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## On Healing and Christianity: An Examination of Origen and Tertullian's Views on Healing and Christianity

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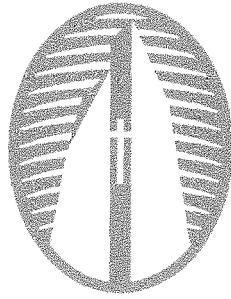
ON HEALING AND CHRISTIANITY: AN EXAMINATION OF ORIGEN AND  
TERTULLIAN'S VIEWS ON HEALING AND CHRISTIANITY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

BY  
BRIAN L. RAPP

TUALATIN, OREGON  
APRIL, 2006

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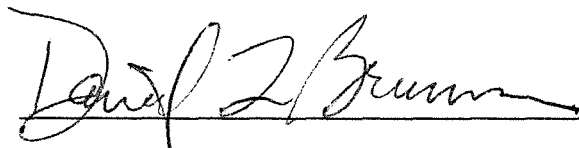
### THESIS ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE

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CHRISTIANITY**

**Presented by:**    BRIAN L. RAPP

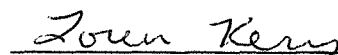
**Date:**               April 25, 2006

We, the undersigned, certify that we have read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree of Master of Arts in Theological Studies.



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*(Daniel L. Brunner)*



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*(Loren Kerns)*

To the Archiatros, and His healers of my heart:  
Kimberley, Collin, Joshua, and Adam.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

C.E.	Common Era
<i>Cels.</i>	<i>Against Celsus (Contra Celsum)</i>
<i>Comm. Jo.</i>	<i>Commentary on the Gospel of St. John</i>
<i>Comm. Rom.</i>	<i>Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans</i>
<i>De nat. hom.</i>	<i>De natura hominis (On the Nature of Man)</i>
<i>FC</i>	<i>The Fathers of the Church</i>
<i>GCS</i>	<i>Die griechische christliche Schriftsteller der ersten [drei] Jahrhunderte</i>
<i>Hom. Jer.</i>	<i>Homilies on Jeremiah</i>
<i>Hom. Lev.</i>	<i>Homilies on Leviticus</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia graeca</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia latina</i>
<i>Princ.</i>	<i>First Principles (De principiis, Peri archōn)</i>
WHO	World Health Organization

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the theological and practical views of Origen and Tertullian on the relationship between healing and Christianity. Its introduction examines the reason for the study, outlines research into this field, and explains the research method utilized. The following two chapters devoted to Origen and Tertullian begin by examining the role of healing in their theology. The chapters then move to a discussion of their understanding and view on the nascent Western medical science found in the Greco-Roman world. Each chapter then ends with a look at their views on the role of faith healing. All of these subjects have been touched on by distinguished scholars who have looked at the relationship between early Christianity and healing in the Roman Empire. This paper seeks to collate this work, thereby allowing a more specific view of that relationship in Origen and Tertullian, who have been respectively called the founders of Eastern and Western Christian theology. A final chapter systematically examines Origen and Tertullian for similarities in their views on healing and Christianity by comparing their writings to the propaedeutic premises proposed by Darrel W. Amundsen for the study of patristic thought concerning healing. The paper ends with a general summary of the paper and its conclusions. The research tended to show a strong emphasis on healing in the theology of Origen and Tertullian. Each church father had specific emphases, but both showed a commonality of belief in the ability of Jesus to heal the minds, bodies, souls, and societal structures of the Greco-Roman world.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

For almost two thousand years, the two communities have loved, hated, and fought each other. They have lived and died together. Western medicine and Christianity have had to interact since the first Christian was afflicted with physical suffering and was forced to decide what a Christian should do in that situation. During the two thousand years since that choice, the interactions have been fraternal, paternal, hostile, and loving, eventually ending in a truce of territorial division. How long can this truce of territorial division between Christianity and medicine hold when both, in their purest forms, actually seek to control the idea of health for humanity without limitations by the other? With the rise of medical science, what should Christianity's relationship be to the increasing possibilities and dilemmas of modern medicine? Does the age old relationship between Christianity and Western medicine still maintain any importance? How can some light be shed on these questions?

This study of the writings of Origen of Alexandria and Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (Tertullian) on healing and medicine has bearing on this historical intertwining of Greco-Roman medicine with Christianity. It can primarily provide some historical insight into the views of two foundational early Christian thinkers on the practical outworking of this relationship in the life of the Christian faith. Beyond the pure research goal of understanding this relationship, there are practical research benefits. For

any reader, the study of Origen and Tertullian on healing can help to explain the synthesis of Christian beliefs with Greco-Roman medical science which resulted in the foundation of modern Western medicine. For the Christian, the study of Origen and Tertullian on the subject of healing can help to see this relationship in a new light. Viewing that relationship during the pre-Christendom world might allow a better understanding of the situation in the current post-Christendom world where previous Christendom models are faltering.

### **Why Analyze Origen and Tertullian's Relationship to Healing?**

The steady advance of science into the manipulation, and potential creation, of the human psyche has upset the truce between Christianity and modern science. As the definition of what humanity is, and will be, comes into question, one must ask: Does Christianity's views on healing still have significance given the goal, and potential, of science to "heal" all psyches? In answer to this question, modern medical science is often at a loss to provide a satisfactory meaning for its actions. The naturalistic philosophy at the root of modern medical science precludes it from answers that are not ultimately reducible to observations of cause and effect. This utilitarian pragmatism does not adequately serve many people in the search for meaning in the healing arts. To find a purpose for our medical beliefs, Western society has typically looked to the Judeo-Christian world view to find the meaning and purpose for its healing, and many continue to do so. Secondly, the views of Christianity should matter to medical science due to the number of Christian adherents alone. The needs of these patients require that the question of what Christianity desires from the healing arts should maintain importance. It is a subject worthy of analysis by society.

Understanding the relationship between Western medicine and Christianity is more than just that of customer service to its Christian consumers. Modern Western medicine has been intimately affected by the blending of Greco-Roman medical thought with the beliefs of Christian thinkers, Christian physicians, Christian scientists, and the Christianized societies that Western medicine evolved in. Other influences, such as the Arab medical tradition have also played into the history of Western medicine, but the historically significant interaction of Christianity and Western medicine remains a crucial factor in its development and therefore worthy of probing. Stephen d'Irsay, in his 1927 article "Patristic Medicine," makes note of this blending of Christianity and Greco-Roman medical science in the second and third century of the current era. He writes that it was Christianity that brought "charity and genuine altruism" to Greco-Roman medical science.<sup>1</sup> The early church also contributed to medical science intellectually. The importance of "the direct intellectual interest of the Fathers of the Church in things medical . . . lies not so much in their possible originality, but in their gathering activities. Not as creators, but as conservators did they contribute a share to the history of medical civilization."<sup>2</sup> Beyond the emotional and intellectual effects of Christianity on Western medicine, it had a practical effect on "the field of action . . . [where] several ancient Christians, in East and West, gave an impetus to institutional development, to the monastic school and hospital which remained foci of medical labor throughout the tempestuous Dark Ages, reaching into the fullness of medieval civilization."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen d'Irsay, "Patristic Medicine," *Annals of Medical History* 9 (1927): 364.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 364-5.

Henry Sigerist, the lauded medical historian, concurs with d'Irsay's appraisal of the ethical impact that the integration of Christian values had on Greco-Roman society and therefore its medical tradition:

Thus the sick man in Greek society also found himself burdened with an odium, not that of sin but of inferiority.

It remained for Christianity to introduce the most revolutionary and decisive change in the attitude of society toward the sick. Christianity came into the world as the religion of healing, as the joyful Gospel of the Redeemer and of Redemption. It addressed itself to the disinherited, to the sick and afflicted and promised them healing, a restoration both spiritual and physical....It became the duty of the Christian to attend to the sick and poor of the community....And when Christianity became the official religion of the state, the family[Christendom] embraced the whole of society, and from then on society assumed the obligation to care for its sick members.

The social position of the sick man thus became fundamentally different from what it had been before. He assumed a preferential position which has been ever since.<sup>4</sup>

This innovation of ethics in medical care derived its impetus from a new belief. Anne Merideth writes that the growing influence of Christianity in Greco-Roman society “owed as much to the Christian willingness to care for the sick as it had to do with its ability to cure the sick.”<sup>5</sup> These “early Christians regarded physical life as a gift of God that was so precious that they viewed the care of the sick as a categorical imperative,” according to Darrel Amundsen.<sup>6</sup> Origen and Tertullian, through their teaching and writings, were major factors in this impact of Christianity on Greco-Roman culture.

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Ernest Sigerist, *Civilization and Disease* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1945), 69-70. It should be noted that on page 70 Sigerist does say that “the attitudes of society towards the sick that prevailed before the Christian era were never entirely overcome.”

<sup>5</sup> Anne Elizabeth Merideth, “Illness and Healing in the Early Christian East” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1999), 17.

<sup>6</sup> Darrel W. Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 75.

This extensive inculcation of Western society, and its medical tradition, with the Christian imperative towards altruism and care of the sick, had an effect which continues in the current Western medical tradition. Thus, the writings of Origen and Tertullian allow us to view a part of the historical formation of the current christianized Western medical synthesis as these two early Christian leaders interacted with the Greco-Roman establishment of medicine and healing.

For the Christian struggling with the ethical dilemmas of the current century, further understanding can be derived from the study of Origen and Tertullian on the relationship between healing and Christianity. With the end of western Christendom, a situation exists where the interests of Christianity are no longer necessarily the interests of society. Christians must now develop new models to deal with the medical challenges and blessings of the present day, as well as those more drastic challenges shortly over the horizon. The Western medicine of the post-Christendom world seeks to master the creation of human life, create new forms of life, and heal all imperfections in a world with limited resources and a commitment to plurality of belief over certainty of belief. What will the Christian do in this environment?

Origen and Tertullian provide modern Christianity a way to look at the earliest formations of its beliefs. These beliefs were formed during a time which, in many ways, bears more similarity to the current post-Christendom Western society than that of Western Christendom one hundred years ago. Christianity is no longer in control of the social agenda in a post-Christendom world, in comparison to its influence during Western Christendom. This new status for Christianity is therefore somewhat similar to its status

in the pre-Christendom world of Origen and Tertullian where it had growing popular support but limited direct influence over power structures.

Further similarities exist. Humanity is much the same today as it was in Origen and Tertullian's day. Many of the same diseases, mental issues, and social illnesses continue to afflict people as they did eighteen hundred years ago. Given our common humanity, their opinions would seem to still bear on the modern situation at many points.

Origen and Tertullian have also been noted as beginning points of the two divisions in Christian theology between the East and the West, respectively the Greek and Latin traditions. By analyzing the thought of Origen and Tertullian, it is possible to view Christian thought on healing just after the initial formative years of Christianity, just as it was beginning to work out its views on the relationship between Christianity and medicine, and just before the characteristic differences of each tradition became entrenched.

### **Review of the Literature on Healing and Christianity**

The question of the role that Christianity played in healing is not new. Rodney Stark says that as early as the second century the Christian imperative to care for the sick was impacting the culture around it.<sup>7</sup> In 1892, the church historian Adolf von Harnack wrote an extensive essay on the subject, which he referred to in a footnote of his *History of Dogma*:

I have attempted to shew in my essay, 'Medicinisches aus der ältesten Kirchengesch' (1892), the extent to which the Gospel in the earliest Christendom was preached as medicine and Jesus as a Physician, and how the Christian Message was really comprehended by the Gentiles as a medicinal religion. Even

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<sup>7</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 81-3.

the Stoic philosophy gave itself out as a soul therapeutic, and Æsculapius was worshipped as a Savior-God; but Christianity alone was a religion of healing.<sup>8</sup>

In 1914, Arthur Stanley Pease wrote an article thoroughly noting the uses of medical terminology in many early church theologians.<sup>9</sup> This study of the relationship between healing and Christianity was continued by Stephen d'Irsay who contributed two major articles on the subject of early Christianity and healing in 1927 and 1930. "Patristic Medicine" was the more significant of the two in providing research on the views of Origen and Tertullian for this paper.<sup>10</sup>

During the middle part of the twentieth century, the study of the relationship between Christianity and healing was continued in various forms by Henry Sigerist, Victor Dawe, Evelyn Frost, Morton Kelsey, Rudolph Arbesmann, and D. S. Wallace-Hadrill. Sigerist noted the effect that early Christianity had on Greco-Roman medicine in his study of the general history of Western medicine.<sup>11</sup> At about this same time, Arbesmann wrote his article on the early Christian tradition of "Christus medicus" in Augustine.<sup>12</sup> Focusing on early Christianity, Dawe and Frost created scholarly studies

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<sup>8</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 1 (Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith, 1961), 147 n. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur Stanley Pease, "Medical Allusions in the Works of St. Jerome," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 25 (1914).

<sup>10</sup> Stephen d'Irsay, "Christian Medicine and Science in the Third Century," *Journal of Religion* 10 (1930); d'Irsay, "Patristic Medicine."

<sup>11</sup> Sigerist, *Civilization and Disease*.

<sup>12</sup> Rudolph Arbesmann, "The Concept of 'Christus Medicus' in St. Augustine," *Traditio: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought and Religion* 10 (1954).



which primarily focused on the relationship between Christianity and spiritual healing.<sup>13</sup>

Wallace-Hadrill created a thorough and insightful study on *The Greek Patristic View of Nature*, which was very useful for Chapter 2 on Origen and healing.<sup>14</sup> About this time Kelsey also wrote his first edition of the classic study *Healing and Christianity*.<sup>15</sup>

Towards the end of the twentieth century various scholars addressed the subject. Since the early 1980's Darrel Amundsen and Gary Ferngren have written many scholarly studies of early Christianity and healing, both as partners and individually.<sup>16</sup> Their work

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<sup>13</sup> Evelyn Frost, *Christian Healing, a Consideration of the Place of Spiritual Healing in the Church of Today in the Light of the Doctrine and Practice of the Ante-Nicene Church* (London: Mowbray, 1954); Victor Gladstone Dawe, "The Attitude of the Ancient Church toward Sickness and Healing" (Th.D. diss., Boston University, 1955).

<sup>14</sup> D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Greek Patristic View of Nature* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1968).

<sup>15</sup> Morton T. Kelsey, *Healing and Christianity: A Classic Study* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1995). This is the third edition revised from the 2nd ed. published in 1988 under the title: *Psychology, Medicine & Christian Healing*.

<sup>16</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*; Darrel W. Amundsen, "Medicine and Faith in Early Christianity," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 56, no. 3 (1982); Darrel W. Amundsen and G. B. Ferngren, "Virtue and Medicine in Early Christianity through the Middle Ages," in *Virtue and Medicine: Explorations in the Character of Medicine Philosophy and Medicine*, ed. Earl E. Shelp (Dordrecht; Boston: D. Reidel Pub. Co.; Hingham, MA: Sold and distributed in the U.S.A. and Canada by Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1985); Darrel W. Amundsen, Ferngren, Gary B., "Medicine and Religion: Early Christianity through the Middle Ages," in *Health/Medicine and the Faith Traditions: An Inquiry into Religion and Medicine*, ed. Martin E. Marty and Kenneth L. Vaux (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); Darrel W. Amundsen and Gary B. Ferngren, "The Perception of Disease and Disease Causality in the New Testament," in *Principat* 37, 3 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996); Edward J. Larson and Darrel W. Amundsen, *A Different Death: Euthanasia & the Christian Tradition* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998); Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire: (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); G. B. Ferngren, "Early Christian Views of the Demonic Etiology of Disease," in *From Athens to Jerusalem: Medicine in Hellenized Jewish Lore and in Early Christian Literature: Papers of the Symposium in Jerusalem, 9-11 September 1996*, ed. Samuel S. Kottak and Manfred Horstmanshoff (Rotterdam:

provided a significant amount of information for this study on Origen and Tertullian in the form of leads to primary documents and analysis of the relationship. David Bostock's article on Origen and Greco-Roman medical theory was an extensive and crucial source of information for Chapter 2 on Origen.<sup>17</sup> Lastly, the doctoral dissertations of Anne Elizabeth Merideth and Jerry Pattengale provided useful information and insight on the subject.<sup>18</sup>

Much research has been done on the relationship between Christianity and healing. This study of Origen and Tertullian seeks to build on the work of these previous scholars through the collection of the many various threads of research on this aspect of Origen and Tertullian, thereby shining a light on the specific manner in which these two major early Christian thinkers interacted with the subject of healing.

### **Research Method**

Definitions are important. To clearly discuss the topic at hand it must be understood what is meant by health, healing, and medicine? Amundsen points us to the WHO definition of health which has remained in place for over fifty years: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity."<sup>19</sup> Both Origen and Tertullian advocated, with exceptions, for the

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Erasmus Pub., 2000); G. B. Ferngren, "Early Christianity as a Religion of Healing," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 66 (1992). This footnote is a listing of much of the work by Amundsen, Ferngren, and other coauthors.

<sup>17</sup> David G. Bostock, "Medical Theory and Theology in Origen," in *Origeniana tertia: the Third International Colloquium for Origen Studies*, ed. R. P. C. Hanson and Henri Crouzel (University of Manchester: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1981).

<sup>18</sup> Merideth, "Illness and Healing"; Jerry A. Pattengale, "Benevolent Physicians in Late Antiquity: The Cult of Anargyroi" (Ph.D. diss., Miami University, 1993).

healing of the physical, mental and social problems of the individual and society. The WHO goal of health, and that of early Christianity, bear similarity and therefore share common ground for discussion and comparison.

Amundsen also provides us with a clear and concise definition for the term medicine:

Medicine typically has had well-being, in the sense of physical (and perhaps mental) health, as its sole telos. By 'medicine' we mean (1) the substances, mechanisms, and procedures for restoring and preserving health and physical wellness; and (2) those who employed such substances, mechanisms, and procedures, in at least one of their recognized roles in their society, in order to assist people who availed themselves of their expertise.<sup>20</sup>

The realm of health in the WHO definition is expanded beyond what can be achieved by the typical Western limitation of healing/medicine to pharmacology, surgery, and physiological manipulation. Healing becomes a more holistic definition which includes those medical therapies, but adds other interventions which lead to personal/social mental health and physical well-being. The actions of the early Christian church fit this WHO definition of healing as they reformed the lives of individual to healthier behaviors, and added a newly altruistic ethos that elevated the status of the sick in Greco-Roman medicine and society.

After seeking clarification on the meaning of healing and medicine, key works on the subject of early Christianity and healing were collected. They were then reviewed for general information, and particularly for specific data pertaining to Origen and Tertullian. Particular emphasis was placed on locating references to the literature of Origen and Tertullian from the secondary literature. These references to the primary sources were then

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<sup>19</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

located in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* online edition at Christian Classics Ethereal Library, collected, and given subject headings to allow for utilization during the writing phase of the paper.<sup>21</sup> These subject headings were then collated from each author and group in ways that attempt to create an organic rendering of the patristic author's thoughts on healing in outline form. Using this outline, the notes from the secondary sources were then combined with the primary literature located to create the chapters on Origen and Tertullian. The fourth chapter was utilized as an opportunity to examine commonalities in the thoughts of Origen and Tertullian using the presuppositional schema proposed by Amundsen.

This study is not without limitations in its ability to speak comprehensively and with finality on the subject of Origen and Tertullian's views on healing and early Christianity. The author is heavily dependent on the secondary literature for understanding and data. It is also difficult to speak with finality on this subject for lack of a complete corpus of Origen and Tertullian's known work. Of the extant work, neither Origen nor Tertullian devoted more than a chapter, and often only sentences, to the relationship between healing and medicine. As a result, all attempts at understanding are dependent on gathering from various portions of their work to create a picture of their views on healing. At times inferences must also be drawn from the views seemingly implicit in their use of healing terms as analogies for Christian beliefs. Lastly, this study did not delve into the further linguistic studies which could be done on the Greek and Latin terminology used in the writings of Origen and Tertullian on medicine, healing, and Jesus the Physician.

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<sup>21</sup> Alexander Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, American reprint of the Edinburgh ed. (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1903). The online texts at <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2> were then compared to the hardcopy text and changed to mirror the hardcopy footnoting.

Using the methodology above, and despite the limitations, this study seeks to explicate the thought of Origen and Tertullian on healing, to allow some insight into their role in the synthesis of Greco-Roman medicine with Christian beliefs and their understanding of the role that healing should play in the life of Christians.

## CHAPTER 2

### ORIGEN AND THE PHYSICIAN OF SOUL AND BODY

Healing is a practice common to all peoples, and early Christians were no exception. From the beginning, Christians and their leaders had to find out how their new religion affected their participation in the medical practices and healing models of their day. Many factors would have affected this decision: local practices, the effectiveness of certain treatments in comparison to others, and the leadership of Church luminaries. Origen fits the description of one such luminary. As a teacher and writer with extensive influence, he was in a perfect position to have influenced this relationship between the healing arts and Christians. The question then becomes, just what did Origen write about healing and the appropriate response of Christians to the issues of disease and Greco-Roman medical practices?

