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The praxis of practice for the chiropractic physician: A christocentric model for a physician-patient relationship

Introduction

What is embedded in all of life, which transcends all religions, history and cultures, is the fact that during our lives we all experience suffering in a variety of ways. This is inescapable. One way we suffer, in particular, is in the universality of unnecessary suffering from physical illnesses.

One of the life's basic needs is health. Health is a universal desire sought by all. Healing allows us to experience a physical liberation from our suffering. As we come to this dialogue to define a type of spirituality in a universal perspective, we need to bring our sufferings. As Christian physicians, we can share the essential truths of the gospel concerning the healing ministry of Jesus when we share in the sufferings of others, as we transcend our own sufferings.

We can use the focus and purpose of Jesus' healing ministry as our model, and integrate this into our spirituality as health care physicians. The starting point of this dialogue

begins with our roles and actions as professional health care providers, and our philosophical and theological views of what it is to be human. What I will discuss is how the physician encounters Christ through the sufferings of the sick. This experience leads to a spirituality of one's practice and a liberation of the patient, not only through physical means, but through a spiritual dimension towards wholeness.

I. The Whole of Reality - Our Embodiment and Jesus Incarnate

In relating to the whole of reality there can be no closer connection to God than through His creation, humankind. Touching each other, especially in the midst of suffering, we not only model Christ, but we become an instrument, a mediator of the love of Christ through our actions as His healing agents. Through our actions we connect, not only with the physical side of suffering, but the emotional and spiritual side of our humanity, and to the divine that animates all that exists

A. The Human Reality -The Human Body

1. Anthropology-Theological

When we touch another, we touch not only the physical body, but also the mystery within, the soul that animates our very existence. It is within this physician-patient encounter that we come close to touching Christ.

a. "In man nothing is 'merely biological' as nothing is 'merely spiritual'. Every cell of his body participates in his freedom and spirituality, and every act of his spiritual creativity is nourished by his vital dynamics" (Paul Tillich).

b. "A human person does not possess a body: rather, from the moment of conception, each [soul and personality], is expressed bodily, so that no one can be distinguished from his/her body" (Prokes, 24).

c. "What defines us as human beings is precisely this limited but real transcendence of rigid biological determinism. We are indeed bodily, biological, animal beings with inherent need for food, shelter, and reproduction...a human person is not a

pure intelligence like an angel... but a bodily being, evolving out of the natural world it shares yet never separate from it" (Ashley, 4 -5).

d. "The human body shares in the dignity of the "image of God": it is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit" (Catechism of the Catholic Church #364).

e. All body-involvement touches the divine-human encounter (Prokes 25).

f. "Being human is what we experience daily. Only by walking ever more deeply into that mystery, will we be able to ask what it really means to affirm *that the word became flesh*" ([Karl Rahner] Prokes 27).

2. Health - a universal hope

What we all strive for, in living out our lives, is an essential expression of life itself- health shining through as its fullest potential. Health is:

a. a state of complete physical, mental, and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (World

Health Organization).

b. the overall condition of an organism at a given time, soundness, especially of body or mind; freedom from disease or abnormality, or a condition of optimal well being.

(Dorland's Medical Dictionary)

3. Disease/Sickness: - a universal reality

What we struggle against, and at times only temporarily overcome, is sickness and disease. This morbid process is a deviation from a normative process of health. Disease is:

a. A definite morbid process having a characteristic strain of symptoms: it may affect the whole body or any of its parts, and its etiology, pathology, and prognosis may be known or unknown (Dorland's Medical Dictionary).

b. Sickness or illness: any condition or episode marked by pronounced deviation from the normal health state (Dorland's Medical Dictionary).

c. Sick: Suffering from or affected with a physical illness; or mentally ill or disturbed;

d. Unwholesome. (American Heritage Dictionary)

4. Suffering - a universal struggle

Death is the only final and ultimate reliever of suffering. This struggle of life encompasses all of humanity, at all times, and in all dimensions. When we suffer physically, we suffer spiritually. When we suffer spiritually, we suffer physically.

a. Dictionary definition:

Suffer: under go pain, grief, be damaged, subject to, to endure, bear, withstand, abide, and agonize (*Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus*)

b. Biblical definition:

1) Suffering is defined as the disruption of inner human harmony caused by physical, mental, spiritual and emotional forces. It is a deprivation of human good and is inseparable from the mystery of evil. (*The Dictionary of New Theology*).

