not easily identified, otherwise, the sickness may be quickly diagnosed and given a remedy. If divination is required, then the practitioner will advise the patient to consult a diviner who can further give a diagnosis and cure. Contact with the spirit world through divination often requires not only medication, but sacrifices (Onwuanibe, 1979, p. 25)

The concepts of medicine, miracles, and magic show clearly that Jesus had full knowledge of what healing entails. According to Kee (1986), Modern medicine is understood to be a method of diagnosis of human ailments and prescriptions for them based on combinations of theory and observations of the body, its functions and malfunctions. There is nothing supernatural about the practice of medicine; it is simply based on knowledge of the body and the effects that certain practices or substances have on the body. But in Jesus' healing process, miracles are used to combat any form of ailment. This embodies the claim that healing can be accomplished through appeal to and subsequent action by God, either directly or through a chosen intermediary agent—Jesus.

Healing in African religion is also effected through magic, defined as “a technique through word or act through which a desired end is achieved, whether that end lies in the solution to the seeker's problem or in damage to the enemy who caused the problem”. Magic involves knowledge of the laws of the cosmos to which all beings including the gods and other spiritual beings are subject. One could then force the gods or other beings to do one's bidding through manipulation of these laws. It should be noted that often, magic and medicine overlapped: at times the two were not always differentiated in the minds of the practitioners or the masses (Conserve Africa, 2002).

Jesus' healing ministry would have been understood by first-century Palestinian Jews as miraculous; he was neither a physician nor a magician, but healed by divine power. It must be stressed that, as already indicated and different from all other known examples, Jesus healed all who were brought to him—not simply one or two individuals at different times. Jesus' ability to heal universally would certainly have commended him to the masses as an extraordinary individual.

In Africa, the importance of traditional healers and remedies made from indigenous plants play a crucial role in the health of millions. According to the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), one estimate puts the number of Africans who routinely use these services for primary health care as high as 85% in Sub-Saharan Africa

(Stanley, 2004). Presently among most African Christians, modern medicine is used concurrently with African medicine and Jesus' healing power.

Essentially, Jesus' healing ministry is a divine mystery. It is faith healing. Those who believed touched him with faith and were healed. He cast out demons by commanding them to leave. He healed the lepers by just telling them to go and show themselves to the priest. Jesus could also apply mud and saliva from his mouth to heal. He prayed and brought Lazarus back to life. Whenever he recognised believing faith for any need in someone, he declared that it was granted to him according to his/her faith.

## **XI. Conclusion and Recommendations**

It is sometimes expected that a Christian believer should have more faith in God and the blood of Christ than in doctors and drugs. What should be our response to illness? Firstly, when we are sick we should seek proper medical treatment. It is not an act of rebellion against our faith to go to the doctor when we are sick. It makes all the sense in the world. Paul did not think it was an act of faithlessness to go to the doctor or take medicine when he got sick. The fact that he travelled with Luke, who was a physician, may have been directly related to his thorn in the flesh.

Secondly, we should learn to cooperate with the inevitable. This means we should admit that sometimes we are going to get sick. Sometimes we may get extremely sick. There may come a point and time when we stay sick. If Christians are not supposed to get sick, why did Paul, Epaphroditus, Timothy and Trophimus live with persistent illnesses (Galatians 4:14; Philippians 2:25-27; I Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:20)? If it is God's will for all believers to be healed of all sicknesses in every occasion, why did Paul not mention at least one of these instances? These men lived with their illnesses because in spite of their faith, their prayers, and their medical treatment there was nothing they could do other than cooperate with the inevitable.

Thirdly, we must learn to view sickness as a path to God. Does God want you sick? When Paul got sick he prayed about it. He prayed about it a lot. Philippians 4:6 tells us to pray about everything. Then, we must pray constantly until the prayer is answered or we have an understanding to accept it as the will of God. There are a number of ways in the Bible whereby Christian believers can obtain

healing. Since people's faith is not on the same level, God has provided several ways by which physical healing can be obtained. These could be followed according to the level of faith and cultural provision on healing that is available.

Lastly, modern science in the past, considered methods of traditional knowledge as primitive. Gone were the days when traditional diviner-healers were outlawed because they were considered by many nations to be practitioners of witchcraft and declared illegal by the colonial authorities. In recent years, the treatments and remedies used in traditional African medicine have gained more appreciation from researchers in Western science. Developing countries have begun to realize the high costs of modern health care systems and the technologies that are required, thus proving Africa's dependence to it.

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