It is the main purpose of this chapter to look into Origen's thoughts on healing and Christianity. Origen used medical analogy in the interpretation of the Christian message, and apologetically to defend that same Christian doctrine. Greco-Roman medical theory, the early Christian Church's beliefs on faith healing through Jesus, and the idea of public healing by early Christianity were all incorporated into his writings. These various threads relating to healing were woven throughout Origen's writings to show Jesus as a savior come to heal both body and soul. Body and soul did not however

always retain equality of importance. Origen viewed the healing of the body as secondary to the healing work of Jesus on the soul of the person, when forced to prioritize.<sup>1</sup>

### **Origen's Theology and Healing: The Intertwining of Christian Theology and Greco-Roman Medicine**

Origen incorporated the medical terminology and healing ideas of Greco-Roman medicine into his theology. As he sought to explain and defend Christian doctrines to the Greco-Roman world he found a ready ally in medical thought. After a discussion of the necessary backgrounds for this discussion, this utilization of Greco-Roman medical theories and terminology in Origen's theology will be discussed.

#### Necessary Backgrounds on Origen in Relation to Healing

Origen of Alexandria was born circa 185 C.E. into a time when Christianity was growing, while constantly under the threat of persecution. Origen was educated by his father Leonidas who gave "him a careful education in Scripture and secular subjects."<sup>2</sup> When Origen was a teenager his father was martyred for his Christian beliefs. His father's martyrdom provides an insight into a religiously fervent young Origen. He had attempted to volunteer for the same martyrdom, but was stopped by his mother who hid his clothes from him.<sup>3</sup>

Origen took seriously his emotional commitment to Christianity; however, he maintained more than just the emotional conviction of his Christianity. Origen had been

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<sup>1</sup> Ferngren, "Religion of Healing." Ferngren points to the increased emphasis on the healing of body, rather than just primarily the soul, as a later development of Christian thinking.

<sup>2</sup> Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 2 (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1986), 37.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

well educated. Henri Crouzel, an authority on Origen, quotes the work of J. Borst who stated that “Origen’s vocabulary bears witness to the universality of his culture: pedagogy, medicine, natural sciences, grammar and philology, the language of law, not forgetting, of course, the words of biblical and philosophical origin.”<sup>4</sup> Borst is not alone in his assessment of Origen. Johannes Quasten calls Origen “the outstanding teacher and scholar of the early Church, a man of spotless character, encyclopaedic learning, and one of the most original thinkers the world has ever seen.”<sup>5</sup> In Origen, an extensive education combined with the circumstances of his life had led to Christianity’s first systematic theologian and great thinker.<sup>6</sup> Origen was to influence the course of Christian thought from his time forward, despite his controversial opinions on “universal restoration” and the unfortunate castration of himself as a young man.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 57. In footnote 32 Crouzel notes J. Borst’s work: *Beitrage zur sprachlich-stylistischen und rhetorischen Würdigung des Origenes*, Freising 1913; Thomas A. Robinson, *The Early Church: An Annotated Bibliography of Literature in English*, Atla Bibliography Series; No. 33 (Metuchen, N.J.: American Theological Library Association & Scarecrow Press, 1993), 52-3. Robinson reviews the literature on Origen and identifies Henri Crouzel’s 1989 work as an authoritative source; Eusebius, Christian Frederic Crusé, and Hendrickson Publishers, *Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History: Complete and Unabridged*, New updated ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998; reprint, Second Printing), 210. Eusebius is discussing Origen’s extensive knowledge of Greek literature.

<sup>5</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, 37.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>7</sup> Pease, “Medical Allusions,” 74. According to Pease, Origen’s writings had a significant influence on Jerome; Origen’s writings are important because they “inspired and provoked generations of Christians after him.” Merideth, “Illness and Healing,” 9; Quasten, *Patrology*, 38, 87. Origen’s “emasculatation” and views on “universal restoration” are discussed.



Healing was an important aspect of Origen's influential thought.<sup>8</sup> According to David G. Bostock, in Origen's complex and extensive thought he held an important place for the art of medicine. In his *Origeniana Tertia* symposium paper Bostock discussed in depth the relation of this medical thought to Origen's theology:

Like the snakes on the caduceus of Hermes medical imagery is intertwined with the whole of Origen's theology. It is only one strand of thought among many in his writings, but it is a vital strand and one which is integral to his general theology. It cannot be ignored therefore or removed without doing violence to the rest of his system. In particular the medical motif we find in Origen clarifies, as does no other principle, the essential relationship between creation and redemption.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus came to heal the souls and bodies of humanity. Medicine was the perfect analogy, and Origen used it to communicate and comprehend the meaning of Jesus' work.

Although Origen was well cultured and educated in the Greek and Roman thought of his time, it would be a mistake to assume that he simply copied those worldviews into his Christian theology. Origen recognized the authority of biblical revelation in thought and action. Therefore, to understand Origen in relation to Greco-Roman medicine we need to look at some of Origen's background ideas, which will then allow the foreground discussion of Christianity and healing to be viewed more clearly.

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984); Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*; Henri Crouzel, "The Literature on Origen 1970-1988," *Theological Studies* 49 (1988); Crouzel, *Origen*; Eusebius, Crusé, and Hendrickson Publishers, *Ecclesiastical History*; Edgar Johnson Goodspeed and Robert McQueen Grant, *A History of Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Merideth, "Illness and Healing"; Quasten, *Patrology*; Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (Atlanta, Ga.: J. Knox, 1983). The previous sources are authoritative resources for further research into the thought of Origen.

<sup>9</sup> Bostock, "Medical Theory and Theology," 197-8.

## The Place of Reason and the Supernatural

This paper seeks to discuss Origen's thoughts on healing without placing Origen's thought into the value judgments of the ongoing war between naturalistic (physical existence only) beliefs and those beliefs which allow for the supernatural and revelation. The medicine and healing of our day have a bias towards the naturalistic side of the argument. Origen, however, lived in a time when naturalistic reason and supernatural beliefs coexisted in a somewhat less antagonistic manner. Therefore, care will be taken to present Origen as Origen, and to avoid potentially anachronistic interpretations of his thought. It is important to understand how he viewed this relationship between the natural and supernatural with a minimum of bias.

The supernatural and the natural both played parts in his thinking. Origen used reason, regularly and proficiently, in his theology. He was no stranger to rational argument. Origen argued that critical judgment should be used to discern the truth.<sup>10</sup> When arguing against Celsus, the patriotic Roman defender of the Roman religion and society, Origen viewed Christianity as the "medicine of reason," "which enlightens the reason<sup>11</sup> in the true<sup>12</sup> knowledge of things."<sup>11</sup> It was not considered irrational to see the world supernaturally in Origen's time. Harold Remus points us to Origen's supernatural belief that the powerful name of Jesus had more effectiveness in the original language on

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<sup>10</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Cels. 3.13.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Cels. 3.54, 3.61. \_\_\_\_\_ <sup>11</sup>τὸ ἡγεμονικόν. <sup>12</sup>ἀψευδῆ.

healing the person of evil spirits.<sup>12</sup> In fact, it would be logically impossible for Origen not to believe in the supernatural as a theologian of the Christian religion.

Origen approached the topic of healing and Christianity with foundational beliefs on the importance of reason in relation to the supernatural. These were beliefs based on Greek thought and the Christian revelation. Origen demonstrated this belief in the “parallelism between material and spiritual medicine” allowing him to “refer quite happily to Christ as the ‘physician of body and soul.’”<sup>13</sup> He had adopted much of what he felt was the best of Greek natural medical thought and applied it to his supernatural theology.

### **Creation**

Greek thought on creation did find its way into Origen’s writing. He went so far as to accept the Platonic view of a cyclical creation that never ends.<sup>14</sup> The Stoic influence on Origen can be seen in *First Principles (De Principiis)* where Origen said that the universe is ““some huge and immense animal, which is held together by the power and reason of God, as by one soul.””<sup>15</sup> As noted earlier, the physical creation, for Origen, had

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<sup>12</sup> Harold Remus, *Jesus as Healer*, Understanding Jesus Today (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 20. Origen in Cels. 1.25 demonstrates his belief in the power of Jesus to exorcise evil spirits.

<sup>13</sup> Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology,” 192. Bostock is referring to Hom. in Lev. 7, 1: Die griechische christliche Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte (GCS) VI, p. 372, 1.6; and Fragments on Luke 125: GCS IX, p. 279, 1.12.

<sup>14</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, 90. This view was later condemned as heretical and creation *ex nihilo* (from nothing) was the accepted church doctrine.

<sup>15</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 103. Cf *Princ.* 2.1.3.

a parallel spiritual counterpart which was influenced by the physical creation and vice versa.<sup>16</sup>

Even with this major Greek emphasis in his thought, the impact of Judeo-Christian thought kept Origen affirming the worth of the physical creation. Origen viewed the created world as having “regulating” laws written into its fabric.<sup>17</sup> To Origen, things were not always arbitrary, and there was a sustaining plan to creation that maintained life even in a fallen world. Origen’s view of creation also had a holistic sense to it. Jesus does not just heal the soul of the leper, but also the body.<sup>18</sup> It is God’s desire to heal the physical world and return it to the natural intent of beauty.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Origen viewed Jesus as giving the world meaning and restoration.<sup>20</sup>

### **Fallen Creation, Evil, and Providence in Origen**

Origen accepted the Christian doctrine of the fallen nature of the world.<sup>21</sup> Evil had come into the world, and for Origen it arose from the minds of humanity. In refuting the claims of Celsus, Origen argues against the antiworldly sentiment of Greek thought and places the blame for evil with humanity:

It is true, certainly, that evils do not proceed from God; for according to Jeremiah, one of our prophets, it is certain that “out of the mouth of the Most High

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 120-1. Cf *Commentary on Song of Songs* 3.2.

<sup>17</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Cels. 4.57. The reference was noted in Wallace-Hadrill p. 105.

<sup>18</sup> Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology,” 193.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 198. Cf Cels. 4.69 GCS I p. 339 1.5-8.

<sup>20</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 122.

<sup>21</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, 83.

proceedeth not evil and good.”<sup>22</sup> But to maintain that matter, dwelling among mortal things, is the cause of evils, is in our opinion not true. For it is the mind of each individual which is the cause of the evil which arises in him, and this is evil (in the abstract);<sup>3</sup> while the actions which proceed from it are wicked, and there is, to speak with accuracy, nothing else in our view that is evil.<sup>22</sup>

For Origen, evil is the lack of goodness similar to the way illness derives from the lack of health in Greek medical thought:

In proportion as one falls away from goodness, in the same proportion does he become involved in wickedness. In which condition, according to its actions, each understanding, neglecting goodness either to a greater or more limited extent, was dragged into the opposite of good, which undoubtedly is evil.<sup>23</sup>

God in divine providence had created ways to heal the world. The world needed redemption, according to Origen, and just as God in his foreknowledge made the truths of scripture he had made medicine to heal the bodies of humanity suffering in a fallen world.<sup>24</sup> Origen felt that “the knowledge of medicine was a direct gift from God to man.”<sup>25</sup>

A last point should be made on Origen and creation. It is concerning the Christian doctrine of the *imago Dei*, or image of God. Origen focused on the real humanity of Christ in the incarnation.<sup>26</sup> Jesus in being human allows us a view of a perfected

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<sup>22</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Cels. 4.66. The reference was noted in Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lam. iii. 38. [In the Authorized Version and in the Vulgate this passage is interrogative. S.] <sup>3</sup> ἥτις ἐστὶ τὸ κακόν.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., *Princ.* 2.9.2. Cf Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology,” 196-7.

<sup>24</sup> Bostock, 191-2. This is a summary of Bostock’s translation from *Homilies on the Psalms* 37 1, 1 located in PG 12, 1369.

<sup>25</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 109; Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology,” 191. Cf *Homily on Numbers* 18.3.

<sup>26</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 119. Wallace-Hadrill is referring to *Commentary on John* 2.8.

nature.<sup>27</sup> Stanley Harakas discusses Origen's thoughts on this "likeness" or image of God. "'Likeness' meant potential for our fulfillment in God-likeness."<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the most important consequence of this idea of the *imago Dei* in Origen's teachings would have been the effect it had on its hearers and readers. Ronald Numbers and Darrel Amundsen have pointed out that "in general there was no religious or ethical motivation for charity in the pagan classical world."<sup>29</sup> Greco-Roman "benevolence manifested itself in civic philanthropy on behalf of the entire community rather than in private charity undertaken for individuals in need, such as the sick, widows, or orphans."<sup>30</sup> When God's image could be found in all people, then all people have worth. As Christianity rose to power in the Empire, this idea of the *imago Dei* was most likely a part of the change in the charitable patterns towards healing and supporting the weak. Christians changed the place of the weak in society, and in effect brought the possibility of healing to bear on those most in need of it, who had previously been found, for the most part, not worthy of its attention.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>28</sup> Stanley S. Harakas, *Health and Medicine in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition: Faith, Liturgy, and Wholeness*, Health/Medicine and the Faith Traditions (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 62.

<sup>29</sup> Ronald L. Numbers and Darrel W. Amundsen, *Caring and Curing: Health and Medicine in the Western Religious Traditions* (New York: Macmillan; London: Collier Macmillan, 1986), 48.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. \_\_\_\_\_ [original n. at end of excerpted quote] 11. See Darrel W. Amundsen and Garry B. Ferngren, "Philanthropy in Medicine: Some Historical Perspectives," in *Beneficence and Health Care*, ed. Earl E. Shelp (Dordrecht, 1982), pp. 1-31, especially pp. 1-12.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 49.; Sigerist, *Civilization and Disease*, 69-70.

## Suffering

Suffering is a quintessential aspect of most disease states. It is often the reason that a person seeks medical care and the reason for so desperately wanting a cure for disease. Suffering was not as much of a concern for Origen, who would later become a martyr for his beliefs. Origen was prepared to suffer. He viewed suffering as a test for the Christian:

Origen, in his reply to Celsus, says that Christians endure the appointed evils, that is, troubles that occur among men, as trials of the soul; for by them their souls are tested, either being convicted of failure or being shown to be reliable. So prepared are Christians for evil that they say, 'Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my kidneys and my heart by fire' (Ps. 26:2; 25:2 LXX).<sup>32</sup>

Suffering could be "of spiritual value" for Origen if it was sent from God to refine or redeem the individual.<sup>33</sup> Even death was not an inherent evil, since it should be an end to suffering and the beginning of a new life for a Christian.<sup>34</sup> Not all suffering was negative or to be avoided.

## Natural Processes or Demonic Intervention in Disease Causality

Did the devil cause suffering and disease? Origen was a child of his culture and felt that good and evil spirits were involved in the world around him. Yet, Gary Ferngren states that "scholars who attribute to early Christians a demonological explanation of illness seriously misunderstand the early Christian perception of disease-causation. . . .

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<sup>32</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 136-7.

<sup>33</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 65. Cf *Princ.* 2.10.6, and *Cels.* 7.67, 8.58.

<sup>34</sup> Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 149. Droge is quoting and discussing from *Dialogue With Heraclides* c.245.

Our survey of the evidence has indicated that early Christians, like most of their contemporaries, basically accepted a natural causality of disease.”<sup>35</sup> More specific to Origen, he writes that “Tertullian and Origen (ca 185-ca 254) blame demons for disease and pestilence, as they blame them for all the physical evils in the world, but only in a general sense.”<sup>36</sup> Others disagree with Ferngren and Amundsen’s view. Jürgen Helm says that Amundsen and Ferngren argue from silence to say that early Christianity used a rational model to view sickness.<sup>37</sup> As we shall see in the following sections, Origen does seem to have seen evil spirits as capable of causing and even healing illness. Simultaneously, Origen seems to point to a natural way that sickness and the world functioned without the force of spiritual intervention.

#### Greek Medical Influence on Origen’s Theology

Greek medical thought is interwoven throughout Origen’s theology, as Bostock notes in detail. The Greek secular medical ideas of parallelism, substance, accident and contradictories can be seen in Origen’s writings on Christianity.<sup>38</sup> Medical theory on human anatomy and physiology illustrates this incorporation of Greek medical thought by Origen. Wallace-Hadrill points out that “the patristic view of human physiology is

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<sup>35</sup> Ferngren, “Early Christian Views,” 198-9.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 190. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>38</sup>. See Tertullian *Apology* 22; Origen *Against Celsus* 1.31 and 8.31.

<sup>37</sup> Jürgen Helm, “Sickness in Early Christian Healing Narratives,” in *From Athens to Jerusalem: Medicine in Hellenized Jewish Lore and in Early Christian Literature: Papers of the Symposium in Jerusalem, 9-11 September 1996*, ed. Samuel S. Kottek and Manfred Horstmanshoff (Rotterdam: Erasmus Pub., 2000), 247.

<sup>38</sup> Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology.”



dominated by the Stoic physiology elaborated in the second century by Galen.”<sup>39</sup> Galen was important to Origen, who pointed “to Galen as an anatomist who could explain precisely why Providence had made each part of the body for its particular purpose.”<sup>40</sup> Origen felt that God should receive the credit for the skills and knowledge of humanity.<sup>41</sup> Medicine was to be no exception. Thus, Origen would take what he wanted of Hippocratic medicine to put to theological use. In discussing this relationship, Temkin writes that “as part of Greek philosophical culture, Hippocratic medicine was readily adopted around the turn of the third century by Clement of Alexandria and, in particular, by Origen who was looking for a synthesis of Christian faith and Greek philosophy.”<sup>42</sup>

Galen was also a conduit for the broader thought of Greek medicine to Origen, but Origen had other Greek medical influences on his thinking. This interaction with Galen and other Greek medical theorists can be seen when Origen discussed the link “between material and spiritual medicine”.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 41.

<sup>40</sup> Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, Sciences of Antiquity (New York;London: Routledge;Taylor & Francis, 2004), 229. Nutton is pointing to *Philocalia* fr. 2,2 by R.M. Grant, 1983; Lawrence I. Conrad and Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine., *The Western Medical Tradition: 800 B.C.-1800 A.D* (Cambridge, Eng.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 80. Galen, although looking poorly on Christianity, did allow it to possess the status of a philosophical school in his writings according to Robert Louis Wilken in *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), 82.

<sup>41</sup> Owsei Temkin, *Hippocrates in a World of Pagans and Christians* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 130.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 130. Temkin is pointing to *Homily on Numbers* 18.3 as his example.

<sup>43</sup> Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology,” 192.

It is a parallelism which has its roots in medical theory which believed, in the words of Galen, that ‘just as the body’s health consists in a harmony of its basic elements (by which I mean the hot, the cold, the dry and the wet) so the health of the soul consists similarly in the harmony of its simple elements’.<sup>9</sup> This theory, which can be traced back to Plato<sup>10</sup>, was taken a stage further by Chrysippus who believed in a moral as well as a philosophical correspondence between body and soul.... Origen appears to have been familiar with Chrysippus’ work *On the Cure of the Passions*<sup>12</sup>, and develops this analogy by positing a clear parallelism between illnesses of the body and of the soul.<sup>44</sup>

Greek parallelism was not the only idea embraced by Origen. Bostock notes Origen’s use of the “kenosis of Christ” as that “of the descent of a physician.”<sup>45</sup> In a footnote, he points out that “it is through the *kenosis* or emptiness of Christ that man is made full and released from his own emptiness. It may be significant that Hippocrates uses the term *kenosis*.”<sup>46</sup> Origen probably used this medical analogy to describe the Christian doctrine of the kenosis of Jesus, emptying of Godhood to descend to human form. Jesus, the physician, was dedicated enough to the patient to risk sacrificing his own life and well being for the treatment of the sick.<sup>47</sup>

The Hippocratic idea of “deficiency” might also have been similarly utilized in Origen’s theology of healing:

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>9</sup> Galen, *De Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 5,2,35. <sup>10</sup> Cf Plato, *Phaedo* 86 b-c. For the importance of the four elements in Origen’s understanding of the nature of physical and spiritual reality see D.G. BOSTOCK, *Origeniana Secunda* pp. 327-31. <sup>12</sup> Cf *CCels* 1,64: *GCS* I, p. 117, l.16-17; *CCels* 8,51: *GCS* II, p. 266, l.18-19.

<sup>45</sup> Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology,” 196. Bostock points to *Philocalia* 2.7.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 197 fn. 38.

<sup>47</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Cels* 2.23. Found in Droge, *A Noble Death*, 114; Ibid., *Cels*. 4.15. Noted in Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology,” 196.

The evil which Christ came to remove is often described by Origen as a “deficiency”<sup>32</sup>, and it is noteworthy that Hippocrates regarded disease as a state of imbalance caused by a deficiency<sup>33</sup>. It is possible therefore that Origen’s definition of evil has been influenced by medical thought.<sup>48</sup>

Similar to the idea of deficiencies as the cause of disease and sin, Origen felt that they could be healed by the Greek medical “use of contraries”:

What is certain is that both Galen and Hippocrates believed that evil was removed by the use of contraries<sup>34</sup>, and that Origen echoed this belief. He was well aware that the science of medicine consisted in the knowledge of contraries<sup>35</sup>, and he applied the principle of healing by contraries to his theology. “All the contraries were adopted by my Lord and Saviour, so that he might cancel out the contraries with one another, and we might be made strong through the weakness of Jesus and wise through the foolishness of God” (cf. 1 Cor 1,25)<sup>36[original n. ]</sup>.<sup>49</sup>

Origen pointed to the Cross as a contrary to heal our sin, for it was in Jesus’ weakness that he healed with power.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Origen seems to have viewed a central aspect of Christian theology as analogically similar to the medical thought of his day.