2) The Old Testament saw value in both health and suffering. Health was seen as a blessing from God. Psalmist valued healing and praised God in thanksgiving. On the other hand, in Psalms 65:10 suffering had a purifying value, and in Job and Sirach there was value in suffering because it is part of the mys-

tery of the divine plan. (Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*).

B. The Divine Reality - The Body of Christ

God comes to us for many reasons, but most because of His love for us. It is through knowing this love that we will have the strength to uplift the grieved, the damaged, the suffering. Within this love, we partake in the mystery of the divine plan, as members of the Body of Christ.

a. The Word became flesh for us in order to save us by reconciling us with God (#457)

b. So that this we might know God's love (#458)

c. To be our model of holiness (#459)

d. To make us "partakers of the divine nature" (#460)

e. In his soul as in his body, Christ thus expresses humanly the divine ways of the Trinity (#470) (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*)

II. The Whole of Reality - Encountering Jesus in Suffering

How we are called to be in solidarity with Christ is through the suffering of others within our practices as health care providers.

1. Our Vocation

Christian health care professionals are called by their faith to understand this vocation in a special way, just as professionals of other religions or philosophies of life are called by theirs. Christians think of life as a gift of God and the body as a marvelous work of divine creation to be revered as a temple of God (I Cor. 6:19) (Ashley, 87).

2. Our Solidarity

Our pursuit of wholeness, for ourselves and for others, is solidarity with Christ's suffering and the patient's suffering (Haring).

3. Finding Jesus in Others

Jesus told us where to find Him and what we are to do for Him. When we have not done for others, we have not done for Christ. "I was hungry and you never gave me food.... Insofar as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me" (Matt. 25: 31-46).

4. The Body and Salvation

Jesus was the Word made Flesh, who came to save us through his suffering, death, and resurrection. It was through His own Incarnate suffering that He identified with our poverty of suffering, and became one with us in complete solidarity. We can see this when He chose to reveal to us the reality of salvation through his ministry of healing.

It was through our bodies, our physical pain, that he chose to reveal, in a physical manifestation, what is now and what will be our salvation, the kingdom of God. It is through our bodies that we come to experience the mystery of God. It is through the sufferings of Christ's body that we come to salvation. It is through the Body of Christ, the Eucharist, that we now can experience His presence. It is through the body of Christ, the Church that we minister to the people of God. The essence and manifestation of God's presence are mediated through our body's actions.

A Reflection on the Theological Rationale for Spirituality of Practice

I. Introduction

Throughout the New Testament the ministry of Jesus is filled with accounts of his healings. The theological basis for any profession dealing in health care is found in the actions of Jesus.

1. Jesus cares for the Sick

“Care for the sick, as well as the sinful, was one of Jesus' first concerns. He healed before he preached, and he went out to the lepers, the most neglected members of the community. If Christians embrace this concern for the bodily needs of the alienated, the experience of charity will sweep away many of the one sided views that divide us” (Ashley 10).

2. The Unique Healing Ministry of Jesus of Nazareth

a. The spiritual “Father of Medicine” was not Hippocrates of the island of Cos, but Jesus of the town of Nazareth.” (Kelsey- J. W. Provonsha, M.D. “The Healing Christ” *Current Medical Digest* Dec. 1959.3)

b. “The interest Jesus showed in the physical and mental health of men was greater than that of any other leader or religious system from Confucius through Buddha to Zen and Islam”

(Kelsey 53).

3. The New Testament Recordings

“Nearly on-fifth of the entire Gospels is devoted to Jesus' healings and the discussion occasioned by it...we find that everywhere Jesus went he functioned as a religious healer. Forty-one distinct instances of physical and mental healing are recorded in the four Gospels.... [This] is by no means represents the total” (Kelsey 54).

II. Biblical Accounts

1. Jesus' Ministry

The activities of his ministry consisted of teaching, proclaiming, and healing (Matthew 4:23, 9:35). “He went around all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness among the people” (Matthew 4:23).

