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Religion and health - spirituality and healing

The Healing Ministry – a Chronology

By Edgar Widmer



- 1225 b.Chr. Ten commandments revealed to Moses for the individual and common wellbeing
- 800 b. Chr. Hesiod refers about Aesculap as the healing God
- 600 b. Chr. First Aesculapian school in the temple of Epidaurus
Interpretation of disease - magic and- rational
Symptomatic treatment: by herbal medicines, hydrotherapy, diets, surgery, advice in lifestyle
- 400 b.Chr. Hippocrates (460-377) formulates the doctor's ethical chart (oath of Hippocrates). His father introduces him into anatomy and sacerdotal medicine. Later he exercises the medical art free from religious contexts rather systematically observing clinical data.
- 250 b. Chr. Aesculapian temple on Tiber island in Rome
- 180 b. Ch. Jesus Sirach: „praise of the physician“ (38,1-15) Paradigm change: abandoning traditional israelic belief in demons as cause of sickness and opening up to Greek empirical medicine as part of God's Genesis.
- Christian era Christ as a healer, St. Luke, Apostle and Doctor,
Faith and charity is one. The weak and miserable are looked after by the community.
Solidarity enters into the world
- 215 Clemens of Alexandria declares that Christ is the healer, Christus Medicus Mundi
Therapy for disease was reduced to reconciliation with oneself, the neighbours and with God
Explanation for disease: - punishment for the original sin
- a chance to participate in Christ's suffering
- 380 Basilius creates in Ceasarea a hospital complex, at this time the first and unique of its kind
- 400 Celsus, a contemporary and friend of Augustinus, published: “De medicamentis”
proof that Christian doctors also practiced the art of healing.
- 431 Christian Doctors as Nestorians fled from Syria to Persia and founded medical schools in Nisibis and Gondischapur. Here the antique knowledge of the Greeks was translated into Arabic. Under the rule of Harun al Rashid (786-809) doctors from Gondischapur founded the Bagdad Medical School. One of its scholars, Rhazes, published in 865 Al-hawi, containing the medical knowledge of the age. It had finally been published in the 12th century in Latin with the title: “Liber Continens”, at the time, when in Salerno, the first medical school under western rule, started.

- 529 Emperor Justinian closes in Athens the last Aesculapian temple in order to eradicate paganism. Saint Benedict founded Monte Cassino, Monks preserve the ancient knowledge of the aesculapian schools copying ancient texts. For centuries the “pagan” knowledge was only preserved but not further developed, whereas the School of Bagdad continued to develop medical science. Islamic culture spread all over Northern Africa and reached Cordoba where Christians came in touch with Arab knowledge. Important representatives were: Averroes, Ibn Ruched, (1126-1198) as philosopher and Maimonides Moïse (1135-1204) as philosopher and doctor. Here Gérard of Cremona translated Albucasis’(940) Al Tasrif, a compendium on surgery, and published it in Toledo in the same periode. Albertus Magnus from Cologne, (1193- 1280), translated and interpreted the work of Avicenna, (980-1037), who was the most famous doctor and philosopher of Bagdad, By him science was based on exact observation of natural phenomena. Experiments had to prove hypothetical theories. Coming into contact with Arab culture, the later Pope, Gerbert d’Aurillac took over the arithmetic system.
- 590-604 Pope Gregor the Great renovates the DIACONIAE, institutions for sick and poor pilgrims. Formerly, in antiquity, compassion was not considered as a virtue. The antique Gods, such as Zeus, may have protected foreigners but never offered help to the poor.. Unselfish engagement for the poor and Solidarity was introduced into the antique world as a new challenge, as a Christian virtue. Therefore since Constantin at the Lateran and at S. Peters Diaconiae were installed and new ones were founded by Gregor at S. M. in via Lata, S.M. in Cosmedin and S. Giorgio in Velabro Health care became an essential part of pastoral care right from the beginning of the Church.
- 900 Nevertheless, in the* Lorsch’er Arzneibuch”, a Codex of a German Convent from around 900, we still read an excuse for having transmitted pagan texts. It explains that it was only done out of compassion with the sick.
- 1100–1300 During the crusades the Order of the knights of Malta is founded. It takes care of the sick and wounded. The crusader’s contact with Arab culture leads to the foundation of the First European Medical School in Salerno by Frederic II.
- 1300-1500 Hospital-Congregations (of saint John and Saint Antony, Hospital Order of Saint John of God, later the Camillians and in recent time the Medical Missions Sisters and many others) started to serve the sick and marginalised in which Christ is seen. Hospitals are called Hôtel de Dieu, many are dedicated to the Holy Spirit
- 1790 French Revolution, Beginning of the period of enlightenment. Secularisation of science
- 1850 Industrialisation creates social illness. Public Health as a science and Social Insurances start
- 1875 Study of tropical diseases goes hand in hand with Colonialism
- 1921 Mission-Encyclical of Benedict XV: „Maximum illud“ Catholic Medical Mission Work starts as a testimony of Christian faith
- 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 25 concerning right for health)
- 1950 WHO Definition of Health as physical, social and mental well-being
- 1960 The first National Co-ordinating Agencies of Church-related Health Services start
- 1978 WHO Declaration of Alma Ata concerning PHC. Poverty is recognised as main cause for disease.
- 1983 36th WHA discussing the importance of “the Spiritual Dimension in Health Care Programmes”.

- 1983 COR UNUM. Pastoral for Health is defined. A paradigm-shift away from mere Pastoral for the sick towards engagement in favour of health.
- 1985 By Motu Proprio „DOLENTIUM HOMINUM“ John Paul II creates the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral of Health
Episcopal Conferences are asked to nominate bishops responsible for the portfolio of health
The dioceses are asked to create professional health councils
- 1995 “Making the Case for Not-For-Profit Healthcare” Joseph Cardinal Bernardin makes the point:
Healthcare is one of those goods which by nature, because it is essential to human dignity and part of human rights, can not be a mere commodity.
- 1997 The International Vatican Conference, “Church and Health in the World, Expectations and Hopes on the Threshold of the Year 2000“ adopts „Health for All- Policy” of WHO.
- 2000 First International Working Conference among Bishops holding the health portfolio within Bishops Conferences: “SOESTERBERG STATEMENT”.
- 2003 The World Health Assembly adopts the Resolution on “The role of contractual arrangements in improving health systems’ performance”
- 2004 Kampala, Working Conference among Anglophone African Bishops defining the Healing Ministry: and defining the Kampala Declaration
- 2005 Working Conference for bishops from Francophone and Lusophone African countries discussing Public private partnership formulating the Cotonou Declaration
- 2006 Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, “Deus Caritas est”
Action and prayer have to be one
- 2009 2nd Synod of African Bishops, Vatican City, Document of the Pontifical Council for Health and AISAC on Catholic Health Care recommending engagement for health as means for justice and reconciliation

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