Bostock, Nutton, and Wallace-Hadrill all demonstrate the linking between Greek medical thought and the theology of Origen. Whether the Greek medical thought influenced Origen’s theology, just served as a useful explanatory model, or some combination of both, is not readily discovered in the secondary literature and in Origen’s writing. Origen did appear to find a kindred spirit in much of Greek medical thought when he set about explicating Christian doctrine to its converts and critics. Its use therefore seems to imply a belief by Origen that the acts of healing and defining illness,

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<sup>48</sup> Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology,” 196-7. <sup>32</sup> Cf *PArch* [*First Principles*] 2,9,2: *GCS* V, p. 166, 1.1-2; *HomJr* 14, 10: *GCS* III, p. 115, 1.3-10; *ComJn* 2,13: *GCS* IV, p. 69, 1.15-17. <sup>33</sup> Cf Hippocrates, *De nat. hom.* 7; *De flatibus* 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 197. <sup>34</sup> Cf Galen, *op cit*, 8,6,19; Hippocrates, *De flatibus* 1. <sup>35</sup> Cf *ComRm* 3,5 (SCHERER, pp. 126ff.). <sup>36</sup> *HomJr* 8,9 *GCS* III p. 63, 1.6-8.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

which both Greek medicine and Christianity set as their missions, held an innate similarity. Through this merging of the Greek medical and Christian thought in the analogical use of Greek medical theory, Origen seems to have validated the worldly mission of healing, as at least a part of the Christian mission to heal and a kindred spirit to Christianity's soteriological imperative.

### Origen's Use of Greco-Roman Medical Terminology In His Analogy and Apology

Following a long Greek and Alexandrian tradition, Origen used medical terminology as an analogy for his explication of the work and meaning of Jesus to the early Christian church. Meredith points to the use of medical analogy prior to Origen: "Greek and Roman philosophers had long acknowledged the analogous role of medicine and philosophy. The former heals the diseases of the body while the latter heals the diseases of the soul."<sup>12</sup> [original n.] <sup>51</sup> Philo of Alexandria, the Jewish philosopher and apologist, had extensively used this same method to interpret Jewish thought to the Greek and Roman worlds.<sup>52</sup> Meredith argues that it is important "how they [church fathers] used the language of disease, suffering, healing, and transformation to shape a new understanding of bodily ills and physical affliction."<sup>53</sup> Origen was adopting and adjusting

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<sup>51</sup> Merideth, "Illness and Healing," 156. <sup>12</sup> For discussion of this theme in Greek philosophy, see Oswei [Owsei] Temkin, The Double Face of Janus (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977) ; Fridolf Kudlien, "Der Arzt des Koerpers und der Arzt der Seele," Clio Medica 3 (1968) 1-20; Jackie Piegeaud, La maladie de l'ame: Etude sure la relation de l'ame et du corps dans la tradition medico-philosophique antique (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1981); Ludwig Edelstein, Ancient Medicine: Selected Papers of Ludwig Edelstein, ed., O. and L. Temkin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967) 349-66.

<sup>52</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *The Greek Patristic View*, 125.

a long tradition, when he sought to explain the healing work of Jesus in the language of the medical culture of his day. Due to his extensive utilization of the analogy between Christianity and healing, it would seem to have been useful to him as an explanatory model.

### **Origen's Use of Medicine as Analogy for Jesus and His Work**

“By resorting to metaphor and analogy to express themselves, the church fathers were . . . engaging in a form of imitatio Christi.”<sup>54</sup> Out of these early church fathers, John Wilkinson points out that “it was Origen (AD 185-254) who more frequently and more fully than anyone else spoke of Jesus as the physician, and in his work *Contra Celsum* called him ‘the good physician’.”<sup>55</sup> “For Origen the art of medicine was the clearest possible parable of the Gospel in action.”<sup>56</sup> Jesus was the Master Physician, the physician of the soul, the physician of the body and soul, the dedicated and sacrificial physician.

In his *Homilies on Luke*, Origen called Jesus the “master physician” who came in Bethlehem to heal what could not be healed by even the angels of heaven.<sup>57</sup> Another physician comparison by Origen is noted amidst a discussion on the use of the physician analogy in many other church fathers. Rudolph Arbesmann points to Origen's vision of

<sup>53</sup> Merideth, “Illness and Healing,” 152-3.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>55</sup> John Wilkinson, *The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 63. Wilkinson is referring to *Cels.* 2.67 in his footnotes.

<sup>56</sup> Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology in Origen,” 191.

<sup>57</sup> Origen and Joseph T. Lienhard, *Homilies on Luke: Fragments on Luke*, ed. Thomas P. Halton and et. al., *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 52-3. Noted in Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology,” 191.

Jesus as “‘ the Physician of the soul’.”<sup>58</sup> Origen, however, did not neglect the body for the soul. Even under the great influence of antiworldly Greek thought on his theology, Origen did not deemphasize the work of Jesus in this world. He acknowledged its importance to Hebrew and Christian thought. As a result, Origen would often refer to Jesus as “the physician of body and of soul,” making fruitful use of the analogy in his sermons.<sup>59</sup> Origen saw Jesus’ work as twofold and complimentary to the Greek medical idea of parallelism of body and soul:

And similarly to this, and more as a matter to be understood by the mind than to be perceived by the senses, Jesus touched the leper,<sup>6</sup> to cleanse him, as I think, in a twofold sense,—freeing him not only, as the multitude heard, from the visible leprosy by visible contact, but also from that other leprosy, by His truly divine touch.<sup>60</sup>

Origen used medical thought to create a bridge between the world and his vision of the work of Jesus, on both the natural and supernatural plane. The analogical use of medical terminology did not just serve for homilies to the faithful. It also served Origen’s apologetic purposes.

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<sup>58</sup> Arbesmann, “Concept of ‘Christus Medicus’,” 27-8. The quote is from Migne, J. P. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*. [Series Graeca]. Omnium Ss. Patrum, Doctorum, Scriptorumque Ecclesiasticorum Sive Latinorum Sive Græcorum. Parisiis Paris: Apud Garnier Fratres et J.-P., *In Exodum* 12.269.

<sup>59</sup> Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology,” 193. Bostock is quoting Origen from *Hom. Lev.* 17, 1: *GCS VI*, p. 372, 1.7-8: “Christ ‘being the physician of body and of soul tells us to avoid plants that cause intoxication and also tells us to avoid the deadly drugs of worldly concerns’<sup>17</sup>.”

<sup>60</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Cels.* 1.48. This is alluded to by Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology,” 193. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>6</sup>Cf. Matt. viii.3.

## Origen's Apology through Medical Analogy

Origen cleverly used medical analogy in his apologetic work *Against Celsus* (*Contra Celsus*). Much of his use of medical analogy for the work of Jesus can be found in this work as he responded to the critiques of Celsus. It is in *Against Celsus* that Origen described God as the necessarily violent physician:

For as, if we should hear those sufferings<sup>3</sup> improperly termed “evils” which are inflicted by fathers, and instructors, and pedagogues upon those who are under their care, or upon patients who are operated upon or cauterized by the surgeons in order to effect a cure, we were to say that a father was ill-treating his son, or pedagogues and instructors their pupils, or physicians their patients, no blame would be laid upon the operators or chastisers; so, in the same way, if God is said to bring upon men such evils for the conversion and cure of those who need this discipline, there would be no absurdity in the view . . .<sup>61</sup>

Origen used the surgeon to show the necessity of painful treatment to effect cure, and therefore demonstrated the necessity of suffering in the Christian life as a similar form of healing. Medical analogy also provided another useful apologetic for “the problem of the slowness of God’s judgement and salvation of sinners,” when Origen used Plutarch’s medical theory that it was best to let people heal slowly so that the healing would become a permanent healing.<sup>62</sup> He even tackled the question of the judgment on the sinner. According to Bostock, Origen felt “that punishment is self-inflicted in the sense that men themselves provide the fuel for the fires of judgement.”<sup>63</sup> In his *Commentary on Romans*, Origen illustrated his apologetic use of medical analogy: “We may say that if anyone eats

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., *Cels.* 6.56. The reference was found in Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 64. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>3</sup> πόνους.

<sup>62</sup> Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology,” 195. Cf Bostock points to Plutarch, *De Sera Numinus Vindicata* c. 6.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 194.

the wrong food through disregarding the advice of his physician and then falls ill or has a fever . . . his illness is his own fault and not that of the physician.<sup>23[original n.]</sup>,<sup>64</sup> Origen also utilized another medical analogy in defending the seemingly harsh judgments found in the Christian Gospel. “The skill of the physician enables a disease [sin] to be recognized, but it would hardly appear to be the cause of the disease.”<sup>65</sup> In this way the judgments of the Christian Gospel could be seen as diagnostic tools which allow the patient to then seek the proper healing, rather than as the “cause of the disease.”

It appears that Origen was able to skillfully use his rhetorical abilities and knowledge of Greek medicine to respond to critiques of Christianity. Using this knowledge of Greek medical thought, Origen attacked the weak points of Celsus’ argument that Christianity was not true because it had too many groups who claim to be the true form of Christianity:

Disagreements within the medical profession should not discourage a patient. The science of medicine is useful, Origen writes, although there are many differences of opinion about how to treat bodies and there are medical opinions branded as heretical by Greeks and barbarians alike; yet no-one would avoid medicine because of such disagreements.<sup>66</sup>

Origen used the theoretical differences in the important science of medicine to rebut Celsus’ argument that the theological battles in Christianity made it obscure or untrue, and by implication unnecessary. Origen had utilized medicine to point out a logical weakness of Celsus’ critique of Christianity.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 194-5. Bostock is quoting Origen. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>23</sup> *ComRm* 2,6: PG 14, 884.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 196. Bostock is quoting Origen *Comm. Rom.* 3, 6 PG 14 p. 941.

<sup>66</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 60. Wallace-Hadrill is nicely summarizing Origen’s statement in reply to Celsus in *Cels.* 3.12.



Origen found Greek medical theory to be conveniently able to provide analogies for explicating much of the theology and mission of Christianity. Galen, Hippocrates, and others all provided ideas and terminologies which Origen appears to have utilized in his theological and homiletical work. By positing this similarity between medical thought and Christian theology, Origen would most likely have raised medical thought and practice to a place of importance for those influenced by his writings and teachings.

### **Greco-Roman Secular Medical Healing and Origen**

Origen lived at a time when the line between the supernatural and the natural was not sharply divided. The temple of Aesculapius, a god of physical healing, had both healer priests and naturalistic physicians working in it.<sup>67</sup> Greco-Roman medicine had coupled the supernatural healing with the more naturalistic form of Greco-Roman medicine which relied on medicine, diet, exercise, and surgery to effect healing. It should be clarified, however, that this naturalistic medicine was not as empirical as that of today and often relied often on philosophical theories which were not verifiable or empirically based.

Origen's theology on healing is an example of this Greek blending of the natural and supernatural. The current section will discuss the naturalistic secular aspects of medicine that Origen discussed and interacted with. The next section will then demonstrate Origen's belief in supernatural faith healing, while acknowledging the place of Greek secular medicine in the life of the Christian.

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<sup>67</sup> Pattengale, "Benevolent Physicians", 100.

Bostock has pointed to the Greek medical influence on Origen's thought.<sup>68</sup> Yet, other areas of Origen's writings must be illuminated to understand his thought on healing and Christianity. Origen's writings on the science of medicine and the physician are some of these key areas. Throughout his work, Origen does acknowledge a rational approach to the use of medicine by Christianity. He notes the place of medicine for the body and mind. He also demonstrates through his writings, his ideal of a good physician and the place of medical science in relation to Christianity. Origen had more than a theological use for naturalistic secular Greek medicine in the life of the Christian.

#### Medicine's Worth to Origen

Origen believed in the worth of naturalistic medicine to the life of the Christian and the world. In his often quoted remark from his rebuttal to Celsus, Origen stated that "the science of medicine is useful and necessary to the human race."<sup>69</sup> In fact, Origen stated his affirmation of sound medical thought at another point in his refutation of Celsus:

For those who are intelligent Christians,<sup>4</sup> keeping this in view, deal with the simple-minded, as parents do with very young<sup>5</sup> children. We do not betake ourselves then to young persons and silly rustics, saying to them, "Flee from physicians." Nor do we say, "See that none of you lay hold of knowledge;" nor do we assert that "knowledge is an evil; "nor are we mad enough to say that "knowledge causes men to lose their soundness of mind." We would not even say that any one ever perished through wisdom; and although we give instruction, we never say, "Give heed to me," but "Give heed to the God of all things, and to Jesus, the giver of instruction concerning Him."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Bostock, "Medical Theory and Theology."

<sup>69</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Cels.* 3.12. The reference was noted by Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 60.

In Origen's reply to Celsus, he is acknowledging his belief in the importance of knowledge, particularly that of the physician. The problem is the type of knowledge. To Origen, God is creator of this wisdom and healing. His statements would seem to imply that the Christian's problem was not with medicine, but that certain physicians might fail to seek the "instruction" of God on the true knowledge.

Physicians and medicine were of such a worthy status that, as we have seen in other statements, Origen could say, "Come now to Jesus, the heavenly physician. Enter into this medical clinic."<sup>71</sup> God had provided a place for people to seek healing similar to that of the medical clinic, where they took part in God's gift of medicine. Medicine was another providential gift from God for the healing of humanity in its suffering.<sup>72</sup> Origen held it in such a high regard that he could compare it to the Word of the Christian God. He without doubt had praises for medicine when he said that "it is indisputable that medical science is a good thing since it offers understanding of illness by which the one who wills can avoid illness."<sup>73</sup> In another work, Origen continued his high praise of

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., *Cels.* 3.75. <sup>4</sup> Instead of οἱ φρονίμως Χριστιανοὶ ζῶντες, as in the text, Ruæus and Boherellus conjecture οἱ φρονίμως Χριστιανίζοντες, etc. <sup>5</sup> τους κομιδῇ νηπίους.

<sup>71</sup> Origen and Gary Wayne Barkley, *Homilies on Leviticus: 1-16*, ed. Thomas P.; et. al. Halton, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), *Hom. Lev.* 8, p.153. This reference was located near a reference from Bostock, "Medical Theory and Theology," 191-2. More on the subject by Origen is located in *Hom. Lev.* 8, p.154.

<sup>72</sup> Temkin, *Hippocrates*, 140. Noting *Homily I on Psalm 38*; Merideth, "Illness and Healing," 33.

<sup>73</sup> Origen and Thomas P. Scheck, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ed. Thomas P.; Halton and et. al., *The Fathers of the Church*, V. 103. (Washington, D.C.:

medicine. Pattengale, in discussing *Homily on Numbers*, states that “Origen declares that there is ‘no doubt’ about the use of rational medicine, and what better example of ‘knowledge from God’ could exist than that pertaining to health?”<sup>74</sup>

Despite his very positive comments on naturalistic medicine, Origen still had reservations about medicine’s place and usefulness. Pease notes that medicine alone was useless, according to Origen in his *Homily on Luke*.<sup>75</sup> Medical healing must be bathed in prayer, not just after the secular medical treatment has failed, but from the beginning.<sup>76</sup> Origen’s commentary on the Jewish King Asa shows this attitude toward the place of naturalistic medicine:

Origen discusses God’s condemnation of the Jewish king Asa, who when he was ill, “did not seek the Lord but the physician” (2 Chron. 16:12). He sees two possible explanations. Either Asa called on physicians who used charms and trickery, or he had faith in the physicians alone and did not place his hope in God. “For those who are adorned with religion use physicians as servants of God, knowing that He Himself gave medical knowledge to men, just as He himself assigned both herbs and other things to grow on the earth. They also know that the physician’s art has no strength if God is not willing, but it is able to do as much as God wills.”<sup>66</sup>[original n.] <sup>77</sup>

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Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 3.6.9 p. 208. The reference was noted by Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology,” 196.

<sup>74</sup> Pattengale, “Benevolent Physicians”, 104, fn 19. Pattengale is quoting from Origen, *Homily on Numbers* 18.3, PG, 12: col. 715B.

<sup>75</sup> Pease, “Medical Allusions” 82, n 12. Pease quotes in Latin from *Homilies on Luke I* in PL 26, pp. 222C -223 A.

<sup>76</sup> Amundsen and Ferngren, “Virtue and Medicine,” 48.

<sup>77</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 139-40. \_\_\_\_\_ 66. Origen, *Adnotations in Librum III Regum* 15:23, in *Patrologia cursus completus, Series Graeco-Latina*, ed. Jacques Paul Migne ( Paris: J.P. Migne, 1857-66), 17:53-55; my translation[Amundsen].

Origen had use for medical science, but he positioned it inferiorly to the higher things of God and eternity.<sup>78</sup> He clearly explains this view and his position in his reply to Celsus:

If there is, then, such a dangerous tendency in this direction, as even the enemy of the truth of God confesses, how much better is it to avoid all danger of giving ourselves too much up to the power of such demons, and of becoming turned aside from higher things, and suffering them to pass into oblivion through an excessive attention to the body; by entrusting ourselves to the Supreme God through Jesus Christ, who has given us such instruction, and asking of Him all help, and the guardianship of holy and good angels, to defend us from the earth-spirits intent on lust, and blood, and sacrificial odours,<sup>2</sup> and strange sounds, and other sensual things! For even, by the confession of Celsus, they can do nothing more than cure the body. But, indeed, I would say that it is not clear that these demons, however much they are revered, can even cure the body. But in seeking recovery from disease, a man must either follow the inure ordinary and simple method, and have recourse to medical art; or if he would go beyond the common methods adopted by men, he must rise to the higher and better way of seeking the blessing of Him who is God over all, through piety and prayers.<sup>79</sup>

Origen clearly had a deep respect for the art of medicine by the secular medical establishment, but would not subjugate the higher life of the Christian pursuit of faith to the lower benefits of the physical healing provided by the medical arts.

#### The Good Physician: Origen on the Purpose, Role, and Art of the Physician

Origen was not a medical writer or physician. He primarily concerned himself with the state of the souls under his care and the explication of the scriptures he found himself teaching. As such, he did not write a comprehensive medical treatise on physicians and the art of medicine. However, through his many medical allegories and

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<sup>78</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 8.

<sup>79</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Cels.* 8.60. Referred to by Amundsen and Ferngren, "Virtue and Medicine," 45. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>2</sup> [Observe this traditional objection to incense. Comp. vol. ii. p. 532.]

occasional discussions of the role of the physician, much can be deduced as to his opinion on the role and duties of the physician.

A section from one of his extant *Homilies on Jeremiah* offers a rare direct insight into his ideal of the good physician:

Healers of bodies, since they are around the sick and always give themselves freely to the cure of the sick in accordance with the purpose of the healing arts, view what is *terrible*<sup>1</sup> and touch what is *loathsome*, and<sup>2</sup> they reap *their own pains* by others' misfortunes<sup>3</sup> and their life is always in crisis. For they are never with those who are well but always with the wounded<sup>4</sup>, with those who have contagions, with those filled with pus, fevers, all kinds of illnesses. And if someone wants to prepare for medicine, he should not feel irritated nor should he neglect the purpose of the skill which he has adopted whenever he may be with the kind of situations we have just mentioned.<sup>80</sup>

Origen's good physician will know what life he has been called into, and remain in the correct attitude amidst the strains of the profession. The physician should "always give themselves freely" and will be with those who are ill in unpleasant and disturbing ways. This good physician will work to heal the never ending masses of people in need. An early Christian reader could not have missed the ethical and practical imperatives located in this text. It is possible that it was a model for the physician who would follow Jesus, the one whom Origen calls the master physician—the "*archiatros* of the medical art."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Origen, John Clark Smith, and Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah: Homily on I Kings 28*, ed. Thomas P. Halton and et. al., The Fathers of the Church; v. 97. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 135. <sup>1</sup> "What is terrible" (*deinav*), a correction from the Catena. S has *tina*; . <sup>2</sup> "And," an addition from Jerome and Hippocrates' text. See below. <sup>3</sup> Klostermann notes that this description is from Hippocrates, *De flatibus* L569K. <sup>4</sup> Luke 5.31.

<sup>81</sup> Pease, "Medical Allusions," 75 fn. 2. Pease is referring to *Hom. I in Ps. 37*, PG, 12, 1369.

## Social Duty

The good physician would seek out the sick. In *Against Celsus*, Origen argued, “But if I seek after those who are thus termed ‘unintelligent,’ I act like a benevolent physician, who should seek after the sick in order to help and cure them.”<sup>82</sup> These benevolent physicians would humble themselves and seek to heal problems of those around them.<sup>83</sup> To Origen, Jesus had done the same when he offered healing piety to the intellectuals, but also to the lowest of society.<sup>84</sup> Jesus, the physician, was for all of society.

The ideal physician, indirectly described by Origen in his analogy, would go so far as to enter “the place of disease.”<sup>85</sup> This ideal and good physician would seek out the sick patient, yet the patient would still have to agree to the physician-patient relationship if they were able.<sup>86</sup> The relationship would not be forced on the patient. The patient would also have to assent to, and participate in, the healing process.<sup>87</sup> Origen appears to have viewed the person seeking healing as usually necessary to the healing relationship and process.

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<sup>82</sup>Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Cels.* 3.74. Cf Wilkinson, *The Bible and Healing*, 63 referring to *Cels.* 2.67 where Origen calls Jesus the “good physician”.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, *Cels.* 4.15.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, *Cels.* 7.41

<sup>85</sup> Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology,” 196. *Hom. Lev.* 7.2 GCS 6 p. 375 1.8-17.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 195. Bostock is referring to *Princ.* GCS 2.7.3.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-5. Bostock is referring to *Comm. Rom.* 2.6.3.