2. Who Jesus Cured

Luke reports Jesus healed all those in the crowd that needed to be cured (9:10-12) and on the Sermon on the Plains Luke tell us that “all those who came to hear Jesus were healed from their diseases: and even those who were tormented by unclean

spirits were cured”(Luke 6:18). He felt compassion for those who suffered and acted to liberate them from their pain. For example he cured the lepers (Matt 8:1-4), the demon possessed (Luke 9:42), the paralyzed (Luke 5:18-25), the old (Matthew 8:14-15) and the young. He even raised the dead (Luke 8:50-56).

3. How Jesus Cured

Some were cured by just his word (Matt 8:16), or by his touch, or as we see in the story of the women hemorrhaging for years, just by her faith and her touching him (Matthew 5: 24-34). Some were cured by their faith alone in the story of centurion (Matthew 8:5-10) and the paralyzed man on the stretcher (Luke 5:17-26). As Jesus touched, so to we come to our patients though touch, as an action of our skills.

4. Why Jesus Cured

a. as an evil to be overcome

Jesus saw sickness as an evil from which people suffered, as a consequence from sin and a sign of the power of Satan over men (Luke 13:16). “He performed exorcisms as the expression of God’s assault against the dominion of Satan and a sign of the

transformation of human life is under way...” (Carroll 137).

b. as a sign of forgiveness

In the Lord’s Prayer Jesus tells us to forgive others as God forgives us. Jesus also said, “Love your enemies.” Jesus never refused to heal anyone in need, even if he or she lacked faith or were his enemies. In Luke 22:50-53 we find the compassion and forgiveness of Jesus in the action of healing his enemy. Knowing death awaited him, he did not hesitate to heal the ear of the servant of the high priest, even though this man was taking part in his arrest. He transcended his own suffering to relieve another’s suffering.

c. as a sign of the kingdom in the future, and in the here and now

We can see when Jesus spoke of the future he acted in the present through his actions of healing to bring this to reality. Jesus revealed to us that He is the Messiah, the ‘Messiah of Deeds.’ Jesus actions of healing was the present reality and the sign of what is here and now, and what was to come, the kingdom of God. (Carroll 134).

d. to liberate

“Luke links Jesus’ activity of healing to a scriptural paradigm... [in] which Jesus inaugurates his public ministry (4:16-30). With Jesus, the era of liberation and divine beneficence promised by Isaiah (61:1-2; 58:6) has begun, for he is then endowed with divine Spirit who will bring good news to the poor, release the captives and oppressed, and sight to the blind...As he presses beyond conventional social boundaries to embrace those living on the margins of society. Jesus will draw the latter into the fellowship of God’s reign. For the sick, this shattering of existing social barriers will mean “salvation,” that is, deliverance and health (see Luke 8:48, 50:17:19, and cf. 7:50; 19:9-10)” (Carroll 134).

5. The meaning of Jesus healings

“The fundamental meaning of Jesus’ mighty deeds of healing and exorcism is this: God wills human wholeness – in its physical, psychological, and social dimensions—and in Jesus’ ministry God’s will is accomplished in concrete terms, for the sovereign rule of heaven’s exerting itself” (Carroll 137).

6. Ministry with his disciples

a. When Jesus and his disciples preached, they healed. "They went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs, and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation "(Mark 16:20).

b. In Matthew 10: 1 and in Luke 9:1-3 we see that he summoned the twelve apostles to go out and proclaim the kingdom of God and gave them the power to cure every disease and every illness. "As you go, make this proclamation: The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 10:7).

c. Luke 10:8-9, "Whatever town you enter and they welcome you, eat what is set before you, cure the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God is at hand for you.'"

7. After the Resurrection

Jesus expected the work of proclaiming and healing to continue even beyond his disciples. When we help the healing process we can truly say like the apostles, 'the kingdom of God is at hand for you.'

"Since Jesus was still 'with them' (Mt 28:20), it is not

astonishing that the apostles should renew His salvific deeds (Act 3:1-10), beginning with the divine miracles of Pentecost: for He had promised them this power, almost institutional (Mark 1: 17), and he had given them something in its use (Matthew 10:8)... The worth of an auricular witness which distinguish an authentic messenger of God (*Dictionary of Biblical Theology* 363).

8. Jesus gives us our Praxis

" For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcome me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me"(Matthew 26:35).