## Discernment

The physician who is worthy will have obtained wisdom and discerned the correct truth:

For as that man is “approved” in medicine who, on account of his experience in various (medical) heresies, and his honest examination of the majority of them, has selected the preferable system,—and as the great proficient in philosophy is he who, after acquainting himself experimentally with the various views, has given in his adhesion to the best.<sup>88</sup>

The good physician will educate themselves diligently, and critically examine the available methodologies and treatments to choose the most effective. For Origen, this wisdom of judgment will enable the good physician to see the usefulness for healing in medicines which those lacking the knowledge will miss.<sup>89</sup> Not only will the discerning physician possess knowledge, but also the skill to apply it to the individual. A physician who practices the critical aspect of their profession will treat each person’s illness in the way specifically needed by their situation. One person might need strong nutrition and the other would need weak broth to heal.<sup>90</sup> The healing regimen must be individualized.

## Treatments Used

Origen makes reference to the tools of the physician’s trade that he appears to certify as appropriate by his analogical use in correlation with Jesus. Psychologically minded therapies were one method that Origen appeared to endorse. In a manner seemingly utilizing the then unknown placebo effect, a physician might lie to his patient

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<sup>88</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Cels.* 3.13.

<sup>89</sup> Adolf von Harnack and James Moffatt, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, 2d, enl. and rev. ed. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1908), 109-111. In fn. 4. Harnack is referring to *Hom. Lev.* 8.1.

<sup>90</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 57. She is referring to *Cels.* 4.18.



if it was in the patient's best interest and facilitated healing.<sup>91</sup> Physical means of healing such as herbs and medicines could also be acceptable methods of healing for Origen.<sup>92</sup> Beyond these medical therapies, Origen mentions the acceptable use of surgery to bring about healing. Sometimes the radical and painful necessity of surgery would be required to effect a cure despite the suffering involved. Origen discussed this in his debate with Celsus:

For as, if we should hear those sufferings<sup>3</sup> improperly termed "evils" which are inflicted by fathers, and instructors, and pedagogues upon those who are under their care, or upon patients who are operated upon or cauterized by the surgeons in order to effect a cure, we were to say that a father was ill-treating his son, or pedagogues and instructors their pupils, or physicians their patients, no blame would be laid upon the operators or chastisers.<sup>93</sup>

Origen's description of the physician also included his bedside practices. Origen's ideal physician might have sought people out to perform these therapies, as he mentions. However, Origen does mention the existence of some form of a medical clinic as a place for patients to enter.<sup>94</sup>

#### Origen's Knowledge of Medical Science and Surgery

Origen possessed knowledge of the modern medicine of his time. This knowledge is witnessed throughout his writings as he incorporates what he witnessed and had learned about the science of medicine. In doing so he left behind a partial record of

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<sup>91</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Cels.* 4.19. The reference was noted by Wallace Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 61.

<sup>92</sup> Origen and Barkley, *Homilies on Leviticus: 1-16*, Chapter 8, p. 153.

<sup>93</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Cels.* 6.56. Reference was noted by Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 64. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>3</sup> πόνους.

<sup>94</sup> Origen and Barkley, *Homilies on Leviticus: 1-16*, Chapter 8, p. 153.

medical practice from his time. Jerry Pattengale, in quoting Singer and Underwood, writes that “it was the Church Fathers who were ‘foremost’ in the effort to ‘keep alight the torch of Greek science,’ and who became the guardians of the medical tradition.”<sup>95</sup> Pattengale identifies Origen as an example of this tradition. This review of Origen’s writings on healing bears witness to this incorporation of the modern medical thought and science of his day into his theology.

### **Greco-Roman Medical Treatments in Origen’s Work**

The influence of Hippocrates and Galen on Origen, identified by Bostock, seems to have been extensive. In the *Philocalia*, a collection of Origen’s works, Origen clearly demonstrates this intermingling of the medical practice of his day with his defense of biblical truths. In this discussion of the Egyptian Pharaoh’s hardening of the heart toward the message of Moses, there is theology, apology, and an intricate analogical use of medical thought all woven together.<sup>96</sup> This interweaving of the medical practice of his time with his theological writings clearly demonstrates the way that Origen was preserving medical knowledge of his time as he incorporated it into his apologetics. On the negative side, it is possible that in doing so he canonized medical procedures by placing them in writings which others held in esteem and therefore could have slowed

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<sup>95</sup> Pattengale, “Benevolent Physicians,” 103-4. Pattengale is quoting from Singer, C. and E. Ashworth Underwood, *A Short History of Medicine* (Oxford University Press, 1962), 67.

<sup>96</sup> Origen and others, *The Philocalia of Origen: A Compilation of Selected Passages from Origen’s Works, Made by St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. Basil of Caesarea* (T. & T. Clark, 1911, accessed 2/27/06 2006); available from [http://www.ccel.org/p/pearse/morefathers/origen\\_philocalia\\_02\\_text.htm#C27](http://www.ccel.org/p/pearse/morefathers/origen_philocalia_02_text.htm#C27).

down medical progress to more effective methods. It is sure, however, that he did preserve aspects of the medical knowledge of his time for future generations.

In another work, Origen acknowledges the worth of Greco-Roman medicinal practices by analogizing them to the message of Jesus:

A Christian, on the other hand, even though he invite those whom the robber invites, invites them to a very different vocation, viz. to bind up these wounds by His word, and to apply to the soul, festering amid evils, the drugs obtained from, the word, and which are analogous to the wine and oil, and plasters, and other healing appliances which belong to the art of medicine.<sup>97</sup>

Origen is listing in his analogy common medical treatments of “oil, and plasters, and other healing appliances.” Through this analogy Origen appears to have a positive estimation of their worth. Other uses of medicines, herbs, and dietary prescriptions in the medical practice of Origen’s day have also been previously noted.

In this part of the discussion with Celsus, Origen leaves a record of the interaction that a patient might have had with a physician of the time:

The “threatenings,” again, are intimations of the (punishments) which are to befall the wicked: for it is as if one were to call the words of a physician “threats,” when he tells his patients, “I will have to use the knife, and apply cauteries, if you do not obey my prescriptions, and regulate your diet and mode of life in such a way as I direct you.”<sup>98</sup>

Origen has left us this witness to the relationship between patient compliance and the physician’s medical treatment. In the event of the patient’s failure to correct behavior, the need to progress on to a surgical intervention would then become a reality for the patient. An emphasis on living a healthy lifestyle as instructed by the physician can also be seen

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<sup>97</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Cels.* 3.61. Reference noted by Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology,” 198.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, *Cels.* 4.72. Reference noted by Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 64.

in this text. In his prescriptions for healthy living and his rhetorical works, Origen has left us with glimpses of his views on medicine and the state of Greco-Roman medicine from his time.

### **Anatomy, Physiology, and Origen**

An important part of the recording of Greco-Roman medicine by Origen would have been his use of anatomic knowledge. Origen incorporated anatomic knowledge into his writings as he sought to explain or allegorize. In an attempt to justify the visions of the Old Testament prophets to Celsus' critique, Origen discussed the senses:

And as in a dream we fancy that we hear, and that the organs of hearing are actually impressed, and that we see with our eyes-although neither the bodily organs of sight nor hearing are affected, but it is the mind alone which has these sensations-so there is no absurdity in believing that similar things occurred to the prophets.<sup>99</sup>

Origen is noting that the connection between the sensory organs and the intellectual area of the mind, along with its ability to mimic the sensory organs. Later, in *Against Celsus*, Origen points out that food for the mother is converted to the milk for the baby demonstrating an understanding of a link in the physical process.<sup>100</sup> The production of seminal fluid is another physiological process over which Christianity has had much debate through the centuries on its effects and purpose. Wallace-Hadrill discussed Origen's physiological and theological views on the matter. "Origen defends the flesh from the imputation that it is intrinsically evil in provoking man to lust by arguing that the action of the body here is a purely physical matter, the eagerness of the body to empty

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., *Cels.* 1.48.

<sup>100</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 57. Cf *Cels.* 4.18.

passages which are filled with the seminal fluid.”<sup>101</sup> Origen is noting this natural state of the body, while at the same time stating that the believer should fight this natural state, to focus on higher things.

Using the Old Testament text as his guide for understanding the function of blood coupled with his Greek anatomical knowledge, Origen arrived at an interesting conclusion that animals possessed souls:

This certainly may be said appropriately of all living beings, even of those which abide in the waters; and of winged creatures too, this same definition of anima may be shown to hold good. Scripture also has added its authority to a second opinion, when it says, “Ye shall not eat the blood, because the life<sup>7</sup> of all flesh is its blood; and ye shall not eat the life with the flesh;”<sup>8</sup> in which it intimates most clearly that the blood of every animal is its life. And if any one now were to ask how it can be said with respect to bees, wasps, and ants, and those other things which are in the waters, oysters and cockles, and all others which are without blood, and are most clearly shown to be living things, that the “life of all flesh is the blood,” we must answer, that in living things of that sort the force which is exerted in other animals by the power of red blood is exerted in them by that liquid which is within them, although it be of a different colour; for colour is a thing of no importance, provided the substance be endowed with life.<sup>9</sup> *That beasts of burden or cattle of smaller size are endowed with souls,*<sup>10</sup> *there is, by general assent, no doubt whatever.*<sup>102</sup>

Origen combined his medical knowledge of anatomy with the Hebrew text to deduce that anything which had blood circulating would be alive with a soul. Even those creatures without red blood, such as insects and crustaceans, could still have a soul due to their other circulatory fluids in Origen’s analysis.

Other examples of Origen’s inclusion of anatomical beliefs are present in his writing. An interesting parallel to today’s discussion of anatomy was found in Origen’s

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 74. The author is referring to *Princ.* 3.4.3.

<sup>102</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Princ.* 2.8.1. Referred to by Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 44. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>7</sup> Animam. <sup>8</sup> Lev. xvii. 14: hJ yuch; paësh~ sarko; ~ ai | ma aujtoû ejsti, Sept. <sup>9</sup> Vitalis. <sup>10</sup> Animantia.

work on *First Principles*. After a discussion of the Greek types of matter which were believed to form life and creation, Origen writes an interesting statement:

I cannot understand how so many distinguished men have been of opinion that this matter, which is so great, and possesses such properties as to enable it to be sufficient for all the bodies in the world which God willed to exist, and to be the attendant and slave of the Creator for whatever forms and species He wished in all things, receiving into itself whatever qualities He desired to bestow upon it, was uncreated, i.e., not formed by God Himself, who is the Creator of all things, but that its nature and power were the result of chance.<sup>103</sup>

It is interesting to note that in his studies of the created order, Origen found himself in the same discussion with his contemporaries on the debate over matter and its purpose, which extends to the current day.

### Healing of the Mind

In Origen there was room for healing of the mind, which did not require a supernatural explanation. The coming of Jesus was something “which enlightens the reason<sup>11</sup> in the true<sup>12</sup> knowledge of things.”<sup>104</sup> Their minds would be set right by this knowledge that Jesus imparted in a cognitive manner. At another point in his rebuttal to Celsus, Origen discusses again the power of Jesus to heal and improve the mind:

And the name of Jesus can still remove distractions from the minds of men, and expel demons, and also take away diseases; and produce a marvellous meekness of spirit and complete change of character, and a humanity, and goodness, and gentleness in those individuals who do not feign themselves to be Christians for the sake of subsistence or the supply of any mortal wants, but who have honestly accepted the doctrine concerning God and Christ, and the judgment to come.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., *Princ.* 2.1.4.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., *Cels.* 3.61. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>11</sup> to; ἡγεμονικόν. <sup>12</sup> αἰεudῆ.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., *Cels.* 1.67. The reference is noted by Kelsey, *Healing and Christianity*, 108.

At first it looks as though Origen is merely pointing to the magical power of Jesus' name to heal the minds and characters of these people. At the end of the statement though, he clarifies that the acceptance of doctrines "concerning God and Christ, and the judgment to come" are the means to an intellectual assent to bring healing in the mind and character of the convert.<sup>106</sup> According to Origen, what appears to have been personality disorders were healed through instruction and agreement with the doctrines attached to the name of Jesus.

As mentioned earlier, Origen mentions a sort of placebo treatment where the physician might not tell the whole truth to the patient with the effect of bringing about healing.<sup>107</sup> This mental technique is not in favor in the current Western ethical model, but was a technique of Origen's time and in some cultures today. Origen was also aware of Chryssipus's work, *On the Cure of the Passions*, an attempt to modify behavior and attitude in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>108</sup> Healing the mind was important for the church. Origen viewed it as an integral part of Christianity's mission:

Christ is the archphysican who can cure every sickness and disease (cf Mt 4,23). But his disciples Peter and Paul, as well as the prophets are physicians too, together with the leaders of the Church after the Apostles who have been given the task of healing men's wounds, because God wished them to be physicians of the soul in his Church.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 61. Wallace-Hadrill is referring to *Cels.* 4.19.

<sup>108</sup> Bostock, "Medical Theory and Theology," 192. Bostock refers to *Cels.* 1.64 and 8.51.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 191. Bostock's translation of *Homilies on Psalm 37* 1,1: PG 12, 1369.

In Origen's vision above, the church's mission in the world was to continue Jesus' mission of healing minds, bodies, and souls.

Origen acknowledged the healing efficacy of natural medicines, intellectual instruction, and surgical intervention for the Christian in need of healing. His main problem with medicine would seem to have been an over reliance on its power, and its tendency to foster a neglect of the spiritual aspect of suffering by the Christian. With his endorsement of many secular medical treatments, he also left open the possibility of divine healing and the exorcism of demons as causative agents in physical or mental disease.

### **Faith Healing: The Way of Supernatural Healing in Origen**

Meredith wrote that for Christianity "demons were the effective agents of all misfortune."<sup>110</sup> She points out that Origen acknowledged the ability of demons to cause disease in a person. In *Against Celsus*, Origen seems to validate Meredith's opinion when he states that "wicked spirits . . . are the cause of plagues, or barrenness, or tempests, or similar calamities."<sup>111</sup> In another text, when discussing the case of a person with a mental problem in Matthew 17.15, "Origen criticizes rational medicine for diagnosing a mental disorder of which he believes a demonic agency to be the cause."<sup>112</sup> Origen did seem to believe in evil spirits and their capacity to cause disease and destruction.

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<sup>110</sup> Merideth, "Illness and Healing," 28.

<sup>111</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Cels.* 1.31.

<sup>112</sup> Ferngren, "Religion of Healing," 10, fn 54. He is citing Alexander, *Demonic Possession in the New Testament*, 229 n. 51.



On the other hand, it would be important to mention again that he did not seem to have exclusively seen problems in the physical world as having a demonic causation. In his theological work, *First Principles*, Origen writes a somewhat different opinion of the role of demons in disease:

We, however, who see the reason (of the thing) more clearly, do not hold this opinion, taking into account those (sins) which manifestly originate as a necessary consequence of our bodily constitution.<sup>1</sup> Must we indeed suppose that the devil is the cause of our feeling hunger or thirst? Nobody, I think, will venture to maintain that. If, then, he is not the cause of our feeling hunger and thirst, wherein lies the difference when each individual has attained the age of puberty, and that period has called forth the incentives of the natural heat? It will undoubtedly follow, that as the devil is not the cause of our feeling hunger and thirst, so neither is he the cause of that appetency which naturally arises at the time of maturity, viz., the desire of sexual intercourse. Now it is certain that this cause is not always so set in motion by the devil that we should be obliged to suppose that bodies would nor possess a desire for intercourse of that kind if the devil did not exist.<sup>113</sup>

Origen clearly did not see the devil behind every physical diagnosis, problem, or anatomic event. Nature had its part to play in Origen's cosmology and anthropology.

Amundsen points out an important point in the discussion of healing and early Christianity. The early church fathers all believed that demons could cure disease.<sup>114</sup> Origen does somewhat validate with this view in his rebuttal of Celsus: "For even, by the confession of Celsus, they [demons] can do nothing more than cure the body. But, indeed, I would say that it is not clear that these demons, however much they are revered, can even cure the body."<sup>115</sup> This possibility of demons causing cures would

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<sup>113</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Princ. 3.2.2. \_\_\_\_\_ <sup>1</sup>Ex corporali necessitate descendunt.

<sup>114</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 7.

<sup>115</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Cels. 8.60. This place was noted by Amundsen and Ferngren, "Medicine and Religion," 101.

have been an ever present concern for Origen when discussing the art of medicine and the ways of physical healing that Christians might utilize it. A physical cure from a demon would not be an acceptable cure for Origen, despite its effectiveness.

Origen also recognized supernatural forces other than God and demons. He stated that there were beings that supported the good and everyday functions of the world:

We indeed also maintain with regard not only to the fruits of the earth, but to every flowing stream and every breath of air that the ground brings forth those things which are said to grow up naturally,—that the water springs in fountains, and refreshes the earth with running streams,—that the air is kept pure, and supports the life of those who breathe it, only in consequence of the agency and control of certain beings whom we may call invisible husbandmen and guardians; but we deny that those invisible agents are demons.<sup>116</sup>

Origen's cosmology seems to have contained demons, helpful "guardians," and natural processes as one of the potential causative agents in a situation.

#### Exorcisms, Healings, and the Narrative of Jesus

Faith healing has been excluded to the edge of the discussions on healing in Western medicine, but remains practiced in many parts of the world. In Origen's world, the lines between medicine, surgery, and supernatural cures was not as clearly delineated as those of the current day. Origen believed that the name of Jesus had the power to rid people of demons and heal them:

For it is not by incantations that Christians seem to prevail (over evil spirits), but by the name of Jesus, accompanied by the announcement of the narratives which relate to Him; for the repetition of these has frequently been the means of driving demons out of men, especially when those who repeated them did so in a sound and genuinely believing spirit. Such power, indeed, does the name of Jesus possess over evil spirits, that there have been instances where it was effectual, when it was pronounced even by bad men, which Jesus Himself taught (would be

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., *Cels.* 8.31. Noted by Ferngren, "Early Christian Views," 190.

the case), when He said: “Many shall say to Me in that day, In Thy name we have cast out devils, and done many wonderful works.”<sup>117</sup>[original n.]

Origen believed that his form of supernatural healing was different from that of others who used “incantations.” It is interesting to note that Hector Avalos pointed to this difference in Christianity’s form of supernatural healing in comparison to others in the Greco-Roman world. He felt that the simplicity and lack of costly and extensive supernatural cures gave it a distinct advantage over other religions as it rose in numbers amidst the Roman Empire.<sup>118</sup> Although the healing by faith is potentially simple, it is important to note that Origen is not stating that the supernatural healing comes merely from the incantation of Jesus’ name. He included “the narratives which relate to Him.”<sup>119</sup> If a person believed Jesus’ name had the power to heal, then it was more effective, but even a non believer might be able to heal with Jesus’ name and narratives, according to Origen. Origen believed that these healings were still taking place after Jesus death and tied the healings in Jesus’ name loosely to doctrines of Jesus in this section of his debate with Celsus:

But we, when we relate the events of the history of Jesus, have no ordinary defence to offer for their occurrence; this, viz.,—that God desired to commend the doctrine of Jesus as a doctrine which was to save mankind, and which was based, indeed, upon the apostles as foundations of the rising<sup>1</sup> edifice of Christianity, but which increased in magnitude also in the succeeding ages, in which not a few

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., *Cels.* 1.6. Noted by Ferngren, “Religion of Healing,” 10. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>1</sup> Cf. Matt. vii. 22.

<sup>118</sup> Hector Avalos, *Health Care and the Rise of Christianity* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999), 84-5.

<sup>119</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Cels.* 1.6. Noted by Ferngren, “Religion of Healing,” 10.

cures are wrought in the name of Jesus, and certain other manifestations of no small moment have taken place.<sup>120</sup>

Origen must have felt that there were enough witnesses to his statement that he could publicly make the claim for healing in Jesus name in his rebuttal to the work of Celsus.

In many other places, Origen continues to make the claim for Jesus' ability to heal individuals through exorcism and even physical healing.<sup>121</sup> However, the healing is not a magical incantation to be controlled at the whim of the purchaser or speaker. Origen still views the healings as under God's providential control. His debate with Celsus, once again leads us into his thought on the matter:

Sir,<sup>2</sup> either disbelieve all the Gospel narratives, and then no longer imagine that you can found charges upon them; or, in yielding your belief to their statements, look in admiration on the Logos of God, who became incarnate, and who desired to confer benefits upon the whole human race. And this feature evinces the nobility of the work of Jesus, that, down to the present time, those whom God wills are healed by His name.<sup>3</sup> [original n.] <sup>122</sup>

Ultimately it was "those whom God wills" that were healed "by His name."

Ferngren writes that in Origen there can be seen an increase in the mention of the faith healing mission from earlier writers in primitive Christianity.<sup>123</sup> The Roman Empire in which Christianity was growing had supernatural faith healing existing side by side with medical and surgical healing methods.<sup>124</sup> Amundsen and Numbers agreed with this

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., *Cels.* 3.28. Noted by Kelsey, *Healing and Christianity*, 120.