9. The Biblical Physician

Hold the physician in honor, for he is essential to you, and it was God who established his profession (1). He endowed men with the knowledge to glory in his mighty works, through which the doctor eases pain (6,7a). Thus God's creative work continues without ceasing in its efficacy on the surface of the earth (8). (Sirach 38: 1-33)

The Key Traits of a Spirituality for Practice

The classical meaning of praxis consists of knowledge and action. It is through our specialized professional knowledge and through the art and science of delivering health care services we live out our spirituality.

1. Vatican Council II -Our role as Physicians.

In our 'call to holiness' we live as ethical professionals and apostles of Jesus, our model, through our actions. It is through this praxis that we participate in bringing the 'here and now of the kingdom of God' to others.

We heal or exert a healing influence as chiropractic physicians. We enter into this praxis process through our knowledge and skill of applying specifically a clinical therapeutic touch to relieve the suffering from disease.

2. Health as a Hierarchical Principle

This spirituality focuses on the universally held ideals found in other ethical systems, such as the dignity of the human person, freedom and human rights. It approaches human rights on a hierarchically arranged set of priorities,

which begins with the right to life. This right to life encompasses the right to health and relief from its unnecessary suffering. It focuses on those who are threatened by repression of sickness and disease (Schubeck 25).

3. Actions of Healing

Our technical work is to relieve, if only temporally or incrementally, the source of pain or distress, and to restore to health or soundness the wholeness of the person. Wholeness is achieved through acting with the body's physical restorative powers, which effects the spiritual. This helps to bring wholeness, since the spiritual and the physical are inseparable.

4. An Ethic of Compassion

Our professional ethics and set of personal principles of moral conduct, is governed by our faith and traditional beliefs in the dignity of every human. This is based in scripture that each one is made in the image of God. Our deep awareness of the sufferings and pains of another, is the foundation of the virtue and ethic, compassion.

5. Our End Goals - Clinical

and Eschatological - Wholeness and Salvation

a. As in theology of liberation that is built on the eschatology of the Second Vatican Council, which taught that earthly progress can contribute to the better ordering of human society, the health care practitioner contributes to the ordering of the common good by providing health services, through the relief of suffering.

b. Salvation is a preservation or deliverance from destruction, difficulty, or evil. In this particular praxis the evil we fight against is the actual physical illnesses and sufferings from diseases. The actual source or cause of the deliverance from this suffering is God's grace acting within the body's natural healing processes.

c. The means of this deliverance comes from our ability to apply the knowledge and skill given to us as a gift of God.

d. When we achieve for others relief from the suffering afflicted by sickness, we liberate the body. The body is now set free from this oppression, which brings the kingdom of God here and now, a wholeness. Salvation, the hope and

the reality, becomes now present and once again renewed. We become the mediators of this action (Martinez).

Conclusion

A Model of Spirituality - The Praxis of Practice
The Praxis of Practice is a *spirituality of professionalism and ethics*. As we conform to the ethics and standards of our profession, and utilize our skills in a competent manner befitting our training in technical and practical knowledge, we reflect our concerns also for the social and the spiritual well being of our patients, while aspiring to answer 'the call to holiness' through compassion and caring.

While it is a *contextualized spirituality* within the mutual trust of the physician-patient relationship, this spirituality reflects a larger social responsibility focused not only on the common good, but also on a lived commitment to the patient as a person with an individual inherent value and dignity. It is a *spirituality of service and restoration* that does not focus on ideology, but on one's practical actions for the purpose of serving the health needs of another, to aid in the recovery or relief from

suffering. This action aims at the furtherance of the Kingdom of God.

By a preferential option for the sick this praxis becomes a *spirituality of solidarity* with the suffering of Christ, imaged in the weakest. The sick are mediators of Christ, not because he or she is sick, but because they represent Jesus in their suffering. It is a *spirituality of transcendence* because it values the sacredness of sick person knowing they are made in the image and likeness of God. This is a *biblical spirituality* based upon the healing ministry of Jesus, who is our model. Furthermore, it is a *spirituality of prayer and contemplation* in which we contemplate God's power as the source of healing and the Holy Spirit as the guide of our actions. It is a *spirituality of transformation and conversion* within the physician-patient relationship because the sick represent Christ for us as we come to represent Christ for them, by transcending our own sufferings through a loving service.

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