\_\_\_\_\_ <sup>1</sup>τῆς καταβαλλομένης οἰκοδομῆς.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., *Cels.* 1.25, 3.36.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., *Cels.* 2.33. Noted by Kelsey, *Healing and Christianity*, 120. \_\_\_\_\_ <sup>2</sup>ὡς οὗτος <sup>3</sup> [Testimony not to be scorned]

<sup>123</sup> Ferngren, "Religion of Healing," 193.

view when discussing the results of their survey of healing in early Christianity, which encompassed the time period of Origen's writings:

It appears that, for the period under survey, several approaches to health and healing, involving both secular and spiritual means, although sometimes antithetical to each other, existed side by side among Christians. Some tension was inevitable but there was a surprising degree of complementarity.<sup>125</sup>

Origen seems to have embraced natural treatments side by side with supernatural healing beliefs. For Origen, it was a good God that came bringing multiple kinds of healing with the intent to redeem and renew his lost children.

### **Origen and the New Healing: Public Healing Through Ideas and Personal Renewal**

Redemption and renewal was the message of healing that Origen preached. He had found in medical science a ready ally to convey his Christian theology. The science of medicine appears to have also been ready to accept the new Christian theology. As noted in chapter one, Henry Sigerist and Rodney Stark both point to the change in the plight of the sick and weak that occurred as Christian influence grew in the Roman Empire.<sup>126</sup> Healing had become a part of the overall charity work of the nascent Christian movement.<sup>127</sup> Christians were becoming noticed for the healing that they were bringing to Roman society in general as they cared for the needs of individuals. D'Irsay had

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<sup>124</sup> Pattengale, "Benevolent Physicians," 100.

<sup>125</sup> Numbers and Amundsen, *Caring and Curing*, 60.

<sup>126</sup> Sigerist, *Civilization and Disease*; Stark, *Rise of Christianity*.

<sup>127</sup> Ferngren, "Religion of Healing," 14; Merideth, "Illness and Healing," 148. "The deep concern which the eastern fathers expressed towards the sick intersected with their attitudes towards the poor."

pointed to this growing awareness of Christian charity noted by Galen.<sup>128</sup> Health is dependent on a supportive environment, the basic needs of food and shelter, and character traits such as temperance.<sup>129</sup> Temperate characteristics keep individuals from over consumption and erratic behavior, which lead to many of the lifestyle health problems still prevalent in humanity. Origen saw Jesus as a healer come to renew the creation from the sickness that afflicted it socially, spiritually and physically.

According to Meredith, Vivian Nutton stated “that this identification of illness with moral failings was one of the factors which differentiated pagans and Christians. He claims that for Greeks and Romans illness did not have an ethical component.”<sup>130</sup> The afflicted Christian would seek to find a sin that might have brought on their disease process, most likely forcing introspection into causative mechanisms and encouraging behavioral changes of the individual and thus the group. Origen’s call for behavioral changes to heal the Christian would have proven ineffective for non-behavioral health problems, but highly effective for health problems related to unhealthy behavioral choices.

On the more public side of health, the idea of delivering healing beyond one’s circle of interest seems to have been a powerful and new idea for the science of healing in

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<sup>128</sup> d’Irsay, “Patristic Medicine,” 365.

<sup>129</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 4. The WHO definition of health listed by Amundsen seems to confirm at least the first two propositions asserted by this paper’s author. The place of temperament could be a more controversial factor in its role in health states.

<sup>130</sup> Meredith, “Illness and Healing,” 40-41. She is referring to Vivian Nutton, “Murders and Miracles: Lay Attitudes Towards Medicine in Classical Antiquity,” in *Patients and Practitioners*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 48.

the Roman Empire. Many modern historians have ignored this component in their explanations of the rise of early Christianity, but Meredith points to sociologist Rodney Stark who has sought to remind us that “ancient authors noted that epidemics, famines, and natural disasters contributed to the spread of Christianity.”<sup>131</sup> Christian nurturing of the ill, in the absence of societal concern for the sick, appears to have had an impact.

#### Food for Many: Health for the Multitudes

As Christians were coming to the notice of Romans for their social healing, writers and ministers like Origen had a major influence in the forming and encouraging of the faithful. What then did Origen say in regards to this important public aspect of health? A survey of the secondary literature has led to some comments in his writing which might witness to his sentiments and views on the subject.

In his reply to Celsus, Origen points out that Christianity could better bring the healthful ideal of moral change to the masses than Greco-Roman philosophy had been able to accomplish:

And even if we were required to show that the same doctrines have been better expressed among the Jewish prophets or in Christian writings, however paradoxical it may seem, we are prepared to prove this by an illustration taken from different kinds of food, and from the different modes of preparing them. Suppose that a kind of food which is wholesome and nutritious has been prepared and seasoned in such a way as to be fit, not for the simple tastes of peasants and poor labourers, but for those only who are rich and dainty in their tastes. Suppose, again, that that same food is prepared not to suit the tastes of the more delicate, but for the peasants, the poor labourers, and the common people generally, in short, so that myriads of persons might eat of it. Now if, according to the supposition, the food prepared in the one way promotes the health of those only who are styled the better classes, while none of the others could taste it, whereas when prepared in the other way it promoted the health of great multitudes of men, which shall we esteem as most contributing to the public welfare,—those who prepare food for persons of mark, or those who prepare it for the

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 120-1. Meredith is summarizing Stark, *Rise of Christianity*.

multitudes?—taking for granted that in both cases the food is equally wholesome and nourishing; while it is evident that the welfare of mankind and the common good are promoted better by that physician who attends to the health of the many, than by one who confines his attention to a few.<sup>132</sup>

Origen clearly felt that Christianity was healing society through the great numbers of converts and their actions. He felt confident enough of this moral healing to see the outcome of the Christian path to healing as equal, if not even better than that of the Greco-Roman philosophies. Christianity was influencing the masses as the philosophies had been unable to do.

### Temperance: The Renewed Individual and the Renewed Society

Immoderation leads to many illnesses related to behaviors that culminate in physical and social disease. Origen did discuss moderation and personal behavior. In *First Principles* he discusses the idea of the need for temperance in appetite, sexuality, and the emotional life of the person:

Let us consider, in the next place, if, as we have already shown, food is desired by human beings, not from a suggestion of the devil, but by a kind of natural instinct, whether, if there were no devil, it were possible for human experience to exhibit such restraint in partaking of food as never to exceed the proper limits; i.e., that no one would either take otherwise than the case required, or more than reason would allow; and so it would result that men, observing due measure and moderation in the matter of eating, would never go wrong. I do not think, indeed, that so great moderation could be observed by men (even if there were no instigation by the devil inciting thereto), as that no individual, in partaking of food, would go beyond due limits and restraint, until he had learned to do so from long usage and experience. What, then, is the state of the case? In the matter of eating and drinking it was possible for us to go wrong, even without any incitement from the devil, if we should happen to be either less temperate or less careful (than we ought); and are we to suppose, then, in our appetite for sexual intercourse, or in the restraint of our natural desires, our condition is not something similar?<sup>2</sup> I am of opinion, indeed, that the same course of reasoning must be understood to apply to other natural movements as those of covetousness,

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<sup>132</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Cels. 7.59.



or of anger, or of sorrow, or of all those generally which through the vice of intemperance exceed the natural bounds of moderation.<sup>133</sup>

Origen is outlining negatives in the life of humanity, and in doing so he is setting up a standard for the life of the Christian in the Greco-Roman world which would not necessarily see these as negatives. Lack of moderation was a systemic human problem which needed proper training to curb. Any such curbing would have led to decreases in disease states caused by excessive dietary intake, emotional volatility, and non-monogamous sexual activity. Origen believed that the emotional changes in many people within the Roman Empire had created a healing for the public good:

The assailants of Christianity do not see in how many persons the passions have been brought under restraint, and the flood of wickedness checked, and savage manners softened, by means of the Gospel. So that it well became those who are ever boasting of their zeal for the public good, to make a public acknowledgement of their thanks to that doctrine which by a new method led men to abandon many vices, and to bear their testimony at least to it, that even though not the truth, it has at all events been productive of benefit to the human race.<sup>134</sup>

In his reply to Celsus, Origen was proud of the positive changes that he felt had been accomplished in the Empire by Christianity. According to Origen, the public impact was such that some public officials acknowledged the healing effect of Christianity on those caught up in the unhealthy behaviors.

Many social illnesses are of concern in public health. Often social health issues such as violence affect women more than men due to their lower position in many

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., *Princ.* 3.2.2. Origen is discussing how illness is brought on by eating and drinking along with other natural inclinations to self-destructive behavior. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>2</sup>  
Quod non simile aliquid pateremur?; Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Homilies on Leviticus* 17.1. Noted by Bostock, "Medical Theory and Theology."

<sup>134</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Cels.* 1.64. Noted by Bostock, "Medical Theory and Theology," 192.

societies and therefore lack of access to resources and rights. In the Roman Empire, women for the most part did have a lower place in society. In quoting from Roger Gryson's work on female ministry in early Christianity, Rodney Stark notes Origen's comments on the worth to Christianity of female deacons in helping the needy.<sup>135</sup> This is telling of the important place of women in the new Christian society. Actually, "within the Christian subculture women enjoyed far higher status than did women in the Greco-Roman world at large."<sup>136</sup> This higher status for women in the Christian subculture did increase their survival rate in the face of the Greco-Roman practice of infanticide and abortion which favored girls for destruction and abandonment.<sup>137</sup> Christians, and later the christianized Roman society, did not allow the destruction of any infant, let alone the specific targeting of female infants. It seems plausible to assume that the higher place for women in Christianity, than Greco-Roman culture in general, would have translated into decreases in violence and better access to resources thereby increasing their overall health and survival.

Origen did comment on the objectification of women through the utilization of women as sexual servants. He did not look favorably on the role of prostitution in Roman society and its use to escape the natural birth of offspring.<sup>138</sup> The Roman Empire of Origen's time was struggling from lack of children. Despite legislation to promote

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<sup>135</sup> Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 109; Roger Gryson, *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1976), 134.

<sup>136</sup> Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 95. For further information see p.103-105.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 95, 97-8.

<sup>138</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Cels.* 5.42. Noted by Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 57.

families with three children and punishing childless couples, Roman families often were small or childless due to contraception, infanticide, and abortion.<sup>139</sup> “That the empire could continue as long as it did depended on a constant influx of ‘barbarian’ settlers.”<sup>140</sup> The weakening of the empire by decreasing births, as Stark noted, had weakened the Roman Empire’s defenses and social cohesion. It seems reasonable to conclude that this had consequently weakened the social protections for the life of the individual which the *pax Romana* provided, and therefore the health of the population. Thus the reproductive medical choices of the Roman Empire likely had a negative effect on the violence level and other social illnesses associated with political instability. The Roman legislation had failed to avert a public health crisis that the government viewed as a serious problem to its well being.<sup>141</sup> The children, whose health early Christianity sought to protect, were needed.

Origen viewed the Christian mission as one of healing for society, through the healing of the individual and thereby the group. He felt that Christianity was contributing to the public health by regulating or removing behaviors such as immoderation, and anger which lead to decreased states of health for the individual and subsequently the society.

### **Origen and the Master Physician**

Origen’s writings witness to the qualified validation of Greco-Roman medicine, the belief in supernatural healing, and the acknowledgement of the social healing instituted by early Christianity. Healing and the science of medicine were even used as an

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<sup>139</sup> Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 115-122.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 115-6.

appropriate analogy for the object of his worship—Jesus. To Origen, Jesus was the first physician who had come to heal the world. Jesus had come to save souls and bodies as a good physician seeking to heal the poor and sick. But even before the historical work of Jesus, God had created medical science to heal human suffering while humanity lived on the earth. Medicine's mission was at times so similar for Origen that the analogical use of medical theory for Christianity could serve as an illustration for Christian theology. The Christian must, of course, lean first on the Christian God and then on the art of medicine. Medicine's goal to end suffering was not always the goal in Origen's view of God, for sometimes God would send suffering to refine or redeem the individual. Healing could even be used by demons, as a tool at their command.

As a man of his culture, Greco-Roman medicine played an integral role in Origen's theology, and Origen's writings offer an important path to understanding the relationship between Christianity and healing. Origen was an important leader of the growing Christian religion that introduced a new ethic of healing into the art and science of Greco-Roman medicine.

### CHAPTER 3

#### TERTULLIAN AND THE ROLE OF HEALING

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus was the son of whom any parent of pagan Rome could be proud. After his birth in Carthage, North Africa, he had grown to become a skilled lawyer and rhetorician in Rome. He spent the first four decades of his life rising to the top of Roman society by using his inherent wit and intelligence coupled with an intense drive. In his early forties, life changed for Tertullian. He had been so impressed by the conviction which Christians displayed during their persecutions that he was drawn to the Christian faith. Johannes Quasten points out that we know little of his conversion experience to Christianity, but Tertullian did convert to Christianity with a zeal for his new found faith.<sup>1</sup> It was a zeal that could not be matched by most people of any day.

The search for truth marked his Christian experience, as Tertullian sought to live, defend, and explicate Christianity. This search took many twists and turns. Most likely he had become a priest of the Catholic Church, yet by 207 C.E. Tertullian had left Latin Christianity for the rigorist Montanist sect.<sup>2</sup> Despite his estrangement from the Catholic Church later in life, Tertullian's literary works left an indelible mark on Western

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<sup>1</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, 246-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

Christianity through his influence on the Latin theology of the western Christian tradition. Quasten notes:

Except for St. Augustine, Tertullian is the most important and original ecclesiastical author in Latin. With a profound knowledge of philosophy, law, Greek and Latin letters, Tertullian combines inexhaustible vigor, burning rhetoric, and biting satire.<sup>3</sup>

Tertullian has been called the father of Latin theology in the Catholic Church, yet Quasten does not feel that Tertullian can truly be called the father of Latin Christian theology because of the nonsystematic and highly polemic nature of his work.<sup>4</sup> What is certain, however, is the large influence that Tertullian had on the development of theology in the Latin tradition of early Christian theology. His influence and positioning at the beginning of the divergence between Eastern and Western Christian theology make Tertullian's views on the relationship between healing and Christianity significant to the understanding of the views held by the early Christian church.

Tertullian dealt with the relationship between Christianity and healing in a nonsystematic manner, characteristic of his unique style and quite different than Origen's.<sup>5</sup> Like Origen, however, he also never devoted an entire treatise to the relationship between healing and Christianity. Yet, a number of Tertullian's responses to situations and issues can be extracted from his writings to form at least a partial picture of the way Tertullian viewed the role of healing in Christian life. Tertullian creates an understanding in his reader of the worth of healing to the Christian who must love the world that the Christian God created. This statement must be qualified, since it is only

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 319-20.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 297.

part of Tertullian's views on healing. Despite the good of the created world, the healing arts were to maintain their proper role as servants of the Christian God, never seeking to distract the Christian believer from God. This chapter will seek to explicate Tertullian's views on the role of healing in Christianity, along with the roles of secular medicine, social health, and faith healing in his works.

### **The Theology and Use of Healing in Tertullian's Writings**

Tertullian was familiar with Greco-Roman knowledge on medicine.<sup>6</sup> At some point he also became familiar with "early Christian literature...especially...Justin, Tatian, Melito, Theophilus, Irenaeus, and Clement."<sup>7</sup> As a result he would have been familiar with Tatian and Clement's comments on the relationship between medicine and Christianity.<sup>8</sup> Tertullian had exposed himself to the prior theological work on this subject by Clement of Alexandria, who was Origen's mentor, and the ascetic anti-Greco-Roman Tatian. The question then arises: What was Tertullian's view of the relationship between Christian theology and healing after his instruction in Greco-Roman thought was combined with his reading of the early Christian writers? Some key issues and emphases do arise from a look at this aspect of Tertullian's writings. His relationship to reason, the place of suffering in healing, and the idea of the innate image of God in humanity are key themes in his theology which directly or indirectly relate to his theological use of, and relationship to, the act of healing.

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<sup>6</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 146.

<sup>7</sup> Goodspeed and Grant, *Early Christian Literature*, 166.

<sup>8</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*. An entire chapter is devoted to Tatian. Clement is also discussed in many places.

### The Place of Reason

Tertullian was in search of truth, a journey which for him could not be taken without the use of reason. Tertullian had found Christianity through emotion, yet despite his anti-scientific rhetoric he maintained a complex relationship to the use of reason, and therefore to medical science.<sup>9</sup> Tertullian is famous for his deprecation of reason's worth in the face of Christian revelation:

What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? what between heretics and Christians? Our instruction comes from "the porch of Solomon,"<sup>23</sup> who had himself taught that "the Lord should be sought in simplicity of heart."<sup>24</sup>[original n.] <sup>10</sup>

Darrel Amundsen notes that Tertullian felt that "philosophical speculation spawns heresy; so Tertullian emphatically insisted that there must be an absolute breach between 'science' and 'faith.'"<sup>11</sup> Despite such harsh rhetoric, Tertullian did not discontinue the use of his extensive education in Greco-Roman thought. He instead used it to create his theological, pastoral, and apologetic works on Christianity.<sup>12</sup>

Tertullian's use of the science of Greco-Roman medical thought demonstrates this state of affairs. Tertullian had called medicine the "sister (as they say) of Philosophy."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, 247.

<sup>10</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, The Prescription Against Heretics* 7. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>23</sup> Because in the beginning of the church the apostles taught in Solomon's porch, Acts iii. 5. <sup>24</sup> Wisdom of Solomon, i. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 145. Amundsen is referring to the findings of Charles Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture; a Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957).

<sup>12</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 146.

<sup>13</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, On the Soul (De Anima)* 2.



Even after equating medicine with the despised Philosophy, Amundsen points out that Tertullian would not give up the use of his medical knowledge in his apologetic and theology: “Tertullian, probably motivated simply by interest or curiosity, had studied medicine.<sup>106</sup> He was fond of using physician-patient and medical analogies in his writings, as were classical philosophers and many other church fathers.”<sup>14</sup> Tertullian was not ready to leave reason and medicine behind, after his conversion to Christianity. As David Lindberg states, “Tertullian himself viewed Christianity as the fulfillment of Greek rationality, and he both advocated and engaged in philosophical activity.”<sup>15</sup> Lindberg’s research has led him past the rhetoric of Tertullian to include him with the other church fathers who embraced a qualified use of medicine. “What the church fathers were eager to denounce was not the use of secular medicine, but the tendency to overvalue it and the failure to recognize and acknowledge its divine origin.”<sup>16</sup> This relationship between Tertullian and reason seems to closely parallel his relationship to medicine, the “sister” of Greco-Roman philosophy.

### **Tertullian’s Use of the Healing Analogy in His Theology**

Like Origen, Tertullian found in medicine a readymade analogy to use in the theology and rhetoric of his apologetic works. It is of note that Origen seems to have been much more likely to utilize the medical analogy for theological explication than

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<sup>14</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 146. <sup>106</sup> Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 210.

<sup>15</sup> David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers, *When Science & Christianity Meet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 12.

<sup>16</sup> David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious, and Institutional Context, 600 B.C. To A.D. 1450* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 321.

Tertullian. This said, Tertullian did not shy away from the use of medical analogy to explain his theological ideas. Adolf von Harnack noted the use of the medical analogy in Tertullian's work on baptism.<sup>17</sup> Rudolph Arbesmann also commented on this phenomenon in Tertullian when writing on the concept of "Christus medicus" in Augustine. He states that it was Tertullian who introduced the analogical idea of the healer as a model of Christ in this world.<sup>18</sup> This analogical utilization can be clearly seen when Tertullian uses it to describe the theological implications of the fall in the Garden of Eden:

Thus, seeing God by brief (sufferings) effects cures for eternity, extol your God for your prosperity; you have fallen into His hands, but have happily fallen. He also fell into your sicknesses. Man always first provides employment for the physician; in short, he has brought upon himself the danger of death. He had received from his own Lord, as from a physician, the salutary enough rule to live according to the law, that he should eat of all indeed (that the garden produced) and should refrain from only one little tree which in the meantime the Physician Himself knew as a perilous one. He gave ear to him whom he preferred, and broke through self-restraint. He ate what was forbidden, and, surfeited by the trespass, suffered indigestion tending to death; he certainly richly deserving to lose his life altogether who wished to do so. But the inflamed tumour due to the trespass having been endured until in due time the medicine might be mixed, the Lord gradually prepared the means of healing-all the rules of faith, they also bearing a resemblance to (the causes of) the ailment, seeing they annul the word of death by the word of life, and diminish the trespass-listening by a listening of allegiance.<sup>19</sup>

Tertullian called God the "Physician" who had prescribed the healthy course of action which the patient failed to follow. In this state of disease, God the physician then

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<sup>17</sup> Adolf von Harnack and James Moffatt, *Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, 109.

<sup>18</sup> Arbesmann, "Concept of 'Christus Medicus'," 6.

<sup>19</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting* 5. Noted by David W. Bercot, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More Than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers*. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 445.

prepared the contrary medicines to heal the disease with its opposites, a medical theory typical to the Greco-Roman medicine of the time, as was discussed in chapter two on Origen. Tertullian was also able to use the healing analogy more explicitly in relation to the cross:

Why, once more, did the same Moses, after prohibiting the likeness of everything, set up the golden serpent on the pole; and as it hung there, propose it as an object to be looked at for a cure?<sup>2</sup> Did he not here also intend to show the power of our Lord's cross, whereby that old serpent the devil was vanquished, -whereby also to every man who was bitten by spiritual serpents, but who yet turned with an eye of faith to it, was proclaimed a cure from the bite of sin, and health for evermore?<sup>20</sup>

Using the healing story of Moses' action in the Old Testament narrative, Tertullian could associate the cross of the New Testament analogically as a similar healing instrument.

### **Tertullian's Use of the Healing Analogy in His Apology**

The rhetorical application of the medical analogy in the apology of the Christian faith was not lost on Tertullian. Much like Origen, he skillfully employed the analogy to create convincing rhetorical wording for problems that others might have with Christian doctrine. One such example is the comparison of Jesus' healing work with the pain caused by the physician in some medical methods of healing:

And the healing art has manifestly an apparent cruelty, by reason of the lancet, and of the burning iron, and of the great heat of the mustard; yet to be cut and burned, and pulled and bitten, is not on that account an evil, for it occasions helpful pains; nor will it be refused merely because it afflicts, but because it afflicts inevitably will it be applied. The good accruing is the apology for the frightfulness of the work. In short, that man who is howling and groaning and bellowing in the hands of a physician will presently load the same hands with a fee, and proclaim that they are the best operators, and no longer affirm that they are cruel.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., *Against Marcion* 3.18. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>2</sup> Spectaculum salutare.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., *Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting* 5. Noted by Droge, Arthur J., and James D. Tabor. *A Noble Death*, 146.

Tertullian cleverly uses the pain component to the surgeon's healing work to make an apology for God's requiring of martyrdom to effect the healing cure on people and Roman society. This is the same tact which Origen used to make an apology for suffering in the world.

Tertullian seems to elevate the medical profession and its work in the eyes of the Christian community by the act of comparison with their God. It is not unlikely that the readers of Tertullian's work would have agreed with his comparison and quite possibly held a special place for healing due to his reasoned use of this analogy and apology of healing. Amundsen does caution against carrying this assumption so far as to say the metaphor created a wholehearted acceptance of medicine in Christianity.<sup>22</sup> Neither Tertullian nor Origen accepted medical science without caveats or reservations.

#### Suffering and Healing

Suffering is typically the reason that most people seek health care and are often willing to pay any price for the cure they seek. Christians were challenged to go against this natural self-protectionism, and to accept suffering if providentially required of them as Christians. Therefore, Tertullian's understanding of the Christian response to suffering has direct relation to his beliefs on the relationship between the Christianity and the healing arts. Amundsen places Tertullian amongst a diverse group of church fathers who discussed the place of suffering in the life of the Christian:

Even a cursory and random reading of the church fathers reveals that they regarded suffering as an essential aspect of God's sanctifying of his people. This belief, combined with a firm assurance that God is sovereign, and an equally firm

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<sup>22</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 11.

trust that he does all thing[s] for their ultimate good, engendered in them an imperative to preach and practice endurance in the face of all afflictions.<sup>23</sup>

Christians were called to bear their suffering in the belief that a patient faith would ultimately prove worthy, despite even the suffering that a martyrdom might bring.<sup>24</sup>

Suffering could even be from God and should be discerned as to its source. "Tertullian . . . held that any particular suffering was intended as a warning for Christians and as punishment for the heathen (*On Flight in Persecution* 1-2)."<sup>25</sup> Suffering, death, and misfortune, even that initiated by the devil, were not an inherent evil for Tertullian:

With this strength of patience, Esaias is cut *asunder*, and ceases not to speak concerning the Lord; Stephen is stoned, and prays for pardon to his foes.<sup>8</sup> Oh, happy also he who met all the violence of the devil by the exertion of every species of patience!<sup>9</sup> -whom neither the driving away of his cattle nor those riches of his in sheep, nor the sweeping away of his children in one swoop of ruin, nor, finally, the agony of his own body in (one universal) wound, estranged from the patience and the faith which he had plighted to the Lord; whom the devil smote with all his might in vain. For by all his pains he was not drawn away from his reverence for God; but he has been set up as an example and testimony to us, for the thorough accomplishment of patience as well in spirit as in flesh, as well in mind as in body; in order that we succumb neither to damages of our worldly goods, nor to losses of those who are dearest, nor even to bodily afflictions. What a bier<sup>10</sup> for the devil did God erect in the person of that hero! What a banner did He rear over the enemy of His glory, when, at every bitter message, that man uttered nothing out of his mouth but thanks to God, while he denounced his wife, now quite wearied with ills, and urging him to resort to crooked remedies!<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 79. Amundsen notes that Tertullian's calls for Christians not to run from the suffering of martyrdom became more fervent as he left Catholicism for the Montanist sect.

<sup>25</sup> Amundsen and Ferngren, "Medicine and Religion," 98.

<sup>26</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, On Patience* 14. Noted by Larson and Amundsen, *A Different Death*, 107. <sup>8</sup> Acts vii. 59, 60. <sup>9</sup> Job. See Job i. and ii. <sup>10</sup> "Feretrum"-for carrying trophies in a triumph, the bodies of the dead, and their effigies, etc.

For apparently no pagan raised the question of whether human beings have inherent value, or possess intrinsic rights, ontologically, irrespective of social value, legal status, age, sex, and so forth. The first espousal of an idea of inherent human value in Western civilization depended on a belief that every human being was formed in the image of God.<sup>28</sup>

Tertullian demonstrates his view of the *imago Dei* during his attack on the Gnostic writer Marcion:

Furthermore, although you allow, with others,<sup>2</sup> that man was inbreathed by God into a living soul, not God by man, it is yet palpably absurd of you to be placing human characteristics in God rather than divine ones in man, and clothing God in the likeness of man, instead of man in the image of God. And this, therefore, is to be deemed the likeness of God in man, that the human soul have the same emotions and sensations as God, although they are not of the same kind; differing as they do both in their conditions and their issues according to their nature.<sup>29</sup>

Tertullian is laying out the fundamental belief that each person is inbreathed with some similarity to God, the image of God, by merely the act of coming into existence. For Tertullian and Christianity, the very essence of every human was formed in the image of the Christian God and therefore deserving of inherent worth.

Greek dualism often led to a denigration of the physical world and the body. The Christian faith of Tertullian was imbued with the world affirming thought of the Jewish scriptures and Christianity's belief in the physical resurrection of the flesh. Tertullian felt so strongly about the importance of material existence for the Christian that he wrote about it in his treatise *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*:

He now became man, who was hitherto clay. "And He breathed upon his face the breath of life, and man (that is, the clay) became a living soul; and God placed the man whom He had formed in the garden."<sup>8</sup> So that man was clay at first, and only afterwards man entire. I wish to impress this on your attention, with a view to

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<sup>28</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 62-3.

<sup>29</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Against Marcion* 2.16. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>2</sup>  
Pariter.

your knowing, that whatever God has at all purposed or promised to man, is due not to the soul simply, but to the flesh also.<sup>30</sup>

Tertullian was arguing for the importance of the physical body in the current existence. It is hard to imagine this not influencing the thought and practice of those Christians who followed him. The current body, along with the soul, was important and therefore the healing of the physical body would most likely have borne some importance in his theology and practice of the Christian life.<sup>31</sup>

### **Tertullian on Scientific and Naturalistic Medicine's Place in Christianity**

The Greco-Roman world had a long tradition of medical theory and practice by the time that Tertullian had become a Christian. It was in this society, at the foundations of current Western society, that Tertullian interacted with the Greco-Roman science of medicine and surgery. Tertullian “was the first Christian author, if certain physiological and hygienic writings of Clement be disregarded, who attempted a scientific integration.”<sup>32</sup> According to Pattengale, he was also one of the “Church Fathers [who] integrated science in their presentation and defense of biblical truths.”<sup>33</sup> He did, however, not see medicine and healing as an unassailable good. It could become a distraction to the person’s ultimate purpose in life—salvation.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., *On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 5. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>8</sup> Gen. ii. 7, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Kelsey, *Healing and Christianity*, 114.

<sup>32</sup> d’Irsay, “Patristic Medicine,” 368.

<sup>33</sup> Pattengale, “Benevolent Physicians”, 104.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., *On Modesty* 22.

### Tertullian and the Greco-Roman Medical Tradition

Tertullian did not call for the removal of Christians from Roman society. Instead he pointed out their location at all levels and places of society as a people who were living peacefully within the bounds of the Roman Empire despite the ongoing semi-arbitrary persecution of their faithful.<sup>35</sup> As an educated and longstanding citizen of the Roman Empire, Tertullian was familiar with the medical tradition and practice of his culture. Therefore, when pertinent to certain topics that he was writing about Tertullian would discuss the ideas of these various medical thinkers and traditions. In these interactions with the healing religion of Aesculapius, and the medical thinking of Hippocrates, Soranus, and Herophilus and others, Tertullian wrote an unsystematic critique of his culture's healing tradition.

At the time of Tertullian's writing there was a popular healing religion in the Roman Empire which worshipped the god Aesculapius as a divine healer. Aesculapius had been appropriated from the Greek god Asclepius whom Homer called "the 'peerless physician.'"<sup>36</sup> Hector Avalos and Arbesmann have commented on the particular hostility Tertullian held for this Roman god of healing.<sup>37</sup> Nigel Allan states that Tertullian "polemicalised Aesculapius" to differentiate between the similarity of the two, "especially

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., *Apology* 37.

<sup>36</sup> Grolier Incorporated., *The Encyclopedia Americana. Volume I, A to Anjou*, International ed. (Danbury, Conn.: Grolier Inc., 1998), 232. Article by Lillian Feder of Queens College, The City University of New York.

<sup>37</sup> Avalos, *Health Care and the Rise of Christianity*, 94. Referring to *Apology* 14.5 where Tertullian comments on Aesculapius' punishment for "'improper use of his healing skill'"; Arbesmann, "Concept of 'Christus Medicus'," 3. Arbesmann is discussing *To the Heathens* 2.14.



in their role of healer, [which] was of particular concern to the early church.”<sup>38</sup>

Tertullian’s vision of Christ as physician might have been in competition with the god Aesculapius for adherents seeking physical healing. Yet, Ferngren argues convincingly that Christianity was not initially a religion primarily fixated on physical healing. He argues that it was not until the late third and fourth centuries that some of Christianity’s healing tradition came to mimic its pagan predecessors more closely.<sup>39</sup>

Tertullian was familiar with medical theories from both Plato and Hippocrates.<sup>40</sup> In his treatise, *On the Soul*, he questioned Plato’s belief in the soul’s entrance into the body with the first breath after birth.<sup>41</sup> Hippocrates, to whom the modern medical Hippocratic oath is attributed, was not looked upon favorably in Tertullian’s attack on the practice of abortion. According to Tertullian, Hippocrates possessed “one of the brutal surgical instruments designed to dismember the fetus.”<sup>42</sup> Soranus, the Greek obstetrical physician, notes that Hippocrates was only against “drug-induced abortions because he knew the section in the Hippocratic treatise that prescribed a method to induce an

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<sup>38</sup> Nigel Allan, “The Healing Serpent in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition,” in *From Athens to Jerusalem: Medicine in Hellenized Jewish Lore and in Early Christian Literature: Papers of the Symposium in Jerusalem, 9-11 September 1996*, ed. Samuel S. Kottek and Manfred Horstmanshoff (Rotterdam: Erasmus Pub., 2000), 221.

<sup>39</sup> Ferngren, “Religion of Healing.”

<sup>40</sup> d’Irsay, “Patristic Medicine,” 367.

<sup>41</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, On the Soul* 25. Noted by Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 268. It should be noted that in *On the Soul* 10 Tertullian affirms an aspect of Plato’s views on the soul.

<sup>42</sup> John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 9. He is referring to *On the Soul* 25.

abortion by manipulation.”<sup>43</sup> Along with Hippocrates and Plato, the physician and theorist Galen was often mentioned by Tertullian.<sup>44</sup>

D'Irsay gives special import to the work of two Greco-Roman medical practitioners in Tertullian's writings:

The medical work of two men in particular must have impressed Tertullian, to wit: Soranus and Herophilus. The latter he abuses, calling him a butcher rather than a physician, for his many autopsies and vivisections which were allegedly performed on criminals, . . . Soranus most probably draws his interest to obstetrics.”<sup>45</sup>

Although Soranus had written a recipe for abortive suppositories, Tertullian still found him a useful ally in other areas of his theology on the body and soul. When Tertullian wrote his treatise *On the Soul* he heavily used Soranus' work. “Tertullian's most important source was *On the Soul*. . . in four books by the physician Soranus of Ephesus, who thought the soul corporeal like the Stoics.”<sup>46</sup> Herophilus did not escape Tertullian's rhetoric as easily:

There is that Herophilus, the well-known surgeon, or (as I may almost call him) butcher, who cut up no end of persons,<sup>11</sup> in order to investigate the secrets of nature, who ruthlessly handled<sup>12</sup> human creatures to discover (their form and make): I have my doubts whether he succeeded in clearly exploring all the internal parts of their structure, since death itself changes and disturbs the natural functions of life, especially when the death is not a natural one, but such as must cause irregularity and error amidst the very processes of dissection.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>44</sup> d'Irsay, “Patristic Medicine,” 367.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, 289.

<sup>47</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *On the Soul* 10. Referred to by Ralph Jackson, *Doctors and Diseases in the Roman Empire*. 1st ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988 and in *On the Soul* 25 Tertullian mentions Herophilus' possession of the abortive surgical instrument; Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 131. Since

Herophilus' vivisection of living criminals seems to have offended Tertullian's sense of the *imago Dei*, and therefore the inherent worth of the human being. He goes beyond offering a personal moral argument against Herophilus' actions, to calling into question the scientific nature of his work by critiquing his methodology.

### Tertullian's Idea of the Physician

Tertullian critiqued and used the medical knowledge of Greco-Roman thinkers. Assuming that analogy can be used to show similarity of meaning and acknowledging the qualification of information acquired from extrapolation, Tertullian's writings can shine some light on what he perceived as the ideal of the physician in the growing Christian communities. The Christian community was a part of the culture and yet it had its own distinctive beliefs. One such belief was the need to provide charity to others. Avalos states that "sentiments against fees expressed by New Testament writers continued into the second and third centuries and formed a coherent argument, among at least some apologists, on behalf of Christian health practices and against the practices of many Greco-Roman traditions."<sup>48</sup> Avalos is referring to the comments of Christians, such as those by Tertullian in his *Apology*, that the Christians offered healing services which did not require payment, unlike the pagan temples where people went for healing.<sup>49</sup> Such a charitable disposition of the Christian religion, and most likely its Christian physicians, would have been appealing to those in need of healing. Indeed, Christians were a part of

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Celsus also referred to vivisection by Herophilus, Nutton is willing to allow Tertullian's statement as possessing some validity. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>11</sup> Sexcentos. <sup>12</sup> Odit.

<sup>48</sup> Avalos, *Health Care*, 95.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 94-5. Avalos is referring to Tertullian's *Apology* 39.5 and noting the Christian community's use of Matthew 10:8 as a reason for its charity.

society working alongside, and depending on, others in the Roman Empire. Pattengale points to Tertullian's sentiments on the Christian worker as an ethical, contributing, and essential member of society that it was squandering in its deadly persecution. It seems probable that Tertullian would have included the charitably motivated Christian physician in the human resources squandered by the Roman persecution.<sup>50</sup>

Tertullian felt comfortable using the role of the physician as an analogy for the work of God in the Garden of Eden and the ministry of Jesus.<sup>51</sup> From extrapolation of his comments on Jesus as the ideal physician, it seems reasonable to form a picture of his vision for good and ethical doctors. For Tertullian the Christian doctor would be caring and prudent.<sup>52</sup> They would practice good medicine, unlike that of Aesculapius and that of Herophilus in his vivisection research on humans.<sup>53</sup> In an analogy, Tertullian offers another example of the proper practice of the physician. The good physician would not delay the cure from a person to gain extra wealth or fame.<sup>54</sup>

Tertullian alludes to two other aspects of the role of Christian physicians in the life of Christians and society. Tertullian seems to imply that the Christian physician

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<sup>50</sup> Pattengale, "Benevolent Physicians," 106. Pattengale is referring to *Apology* 42 and 44.

<sup>51</sup> Arbesmann, "Concept of 'Christus Medicus'," 6. Arbesmann is referring to *Against Marcion* 3.17; Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, On Modesty* 9. Jesus is seen as physician for the sick; Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 146. They are referring to *Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting* 5 where God is seen as a Physician prescribing healthy behavior and healing the results of failure to comply.

<sup>52</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Apology* 2.5.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., *Apology* 14.5 & *On the Soul* 25.

<sup>54</sup> Arbesmann, "Concept of 'Christus Medicus'," 7. Arbesmann is referring to *Against Marcion* 1.22.

would need to know their place in order of things. The physician is a necessity of this life, but could become a person creating a dependence which binds the person's soul to this world inappropriately.<sup>55</sup> He also identifies that the Christian physician would require the trust of the patient to effect a cure. This physician-patient relationship requires the patient to humble themselves, in trust, to the point of embarrassment if necessary, to acquire the cure for their illness, because the alternative would be death without submission to the physician's ability to heal.<sup>56</sup>

### On Topics of Medicine

The physician had a part to play in Tertullian's vision of the Christian subculture in Greco-Roman society. As he addressed different moral and theological topics, he dealt with areas and topics in medicine from surgery, to Greco-Roman medical theory, to healthy living, and also abortion.

### Greek Medical Theory, Medicine, & Surgery

Tertullian critiqued and utilized the medical theories of his time. He embraced the ideas of contraries which were used to heal their opposites in Greco-Roman medicine, while still feeling able to allow God to circumvent the theory with a healing of like with like.<sup>57</sup> Tertullian does not appear to be against the idea of Christians seeking appropriate medical and surgical intervention for disease. In many places he seems to affirm the use

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<sup>55</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, On Modesty* 22.

<sup>56</sup> Arbesmann, "Concept of 'Christus Medicus'," 6. This idea is extrapolated from *Concerning Repentance* 10 referred to by Arbesmann.

<sup>57</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Antidote Against the Scorpion's Sting* 5.

of surgery through its use as a positive analogy for Christian beliefs.<sup>58</sup> In his apology on Christian refusal to participate in pagan rituals, *The Chaplet*, Tertullian points to the use of medicines for healing in the Jewish and Christian traditions as far back as Isaiah and Paul.<sup>59</sup> The concern for Tertullian is more that of the proper Christian use of medicine and surgery:

For we affirm that those things only are proper to be used, whether by ourselves or by those who lived before us, and alone befit the service of God and Christ Himself, which to meet the necessities of human life supply what is simply; useful and affords real assistance and honourable comfort, so that they may be well believed to have come from God's own inspiration, who first of all no doubt provided for and taught and ministered to the enjoyment, I should suppose, of His own man. As for the things which are out of this class, they are not fit to be used among us, especially those which on that account indeed are not to be found either with the world, or in the ways of Christ.<sup>60</sup>

It is for Christianity to apply the principles of the faith to derive what is acceptable to use of the world's medical offerings.

### **Healthy Living**

The Christian also had a responsibility to maintain their personal health through proper living. Tertullian made mention that he bathed in the appropriate manner to maintain his health according to the Greco-Roman medical beliefs.<sup>61</sup> He believed in a connection between the body, mind and soul:

Very likely, too, something must be set down to the score of bodily condition and the state of the health. Stoutness hinders knowledge, but a spare form stimulates it; paralysis prostrates the mind, a decline preserves it. How much more will those

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., *Against Marcion* 2.6; *Antidote for the Scorpions* Sting 5.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., *The Chaplet* 8. Referred to by Numbers and Amundsen, *Caring and Curing*, 59 fn.72.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. Referred to by Numbers and Amundsen, *Caring and Curing*, 59 fn.72.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., *Apology* 39, 42.

accidental circumstances have to be noticed, which, in addition to the state of one's body or one's health, tend to sharpen or to dull the intellect! It is sharpened by learned pursuits, by the sciences, the arts, by experimental knowledge, business habits, and studies; it is blunted by ignorance, idle habits, inactivity, lust, inexperience, listlessness, and vicious pursuits.<sup>62</sup>

A healthy natural state was to be sought. In his discussion of sleep, Tertullian states that sleep in its natural and proper state is desirable. When too much or too little sleep is the case, it is the physician's role to help the patient return to a natural state of affairs as in other cases of disease.<sup>63</sup> His statement on sleep would also seem to mediate against a view of Tertullian as overly ascetical when it comes to seeking a healthy life, at least at that point in the evolution of his beliefs.

### **Abortion**

Tertullian advocated for healthy behavior in the Christian life. Not only the health of adults, but also the health of infants occupied his concerns. A discussion of his views on infanticide in the Greco-Roman world will be discussed in the public health section, but here we will discuss Tertullian's views on the related, but more individual and medical procedure of abortion. Tertullian withheld none of his rhetorical prowess and moral judgments when he attacked the Roman Empire's tolerance of abortion. Amundsen offers us some probable insight into the reason for Tertullian's vigorous attack on its practice:

The imago Dei, with its attendant value, rights, and responsibilities, attached in early Christian thought to the newborn, whether healthy or sickly, maimed, deformed, or monstrous, indeed to that whole continuum of the defective, in vivid contrast to the attitudes and practices of pagan antiquity.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., *On the Soul* 20.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., *On the Soul* 43.

<sup>64</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 65.

Tertullian's disdain for the pagan abortive practices can be seen in his *To the Heathens* (*Ad Nationes*). When called to defend against the rumor that Christians sacrificed infants in their rituals, he coyly turned the attack back on his accusers:

But, after all, what do you less than we; or rather, what do you not do in excess of us? I wonder whether it be a small matter to you<sup>5</sup> to pant for human entrails, because you devour full-grown men alive? Is it, forsooth, only a trifle to lick up human blood, when you draw out<sup>6</sup> the blood which was destined to live? Is it a light thing in your view to feed on an infant, when you consume one wholly before it is come to the birth?<sup>7</sup>[original n.] <sup>65</sup>

Tertullian turned a rumor concerning Christian religious practice into a counter attack on the morality of the accusers. While writing his *Apology* he was much clearer about his view of Christianity's teaching on the life of a fetus in the womb:

In our case, murder being once for all forbidden, we may not destroy even the foetus in the womb, while as yet the human being derives blood from other parts of the body for its sustenance. To hinder a birth is merely a speedier man-killing; nor does it matter whether you take away a life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to the birth. That is a man which is going to be one; you have the fruit already in its seed.<sup>66</sup>

Tertullian had carried the Christian pacifism of the early church to the logical conclusion that destruction of a developing person would be murder, in most cases.

It is in Tertullian's treatise, *On the Soul*, that he devotes much of a chapter to the status of a neonate's soul and further explains his views on abortion. Tertullian began by disagreeing with the Stoic and Platonic belief that the soul was "inhaled" at birth and

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<sup>65</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, To the Heathen (Ad nationes)* 1.15. Noted by Amundsen, *Medicine, Society and Faith*, 69. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>5</sup> Parum scilicet? <sup>6</sup> Elicitis. <sup>7</sup> Infantem totum praecocum.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., *Apology* 9. Noted by Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 69.



therefore did not reside in the body prior to its first breath of cold air.<sup>67</sup> He then held that it was unnatural that a physician would take the life of a human being, even a potential human being. Interestingly, Tertullian turned to the pregnant mother to prove his point that the fetal body within her was filled with life and soul:

These gentlemen, I suppose, were too modest to come to terms with women on the mysteries of childbirth, so well known to the latter. But how much more is there for them to blush at, when in the end they have the women to refute them, instead of commending them. Now, in such a question as this, no one can be so useful a teacher, judge, or witness, as the sex itself which is so intimately concerned. Give us your testimony, then, ye mothers, whether yet pregnant, or after delivery (let barren women and men keep silence),-the truth of your own nature is in question, the reality of your own suffering is the point to be decided. (Tell us, then, ) whether you feel in the embryo within you any vital force<sup>3</sup> other than your own, with which your bowels tremble, your sides shake, your entire womb throbs, and the burden which oppresses you constantly changes its position? Are these movements a joy to you, and a positive removal of anxiety, as making you confident that your infant both possesses vitality and enjoys it? Or, should his restlessness cease, your first fear would be for him; and he would be aware of it within you, since he is disturbed at the novel sound;<sup>68</sup>

Tertullian told the childless philosopher and woman to listen to the words and actions of those who had actual experience with the growing baby. From there, Tertullian went on to say that the infant demonstrated the characteristics of life which we normally attribute to a body containing a soul, and that we give away our belief in the death of the infant in the womb by the use of the word “still-born. . . . For how could any die, who had not previously lived?”<sup>69</sup> He was not ignorant of the medical aspect of abortion. Tertullian demonstrated an explicit knowledge of the procedure and the history of those who had utilized it:

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., *On the Soul* 25. Noted by Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 268.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., *On the Soul* 25. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>3</sup> Vivacitas.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

Accordingly, among surgeons' tools there is a certain instrument, which is formed with a nicely-adjusted flexible frame for opening the *uterus* first of all, and keeping it open; it is further furnished with an annular blade,<sup>1</sup> by means of which the limbs within the womb are dissected with anxious but unfaltering care; its last appendage being a blunted or covered hook, wherewith the entire *fœtus* is extracted<sup>2</sup> by a violent delivery. There is also (another instrument in the shape of) a copper needle or spike, by which the actual death is managed in this furtive robbery of life: they give it, from its infanticide function, the name of ἐμβρυοσφάκτης, the slayer of the infant, which was of course alive. Such apparatus was possessed both by Hippocrates, and Asclepiades, and Erasistratus, and Herophilus, that dissector of even adults, and the milder Soranus himself, who all knew well enough that a living being had been conceived, and pitied this most luckless infant state, which had first to be put to death, to escape being tortured alive.<sup>70</sup>

Tertullian's legal mind seized on the name of a tool specifically designed for destruction of the "infant," as an admission by the physicians that a living person had been destroyed rather than the simple removal of a growth within the womb.

He went further to add three last points in his discussion. With scathing sarcasm he attacked the Greco-Roman idea that the soul entered the newborn with their first breath, and due to the change in temperature from the womb to the cold air at birth. "How many nations are there who commence life<sup>4</sup> under the broiling sun of the torrid zone, scorching their skin into its swarthy hue? Whence do they get their souls, with no frosty air to help them?"<sup>71</sup> Secondly, he pointed to other statements by Plato where he admitted that the soul was related to the "seed." "For he here shows us that the soul proceeds from human seed (and warns us to be on our guard about it), not, (as he had said before,) from the first breath of the new-born child."<sup>72</sup> Lastly, he creatively utilizes the metaphysics of

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. \_\_\_\_\_ <sup>1</sup> Anulocultro. [To be seen in the Museum at Naples.] <sup>2</sup> Or, "the whole business (totem facinus) is despatched.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. \_\_\_\_\_ <sup>4</sup> Censetur.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

astrology to prove his point that the soul is present before birth. He notes that the astrologers date the birth of the child from conception and not delivery.<sup>73</sup>

Tertullian was opposed to the medical act of abortion, with one exception. Temkin notes that in chapter twenty-five of *On the Soul* “he condoned killing the infant, lest it become a ‘murderer of the mother.’”<sup>74</sup> The physical right to exist of the present person, and the growing person, were advocated by Tertullian. In *On the Soul* 25 he argues against the negative health implications for the aborted infant.

### **The Utilization of Healthcare Resources**

Tertullian did not specifically address the stewardship of healthcare resources by the Christian. In his writings one finds an interesting idea which seems pertinent to the discussion of the utilization of healthcare resources in the life of the Christian and the Christian church:

It is thus in general I reply upon the point, admitting indeed that we use along with others these articles, but challenging that this be judged in the light of the distinction between things agreeable and things opposed to reason, because the promiscuous employment of them is deceptive, concealing the corruption of the creature, by which it has been made subject to vanity. For we affirm that those things only are proper to be used, whether by ourselves or by those who lived before us, and alone befit the service of God and Christ Himself, which to meet the necessities of human life supply what is simply; useful and affords real assistance and honourable comfort, so that they may be well believed to have come from God’s own inspiration, who first of all no doubt provided for and taught and ministered to the enjoyment, I should suppose, of His own man. As for the things which are out of this class, they are not fit to be used among us,

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Owsei Temkin, William K. Frankena, and Sanford H. Kadish, “The Idea of Respect for Life in the History of Medicine,” in *Respect for Life in Medicine, Philosophy, and the Law: The Alvin and Fanny Blaustein Thalheimer Lectures; 1975* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 9.

especially those which on that account indeed are not to be found either with the world, or in the ways of Christ.<sup>75</sup>

For Tertullian, the world is something not to be used in “promiscuous employment,” but as a Christian disciple. Tertullian’s words seem to indicate a limit to the extent which one might seek physical healing in the face of death. Amundsen notes that Christianity introduced the ethical imperative to “care” for the helpless, not necessarily to cure.<sup>76</sup> In light of this and his writings, it seems probable that Tertullian’s goal for medicine would not have been the drive to extend the duration of life at all costs. Amundsen summarizes his view of the early Christian church’s views on this subject, which seem consistent with the views expressed by Tertullian:

Physical life was worth little to many early Christians. But it was also of inestimable value. The Christian was frequently urged to give his life willingly as a martyr if the only alternative was denying Christ; when sick, although he should seek healing, whether miraculous or medical or both, he should not cling to life but should regard his sickness as potentially the God-given vehicle for his ‘homegoing.’ And, under all circumstances, the care of the soul was to take precedence over the care of the body.<sup>77</sup>

Tertullian’s Christian disciple and his Christianity were to be world affirming, but not world obsessed or obligated.

### On the Healing of the Mind

The idea of Christianity healing the minds of the masses does not appear to have quite the same prominence in Tertullian that it did in Origen. Tertullian’s pastoral concern for the mental well-being of those under his care can, however, be seen in the

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<sup>75</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, On the Chaplet* 8. Noted by Numbers and Amundsen, *Caring and Curing*, 59.

<sup>76</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 13.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

specifically pragmatic nature of many of his treatises, e.g. *On Modesty* and *On the Soul*. Patristic commentators have taken notice of Tertullian's treatments of the mind. D'Irsay felt that Tertullian had many "psychophysiological discussions."<sup>78</sup> Harnack, according to Goodspeed, called "*On the Soul* . . . the first book on Christian psychology."<sup>79</sup>

Suicide is often the end point of the mind's destruction as the mental process culminates in a final act which destroys the physical body. Given the emphasis that Tertullian placed on martyrdom, it might be easy to conclude that suicide by one's own hand would not have been seen in the negative by Tertullian. Indeed, Larson and Amundsen state that "in the first years of the Church, suicide was such a neutral subject that even the death of Jesus was regarded by Tertullian, one of the most fiery of early Fathers, as a kind of suicide."<sup>80</sup> Previously Amundsen had argued in 1996 that Tertullian's beliefs on the patience of the believer in the face of suffering "militate against the very thought of suicide."<sup>81</sup> Although Tertullian seems to have been able to see the death of Jesus as a sort of divine suicide, he could not advocate for the Christian taking their own life for any reason by their own hand. Tertullian cited Job as the example for the Christian, and therefore would have created a stigma against suicide as a viable escape for the pious Christian.<sup>82</sup> With suicide off of the table for the Christian, it

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<sup>78</sup> d'Irsay, "Patristic Medicine," 368.

<sup>79</sup> Goodspeed and Grant, *Early Christian Literature*, 161.

<sup>80</sup> Larson and Amundsen, *A Different Death*, 17.

<sup>81</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 90.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-90.

would seem that this would have forced despondent, but pious Christians, to seek mental healing rather than the escapism of suicide.

Christians also saw their mission as one of healing the world around them of the vices. Tertullian, like his counterparts, accepted this same mission. This area of healing, while dealing with the mental health of individuals, is dealt with in broad strokes that seem to lend it more to a discussion of Christianity's influence on the social/public health of the Greco-Roman society.

### **Social Healing and Tertullian**

For Tertullian, Jesus the Messiah had come to heal humanity. Not only did Jesus call for his followers to save their souls, but to care for their neighbors regardless of who they were. Tertullian did not shy away from this mission to care for the masses. He fell within the traditions of Christianity which have lived among the greater society and sought to heal their society's mental and physical problems. Tertullian's belief in healing did not confine itself to the individual. Medicine and healing can be seen in an individual manner, yet medicine also deals with the health of humanity in general. The health of the individual cannot be separated from the health of the whole, and vice versa.

Tertullian believed that Christianity was healing his society. In a spiritual sense, he felt that the prayers of healing and support by the Roman Empire's Christians contributed to the well-being of the society.<sup>83</sup> He boldly proclaimed, "How many men of rank (to say nothing of common people) have been delivered from devils, and healed of

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<sup>83</sup> Ronald Kydd, *Healing through the Centuries: Models for Understanding* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 23. Kydd is referring to *Apology* 37.

diseases!”<sup>84</sup> More concretely though, Tertullian could refer to the actions that Christians were taking to provide for the physical and psychological well-being of neglected groups:

Though we have our treasure-chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. On the monthly day,<sup>4</sup> if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary. These gifts are, as it were, piety’s deposit fund. For they are not taken thence and spent on feasts, and drinking-bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God’s Church, they become the nurslings of their confession.<sup>85</sup>

Tertullian’s Christian church made caring for the physical well-being, and thus the health, of his society a primary function. This would have been helpful to the health of those in Roman society who were not of the privileged classes and therefore left to fend for themselves in the Roman metropolis.

#### Temperance, Morality, and Social Healing

People’s actions typically flow from their thoughts and feelings. The inner life of a person and a group therefore has an influence on their physical health and well-being as they choose to avoid or involve themselves in risky or harmful behavior. To Tertullian, intemperance of the soul caused by demons, in some unknown fashion, led people into disease and calamity through their “excesses.”<sup>86</sup> Tertullian felt that the Christian church’s discipline of morality had healed many in their unhealthy behaviors and excesses:

I shall at once go on, then, to exhibit the peculiarities of the Christian society, that, as I have refuted the evil charged against it, I may point out its positive

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<sup>84</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, To Scapula (Ad Scapulum)* 4.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., *Apology* 39. Noted by Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 189. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>4</sup> [On ordinary Sundays, “they laid by in store,” apparently: one a month they offered.]

<sup>86</sup> Ferngren, “Early Christian Views,” 190. He is referring to *Apology* 22.

good.<sup>1</sup> We are a body knit together as such by a common religious profession, by unity of discipline, and by the bond of a common hope. We meet together as an assembly and congregation, that, offering up prayer to God as with united force, we may wrestle with Him in our supplications. This violence God delights in. We pray, too, for the emperors, for their ministers and for all in authority, for the welfare of the world, for the prevalence of peace, for the delay of the final consummation.<sup>2</sup> We assemble to read our sacred writings, if any peculiarity of the times makes either forewarning or reminiscence needful.<sup>3</sup> However it be in that respect, with the sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, we make our confidence more steadfast; and no less by inculcations of God's precepts we confirm good habits. In the same place also exhortations are made, rebukes and sacred censures are administered. For with a great gravity is the work of judging carried on among us, as befits those who feel assured that they are in the sight of God; and you have the most notable example of judgment to come when any one has sinned so grievously as to require his severance from us in prayer, in the congregation and in all sacred intercourse. The tried men of our elders preside over us, obtaining that honour not by purchase, but by established character. There is no buying and selling of any sort in the things of God.<sup>87</sup>

The Christian culture described above was set up to inculcate and reinforce healthy behavior in the life of its adherents.

Tertullian even considered it a badge of honor that certain critiques of Christianity concluded that they were too straight in their moral behavior. In Tertullian's mind, how credible could opinions on the value of Christian moral behavior be when they originated from "pimps, and panders, and bath-suppliers; assassins, and poisoners, and sorcerers; soothsayers, too, diviners, and astrologers"?<sup>88</sup> He seems to have felt that the unhealthy behaviors of his critics only proved his point about the value of Christian morality to the public.

Greed, laziness, and excessive sexuality typically have physical consequences in any time, but more so in an age without the social and medical support that is currently

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<sup>87</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Apology* 39. Noted by Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 198. \_\_\_\_\_ <sup>1</sup>[Elucidation VII.] <sup>2</sup>[Chap. xxxii. *supra* p. 43.] <sup>3</sup>[An argument for Days of Public Thanksgiving, Fasting and the like.]

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, *Apology* 43. Noted by Kydd, *Healing Through the Centuries*, 23.



enjoyed in some of the world's societies. Tertullian viewed Christianity as an antidote to these problems: "Behold unchastity overcome by chastity, perfidy slain by faithfulness, cruelty stricken by compassion, impudence thrown into the shade by modesty: these are the contests we have among us, and in these we win our crowns."<sup>89</sup> For Tertullian, these moral deficits were abundant in the society around him. From his attacks on the immoral behavior of Greco-Roman gods and the gladiatorial entertainment choices of the Roman populace, Tertullian argued for a Christian morality that he felt would lead to healthier behavior for humanity.<sup>90</sup> Stark points out the eventual effect of Tertullian's and Christianity's moral vision on Roman society's attitude towards violence, with its inherent public health implications:

Christians condemned both the cruelties and the spectators. Thou shalt not kill, as Tertullian (*De Spectaculis*) reminded his readers. And, as they gained ascendancy, Christians prohibited such "games." More important, Christians effectively promulgated a moral vision utterly incompatible with the casual cruelty of pagan custom.<sup>91</sup>

Tertullian's moral vision for Christianity directly influenced the thought of Western society's habits of the mind, thereby most likely affecting public health through a change in its casual acceptance of physical violence and cruelty. This moral influence continued in the west into the Middle Ages:

Tertullian (second century), to a lesser extent in *De patientia* (15,4), but very starkly in *De spectaculis* (29), personifies the virtues and vices as two armies fighting for one's soul. In the latter work specific virtues are pitted against the appropriate vices: chastity-lewdness; faithfulness-unfaithfulness; mercy-cruelty; temperance-lasciviousness. Tertullian is the most likely source for Prudentius

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., *On Spectacles*. Noted by Kydd, *Healing Through the Centuries*, 21.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., *To the Heathen* 2.14 & *On Spectacles*.

<sup>91</sup> Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 215.

(fourth-fifth century), whose *Psychomachia* exercised a probably ungaugeable influence on medieval literature and art.<sup>92</sup>

The merit of Tertullian's Christian moral vision on violence and other social habits which concern public health can be debated, but they do appear of have had a significant influence on Western society.

### Sexuality, Sexual Reproduction, and Public Health in Tertullian's Writings

At a time when sexually transmitted diseases ran unchecked, the sexual practices of the person had direct health implications. Sexual reproduction also bore consequences for the social health of the Empire. The safety of the environment from invasion and chaos, created by the *pax Romana* (Roman peace) should have increased the lifespan and health of Roman citizens. Sexual reproduction and its consequent production of citizens to maintain the functions of the state were critical to the maintenance of the Roman Empire's strength, and therefore the physical safety of the people.<sup>93</sup>

Tertullian envisioned the Christian life as maintaining sexuality within the boundaries of marriage. This was the only appropriate setting for sexual activity.<sup>94</sup> Further, the Christian was to confine their marital sex to a female spouse.<sup>95</sup> Tertullian argued for the Christian idea of chastity, listing as one of its benefits the avoidance of incest with offspring which the sexually incontinent would run the risk of. Even the

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<sup>92</sup> Amundsen and Ferngren, "Virtue and Medicine," 31.

<sup>93</sup> Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 115-117. Stark is noting the legislation by Julius Caesar, Augustus, and Trajan to increase fertility for the common good. The legislation ultimately proved ineffective.

<sup>94</sup> David W. Bercot, *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, 212. Bercot is referring to *On Modesty* 4.

<sup>95</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Apology* 46.

philosophers themselves had argued for the value of chastity according to Tertullian.<sup>96</sup>

The monogamous relationships advocated by Tertullian would have had the effect of isolating the practicing Christians from the mortality and morbidity associated with sexually transmitted diseases.

Tertullian's vision of marriage also required the external validation of the Church thereby creating a regulatory body to which the couple was accountable to, beyond the changeable nature of law or personal preference.<sup>97</sup> This Christian marriage envisioned by Tertullian should be within the Christian faith and the Christian man should have nothing to do with other women, even on the level of fantasy.<sup>98</sup> It is probable that the extent to which Tertullian's idea of Christian monogamy in marriage was initiated, the value and thus the level of physical well-being of the woman in a marriage rose. It seems likely that a man who has only one outlet for reproduction and sexuality would have valued that individual more than a man with a wife who is only one option among many. With the early Christian church as an external validator it would also have potentially granted women some recourse against a more arbitrary arrangement exclusively dominated by men in Greco-Roman society thereby allowing them greater physical security.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., *Apology* 9 (problem of incest); *Apology* 46 (philosopher's support of chastity).

<sup>97</sup> Bercot, *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, 212. Bercot is referring to *On Modesty* 4.

<sup>98</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, The Chaplet* 3. Noted by Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 118; *Apology* 46 (Christian mental and physical monogamy).

## Infanticide

As stated earlier, abortion could be considered a subsection of infanticide depending on one's belief concerning the initial moment of human life. Infanticide in the context of the Roman empires seems to have more of a reference to the public aspect of terminating or discarding those who had been born. The term thus lends itself to more of a public health discussion.<sup>99</sup> In response to the rumor of Christian child sacrifice during religious rituals, Tertullian writes to his pagan readers with sarcasm and blunt descriptions of his society's practice of infanticide:

Meanwhile, as I have said, the comparison between us does not fail in another point of view. For if we are infanticides in one sense, you also can hardly be deemed such in any other sense; because, although you are forbidden by the laws to slay new-born infants, it so happens that no laws are evaded with more impunity or greater safety, with the deliberate knowledge of the public, and the suffrages<sup>18</sup> of this entire age.<sup>19</sup> Yet there is no great difference between us, only you do not kill your infants in the way of a sacred rite, nor (as a service) to God. But then you make away with them in a more cruel manner, because you expose them to the cold and hunger, and to wild beasts, or else you get rid of them by the slower death of drowning. If, however, there does occur any dissimilarity between us in this matter,<sup>1</sup> you must not overlook the fact that it is your own dear children<sup>2</sup> whose life you quench; and this will supplement, nay, abundantly aggravate, on your side of the question, whatever is defective in us on other grounds.<sup>100</sup>

The personhood of an infant is currently an a priori assumption in Western society, with some exceptions. It is on this same assumption that Tertullian accused his non-Christian countrymen of the cruel murder of their own children. This infanticide had a definite health impact on the lives of the children affected, and Tertullian sought to improve the

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<sup>99</sup> Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 118-121. Stark discusses the decreasing population due to infanticide and abortion.

<sup>100</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, On the Heathen* 1.15. Noted by Numbers and Amundsen, *Caring and Curing*, 50. <sup>18</sup> Tabellis. <sup>19</sup> Unius aetatis. This Oehler explains by "per unam jam totam hanc aetatem." <sup>1</sup> Genere. <sup>2</sup> Pignora, scil. Amoris.

health of those affected through critiquing the societal beliefs and practices which allowed the occurrence of infanticide. He most likely had a personal involvement in the situation through his work in the Christian church where theologians of the time were intimately connected to the local church, often as religious leaders and priests to the people.

Tertullian envisioned Christianity as a religion which engaged with the world to heal it in ways that he felt were called for by Christian morality. This Christian moral vision of Tertullian's appears to have significantly affected the public healing practices of Western society by instilling, at a minimum, a new charitable ethos not previously present.

### **Faith Healing in the Writings of Tertullian**

The people of the Roman Empire would just as likely seek a medicinal remedy from a physician as they would seek some divine intervention for the healing of their maladies.<sup>101</sup> Christians, like their contemporaries, did not exclude the possibility of divine healing for the diseases and problems with which they were afflicted. Tertullian was no exception. For Tertullian, Christianity could heal people spiritually and physically with divine intervention through faith healing and prayer.<sup>102</sup>

Tertullian felt comfortable enough with the supernatural healing work of Christians that he felt that he could appeal to the events concerning the healing of the Severus in his apology for Christianity:

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<sup>101</sup> Pattengale, "Benevolent Physicians", 100.

<sup>102</sup> Kydd, *Healing through the Centuries*, 30. Kydd is referring to *On Prayer* 29, FC 4.187.

How many men of rank (to say nothing of common people) have been delivered from devils, and healed of diseases! Even Severus himself, the father of Antonine, was graciously mindful of the Christians; for he sought out the Christian Proculus, surnamed Torpacion, the steward of Euhodias, and in gratitude for his having once cured him by anointing, he kept him in his palace till the day of his death.<sup>1 103</sup>

Proculus is given the credit for healing Severus through a religious ritual of anointing.

The explanation is brief and potentially not indicative of the whole manner in which Proculus was able to secure this divine intervention for Severus. It does, however, seem to imply a view of the Christian acceptance of such healing works. Tertullian himself recommended a similar spiritual course of action for healing the sting of a scorpion:

We have faith for a defence, if we are not smitten with distrust itself also, in immediately making the sign<sup>2</sup> and adjuring,<sup>3</sup> and besmearing the heel with the beast. Finally, we often aid in this way even the heathen, seeing we have been endowed by God with that power which the apostle first used when he despised the viper's bite.<sup>4[original n.] 104</sup>

As evidenced by the use of anointing with oil and signs of the cross, Christianity used none of the costly remedies which other healers would require of Roman citizens.<sup>105</sup>

Tertullian did not see Christianity as only capable of healing physical problems. Christianity could heal people's spiritual diseases and afflictions. Tertullian believed, as

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<sup>103</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, To Scapula 4.*\_\_\_\_\_<sup>1</sup>  
[Another note of time. a.d. 211. See Kaye, as before.]

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., *Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting* 1. Noted by Bercot, *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, 328.\_\_\_\_\_<sup>2</sup> Of the cross over the wounded part. [This translation is frequently weakened by useless interpolations; some of these destroying the author's style, for nothing, I have put into footnotes or dropped.] <sup>3</sup> I.e. adjuring the part, in the name of Jesus, and besmearing the poisoned heel with the gore of the beast, when it has been crushed to death. [So the translator; but the terse rhetoric of the original is not so circumstantial, and refers, undoubtedly, to the lingering influence of miracles, according to St. Mark, xvi. 18.] <sup>4</sup> Acts xxviii. 3.

<sup>105</sup> Avalos, *Health Care*.

did many in his society, that the world was inhabited by angels and demons. These demons could affect the health of people in malicious ways:

And we affirm indeed the existence of certain spiritual essences; nor is their name unfamiliar. The philosophers acknowledge there are demons; Socrates himself waiting on a demon's will. Why not? since it is said an evil spirit attached itself specially to him even from his childhood-turning his mind no doubt from what was good. The poets are all acquainted with demons too; even the ignorant common people make frequent use of them in cursing. In fact, they call upon Satan, the demon-chief, in their execrations, as though from some instinctive soul-knowledge of him. Plato also admits the existence of angels. The dealers in magic, no less, come forward as witnesses to the existence of both kinds of spirits. We are instructed, moreover, by our sacred books how from certain angels, who fell of their own free-will, there sprang a more wicked demon-brood, condemned of God along with the authors of their race, and that chief we have referred to. It will for the present be enough, however, that some account is given of their work. Their great business is the ruin of mankind. So, from the very first, spiritual wickedness sought our destruction. They inflict, accordingly, upon our bodies diseases and other grievous calamities, while by violent assaults they hurry the soul into sudden and extraordinary excesses. Their marvellous subtleness and tenuity give them access to both parts of our nature.<sup>106</sup>

Demons bring on humanity these “diseases and other grievous calamities.” Ferngren discusses this belief of Origen and Tertullian when he writes that “Tertullian and Origen (ca 185-ca 254) blame demons for disease and pestilence, as they blame them for all the physical evils in the world, but only in a general sense.”<sup>107</sup> These demons were not just simply malicious to Tertullian, they were devious. Tertullian implied that demons would even heal at times, such as Aesculapius.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Apology* 22. Noted by Ferngren, “Early Christian Views,” 190.

<sup>107</sup> Ferngren, “Early Christian Views,” 199.

<sup>108</sup> Bercot, *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, 268. Bercot is referring to *Apology* 23; John W. Draper, *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (New York: 1903), 43-4.

Tertullian did see Christians as standing in the gap between these evil spirits and the affliction of disease on Roman society:

Yet you choose to call us enemies of the human race, rather than of human error. Nay, who would deliver you from those secret foes, ever busy both destroying your souls and ruining your health? Who would save you, I mean, from the attacks of those spirits of evil, which without reward or hire we exorcise? <sup>109</sup>

He was arguing that Christians were necessary to the Roman Empire because of the charitable spiritual intervention they provided. To Tertullian, Christians healed and maintained their society through spiritual interventions as well as physical ones.

### **Tertullian's Views on Healing and Christianity**

The life of the Christian was ever important to Tertullian as he continued to work out how Christians should live in Roman society and how they should utilize the healing options available to them. Tertullian's views on healing tended to be practical and did not delve into the theoretical. He was not always as explicit in his comments on healing, but it seems possible to construct some likely views on healing from his analogical use of healing to explain Christianity when these are combined with his explicit statements. Tertullian seemed to have viewed medicine as worthy for its ability to heal individuals and society. For him, Christianity brought about healing changes in the soul, and even the body, of the convert which led to positive changes in the health of society. Jesus was the physician come to heal the world, and to accomplish this he might use secular medicine, social healing, or spiritual healing.

For Tertullian, healing had an important part to play in Christian work, charity, and life. At issue would have been the place of healing in relation to Christianity.

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<sup>109</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Apology 37*. Noted by Kydd, *Healing Through the Centuries*, 23.



Christians were to seek the will of God in all things, and health was not a prerequisite that Christians were to require of their God. Thus, for Tertullian, the Christian could seek healing with things “proper to be used, whether by ourselves or by those who lived before us, and alone befit the service of God and Christ Himself, which to meet the necessities of human life supply what is simply; useful and affords real assistance and honourable comfort, so that they may be well believed to have come from God’s own inspiration.”<sup>110</sup> Ultimately though, Tertullian would have exhorted Christians to seek after the healing of their souls primarily, and the healing of their bodies only if that was to serve God’s purpose in their life or for those around them.

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<sup>110</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *The Chaplet* 8. Noted by Numbers and Amundsen, *Caring and Curing*, 59.

## CHAPTER 4

### ORIGEN AND TERTULLIAN'S WRITINGS ANALYZED: AN ANALYSIS USING AMUNDSEN'S PROPAEDEUTIC PREMISES FOR THE STUDY OF PATRISTIC THOUGHT ON HEALING AND MEDICINE

The previous two chapters have sought to discern the thoughts of Origen and Tertullian on healing. Often it seems that they were similar in approach to dealing with the subjects that they both discussed. The differences between the two seemed to arise more from the orientation and frequency of their writing on subjects related to healing. Origen seemed to touch on medicine and healing in a large picture, or theoretical, manner more than he dealt with practical matters of healing in daily living. Tertullian appears to have been at the opposite end of the spectrum. His discussions relating to medicine and healing were often more specific to situations, such as abortion. Tertullian also appears to have not developed the analogy of medicine and Christianity to the extent or frequency of Origen. What then is the common thread in their interactions with the subjects of healing and medicine?

Darrel Amundsen has proposed such a common thread. In *Medicine, Society, and Faith in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, Amundsen places before the academic community his premises based on over twenty-five years of study on the relationship between early Christianity, healing, and medicine. Amundsen proposes “that six fundamental principles must be propaedeutic to further discussion of the place of health, sickness, healing, and the art of medicine in early Christianity in general and in the

theology of the individual church fathers in particular”<sup>1</sup> Amundsen is convinced that we would see these views in an analysis of any particular church father’s writings. In this last chapter, the research findings in the previous chapters on Origen and Tertullian will be compared to Amundsen’s framework to assess the fit between the discovered data and Amundsen’s propositions.

Amundsen first proposes that in contrast to the world-spirit dualism of Greco-Roman culture, that Origen and Tertullian would have felt that “since the world as God created it is good, matter is not inherently evil.”<sup>2</sup> Even Origen, who was heavily influenced by Greek thought, can be seen verifying the worth of the material aspect of creation. Origen wrote that Jesus healed the body and the spirit of the leper, just as he intends to heal the world and humanity returning them to their natural state of beauty.<sup>3</sup> Tertullian similarly points to the importance of the physical world to Christianity’s doctrine of salvation in his defense of the worth of sensations:

We may not, I say, we may not call into question the truth of the (poor vilified) senses,<sup>1</sup> lest we should even in Christ Himself, bring doubt upon<sup>2</sup> the truth of their sensation; lest perchance it should be said that He did *not* really “behold Satan as lightning fall from heaven;”<sup>3</sup> that He did *not* really hear the Father’s voice testifying of Himself;<sup>4</sup> or that He was deceived in touching Peter’s wife’s mother;<sup>5</sup> or that the fragrance of the ointment which He afterwards smelled was different from that which He accepted for His burial;<sup>6</sup> and that the taste of the wine was different from that which He consecrated in memory of His blood.<sup>7[original n.]</sup> <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Bostock, “Medical Theory and Theology,” 193, 198. He is referring to *Cels.* 4.69 *GCS I* p. 339 1.5-8; Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 122.

<sup>4</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, On the Soul* 17. Noted by d'Irsay, “Patristic Medicine,” 367. \_\_\_\_\_ <sup>1</sup> Sensus istos. <sup>2</sup> Deliberetur. <sup>3</sup> Luke x. 18. <sup>4</sup> Matt.

The actuality of the physical nature of Christ and his creation was a thing worthy of importance and not inherently evil, since Jesus saw fit to be a physical being in his redemptive work.

Secondly, Amundsen proposes that Origen and Tertullian would have felt that “God provided in nature for man’s sustenance.”<sup>5</sup> Material items such as medicine and furniture were not inherently evil, for Tertullian felt that they had been provided for humanity to use in the “proper” manner.<sup>6</sup> To Origen, God had provided plants and animals “which have been created for the by no means despicable<sup>4</sup> use of man in general.”<sup>7</sup> God had always provided for humankind, according to Tertullian and Origen, and in Jesus he was once again providing for the healing of his children.

The writings of Tertullian and Origen appear to validate Amundsen’s third positive statement that “physicians and their art may be used beneficially by Christians,” with qualifications.<sup>8</sup> Origen made extremely positive statements about medicine and the similarity between medicine and Christianity. In his *Homily on Numbers* 18.3, Origen asked rhetorically that “if all wisdom comes from God, what science comes from God

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iii. 17. <sup>5</sup> Matt. viii. 15. <sup>6</sup> Matt. xxvi. 7-12. <sup>7</sup> Matt. xxvi. 27, 28; Luke xxii. 19, 20; 1 Cor. xi. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, The Chaplet* 8. Noted by Numbers and Amundsen, *Caring and Curing*, 59.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., *Cels.* 4.54. Noted by Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 109.

<sup>4</sup>pros creian ouk enkatafronhton.

<sup>8</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 7.

more than the science of health[?]"<sup>9</sup> Just as a provider of that God-given science, Origen would echo the words of Jesus that "our Saviour Lord, like a good physician, came rather to us who were full of sins, than to those who were righteous."<sup>10</sup> Tertullian is similar in his views on the usefulness of medicine for Christianity. In his apologetic work *The Chaplet*, Tertullian refers positively to the prescription of medicine and medical treatments by Isaiah and Paul.<sup>11</sup> The medicine was not the problem for the Christian according to Tertullian. It was the proper use of the medicine. Tertullian and Origen could see benefits to the work of the healing arts for the Christian and the world.

Amundsen proposes three other (negative) beliefs that Origen and Tertullian should have held in relation to healing and Christianity. First, Amundsen writes that "there are significant limitations on the occasions and extent to which the Christian should use the services of physicians and medicines."<sup>12</sup> It had become common among the Romans, according to Tertullian, mistakenly to place the beneficial act of healing on the healing agent rather than the provider of the healing—God. This raised medicine incorrectly out of its true place in the plan of God.<sup>13</sup> The use of medicine had to be in

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<sup>9</sup> Jaqueline Lagree, "Wisdom, Health, Salvation: The Medical Model in the Works of Clement of Alexandria," in *From Athens to Jerusalem: Medicine in Hellenized Jewish Lore and in Early Christian Literature*: Papers of the Symposium in Jerusalem, 9-11 September 1996, ed. Samuel S. Kottak and Manfred Horstmanshoff (Rotterdam: Erasmus Pub., 2000), 227.

<sup>10</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Cels.* 2.67. Noted by Wilkinson, *The Bible and Healing*, 63.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, *The Chaplet* 8. Noted by Numbers and Amundsen, *Caring and Curing*, 59.

<sup>12</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 7.

accordance with the premises of the Christian faith and the will of God.<sup>14</sup> Tertullian specifically denounced the medicinal and surgical act of abortion, along with the list of physicians who performed these.<sup>15</sup> Origen also places limitations on the use of medicine. He qualifies any idea that physical healing could be an absolute good, when he stated that there existed a “danger of giving ourselves too much up to the power of such demons [who heal], and of becoming turned aside from higher things, and suffering them to pass into oblivion through an excessive attention to the body.”<sup>16</sup> The body was important, but not to be a focus of “excessive attention” for the Christian. Healing served a purpose for Origen and Tertullian, however it seems to have been given parameters which it was required to remain within to maintain its worth and usefulness for the Christian.

It is common in the modern Christian community to believe that all healing comes from God. Amundsen’s second negative premise states that the early Christian church fathers held a different belief. According to Amundsen, Origen and Tertullian would have said that “God is by no means the source of all healing, for much healing comes through spiritually pernicious sources such as the demonic healing cults and demonically empowered magic.”<sup>17</sup> As Amundsen proposes, Origen did acknowledge the ability of

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<sup>13</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, *Apology* 2.5.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., *The Chaplet* 8. Noted by Numbers and Amundsen, *Caring and Curing*, 59.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., *On the Soul* 25. Noted by Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 268.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., *Cels.* 8.60. Noted by Amundsen and Ferngren, “Medicine and Religion,” 101.

<sup>17</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 7-8.

demons to “cure the body.”<sup>18</sup> Tertullian did not seem to deny the ability to heal of Aesculapius, the well known healing god whom he considered a demon disguising himself as a god.<sup>19</sup> Both Origen and Tertullian do appear to have acknowledged a spiritual existence with demonic entities who sought to derail the life of humanity by any means possible, including the act of healing.

The sixth, and last of the three negative proposals by Amundsen, is that “the art of medicine can be used for evil purposes.”<sup>20</sup> Tertullian quite explicitly stated that, with the exception of saving the life of the mother, the act of abortion was an evil that killed a human being which was contradictory to the Christian pacifism that he espoused. It was a departure from the natural use of medicine into a “furtive robbery of life.”<sup>21</sup> Origen did not appear to be as specific in his condemnation of particular Greco-Roman medical practices. No specific medical procedure was noted in this study to have been condemned by Origen.<sup>22</sup> Origen does, however, mention the “heresies” of medicine which existed “among the Greeks” and he supposed “among those barbarous nations that profess to employ medicine.”<sup>23</sup> More specifically he did write comments that would seem to explain when he would consider medicine an evil for the Christian. Amundsen points to Origen’s

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<sup>18</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Cels.* 8.60. Noted by Amundsen and Ferngren, “Medicine and Religion,” 101.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., *Apology* 23. Noted by Bercot, *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, 268.

<sup>20</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 8

<sup>21</sup> Roberts and others, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, On the Soul* 25.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., *Cels.* 8.55. Origen condemns infanticide at a minimum, and would most likely seem to be condemning the medical act of abortion as not Christian.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., *Cels.* 3.12. Noted by Wallace-Hadrill, *Greek Patristic View*, 60.

discussion of “God’s condemnation of the Jewish king Asa, who when he was ill, ‘did not seek the Lord but the physicians’ (2 Chron. 16:12).”<sup>24</sup> Origen felt that King Asa’s mistake was that “either Asa called on physicians who used charms and trickery, or he had faith in the physicians alone and did not place his hope in God.”<sup>25</sup> The physical life of the Christian, although important, was not to supersede the imperatives to remain pious even in the face of death.<sup>26</sup> As expected by Amundsen, both Origen and Tertullian commented on ways that they felt medicine could become an evil in the life of the Christian.

Amundsen’s proposal of “these six basic presuppositions” to “further discussion of the place of health, sickness, healing, and the art of medicine in early Christianity in general and in the theology of individual church fathers in particular” does seem to match up with comments from the extant writings of both Origen and Tertullian.<sup>27</sup> Further research into the fit between Amundsen’s proposed presuppositions and the writings of Tertullian and Origen would allow a more conclusive decision as to the match between them. Given the findings of this research, the views on healing that Amundsen expected

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<sup>24</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 139.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 139-40. On page 139-40 Amundsen later in the text translates a relevant passage: “ ‘For those who are adorned with religion use physicians as servants of God, knowing that He Himself gave medical knowledge to men, just as He himself assigned both herbs and other things to grow on the earth. They also know that the physician’s art has no strength if God is not willing, but it is able to do as much as God wills.’”<sup>66</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ 66. Origen, *Adnotations in Librum III Regum 15:23*, in *Patrologia cursus completus, Series Graeco-Latina*, ed. Jacques Paul Migne ( Paris: J.P. Migne, 1857-66), 17:53-55; my[Amundsen’s] translation.

<sup>26</sup> Ferngren, “Early Christian Views,” 192. He refers to *Cels.* 8.55.

<sup>27</sup> Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith*, 7-8.



are present in Origen and Tertullian. These views point us to a foundation from which we can see the common structure in the thought of Origen, Tertullian, and most likely the other church fathers on the subject of healing and Christianity.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION: ORIGEN, TERTULLIAN, AND THE MASTER PHYSICIAN

In part, Christianity rose to power in the Greco-Roman world from its insistence on charity towards its neighbors. This charitable imperative required Christians to care for the weak, which would naturally have include the sick and victimized of society. With the ascendancy of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world they brought this concern for the sick, and directly changed Greco-Roman medicine, along with the institutional structures and thought of Western civilization. Our current western medicine is indebted to this synthesis, and this synthesis is in part due to the work of Origen and Tertullian who significantly influenced the growing Christian faith.

Origen actively involved himself in the use of Greco-Roman thought to explicate Christianity. As Bostock points out, Greco-Roman medical theory was no exception in Origen's intellectual appropriation of Greco-Roman thought. Origen frequently used the healing analogy to explain and justify Christian doctrines to friend and foes. Both medical theory and terminology became key components of his theology. Origen also discussed the role of medicine in the life of the Christian. To Origen, it had been provided for the good of all humanity in a fallen world, but could falsely steal the credit for its efficaciousness from the rightful healer—God.

Tertullian was very similar to Origen in his relationship to Greco-Roman medicine, despite his harsh rhetoric against its philosophy and science. Tertullian, like Origen, viewed Jesus and his work as the coming of a divine Physician to heal and save the world. He did not shy away from using Greco-Roman medical theory in his theology when it seemed compatible and useful with his explication of Christianity. At one point in his writings, he even listed the physician in a list of honorable Christians implying that they held a special position in his Christian community.

Both Origen and Tertullian believed in the ability of God to heal the mind, body, and soul of a person using medicine, surgery, persuasion, faith, or miracle. Healing for them was a natural occurrence in Christianity, and to be a natural outflow from a Christianity seeking to imitate Christ. It was never to be an end in itself, but rather an opportunity for charity to others, or the providential ability to continue the individual's God given purpose. Origen and Tertullian did not see the continuum of health as beginning at birth and ending with death. Death was the beginning of true life for the believer, and a continuation of the health achieved during the life of the Christian.

Perhaps, by understanding Origen and Tertullian, we can better understand the origins of our own beliefs on healing as citizens of a Western civilization influenced by Christian thinking. Our medical science will continue to challenge our civilization on the very essence of the meaning and purpose of existence. By knowing ourselves, and our past, we might then know who we should become and where we should go.

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