Introduction
Trained in an era when spirituality and religion did not have a role in caring for the ill, many physicians today do not address the spiritual components of healing when addressing their patients. It has been shown that many patients desire to discuss religious and spiritual issues with their doctor, and taking the time to talk about religion or the spirit promotes confidence in the physician by the patient. Many patients want to understand their disease in the framework of their religion, and empirical medicine alone simply is not equipped to handle the kinds of questions that this brings up. The dichotomy that exists today between religion and medicine was not always present. People who sought healing wanted a cure for both the body and the soul, and healers of the past were religiously affiliated. In a country where 72% of the population identifies itself as Christian, it is beneficial for physicians who intend to practice in the U.S. to learn about the roots of medicine and Christianity. To better understand the history of medicine and Christianity is to build a foundation for understanding the perspective of many patients in America today.

Information was gathered from prior research by Dr. W.K. Dolen, several medical journals and the book, Healing in the history of Christianity.

Method

Healing and the Old Testament
- Disease provided opportunity for spiritual development.
- God was viewed as humanity’s physician.
- God healed, and God gifted medical knowledge or healing power to healers.
- The works of healers were not to be for personal glory but for the glory of God.
- Jewish beliefs included that visiting a diseased person “takes away a sixtieth of the pain” that person is experiencing.
- Disease treatment was performed by a priest and involved patient quarantine, cleansing, atonement for sin and anointing with blood and olive oil.
- The rite of tebilah was a purifying immersion in water that influenced what became Christian baptism.

Healing and the New Testament
Jesus was believed to be a healer, and the apostles were given the power to heal as well. Jesus is described to have performed 72 healings in the Bible.

In line with the teachings of the Old Testament, healings were associated with the forgiveness of sin.

Many early Christians argued that James handed over the responsibility of healing to the elders of the early churches. In James 5:14, he says “Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”

Early Christians and Healing

Centuries after Jesus’ time, most continued to believe in healing miracles performed by saints in Christ’s name.

Difficulties of opinion developed on the mysticism of miracles. Christians to the East embraced miracles as mystical experience more readily than did Christians in the West.

After the proclamation of religious toleration by Constantine, Christian charity to the sick became easier to organize, paving the way toward the creation of the first hospitals.

Christianity was made even more attractive to new converts by spiritual healing, and Christian ties with healing contributed to the spreading of the religion.

Services of worship involved healing practices and exorcisms.

Christians started participating in mission trips to spread the word of Christ as well as to care for the sick.

Based on how Jesus performed healing in his time, Christians treated the sick by anointing their lips, ears and eyes with oil. This practice was to block demons where they could enter the body.

During the time of the plague, the bishop of Caesarea, Eusebius, recorded that Christians would care for and feed the sick, dying victims of the disease.

By improving the survival of those they cared for, Christians would often convert the survivors. Over time, it is theorized that this led to a stronger immunity to the plague. Baptism was seen as the ultimate healing ritual as it related to the death of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus and triumph over evil.

The Eucharist also held healing value for Christians in the first few centuries of the religion. It seems that in these first few centuries, Jesus’ healing miracles were regarded both as literal physical and spiritual intervention. In the 300’s, the healing of the soul overpowered the healing of the body. This trend continued as the soul overpowered the body.

Medieval Christian Healing
Christians continued to view forgiveness of sins as the way to healing. To reach this forgiveness and therefore be cured, Christians in this time would perform acts of penance.

- Much like treatments specific to illnesses today, Christians would do specific acts of penance for particular sins.
- The powers of saints and their relics became an important part of healing. Christian missionaries dug up the graves of martyrs, retrieved their bones and traveled with them. Those with access to the dust of saints would sometimes mix it with water to form a curing drink. People of the time would make pilgrimages to the monasteries where the bones of saints were kept.
- A Eucharistic ceremony became a more dramatic demonstration, and it was viewed to function as the saints and their relics did in regards to healing.
- Monks began to expand their monasteries to include clinics, herb gardens and pharmacies for those who sought their help.
- Medical procedures were viewed as models that described how miracles of Christ and his saints worked.
- Saint Bede expressed that one was not required to be a priest to anoint the sick. Any Christian could anoint a sick person if a bishop had blessed the oil and there were prayers to God during the procedure.
- The study of medicine was growing and was often a practice of Christian monks.
- Medicine performed by doctors was viewed as legitimate but of secondary importance to Christian healing.
- Some Christians remained suspicious of medical cures as part of pagan practices.
- In the 500’s, Emperor Justinian of the Byzantine Empire gave bishops the duty of caring for the sick and the physicians who worked in them.

Renaissance Christian Healing

Holy water was used in the Middle Ages, often mixed with the water of baptism, as a way that described the presence of the whole Christ, as described in the Old Testament. From this time, many people believed that some healings were due to the power ofCombine’. In regards to healing and medicine, these men argued that miracles and mysterious healings were still accepted as part of God’s design, and Christian healing should embrace miracles as mystical experience more readily than did Christians in the West.

Medical guilds were established to license doctors.

Despite the religious origins of hospitals, physicians who staffed them in the 1800’s did not like to treat patients on the basis of religion for fear that their therapies would seem offensive to some people who believe in the true power of religious healing. This led to a reemergence in the 1800’s of the 1500’s to 1600’s, when religious healings were a major part of medicine. As public expressions of Christian healing diminished, public healthcare and its relation to Christianity suffered. Catholics continue commitment to public healthcare, but Protestants turned to home remedies and herbal medicine that could now be printed and distributed in books to care for the sick within the home.

Support of public hospitals picked up again in the 1800’s among Protestants with the rise of charity work and the example of the Catholic Church.

Modern Age Religious Healing

Despite the religious origins of hospitals, physicians who staffed them in the 1800’s did not like to treat patients on the basis of religion for fear that their therapies would seem like trickery.

Universities for scientific study became less associated with religion.

Medical guilds were established to license doctors.

A 20th century New Testament critic named Rudolph Bultmann interpreted Jesus’ acts as merely symbolic, not literal physical healing.

In the 1960’s and 1970’s, Jerome Frank, a psychiatrist, wrote about the placebo effect and its possible link to religious healing.

While offensive to some people who believe in the true power of religious healing, this theory allows for better understanding and respect for the importance of religion in physicians who would otherwise discard the idea of addressing religion in their patients at all.

Cultural anthropologist Thomas Csordas countered that Frank’s theory simply gave another name to the mystery that is true religious healing. Csordas argued that whether one calls the result “the placebo effect” or “religious healing,” there is still some therapeutic efficacy present.

Today in America, there still exists some communities in which Christianity plays a larger role in curing disease than does empirical medicine.

In the Christian denomination of Pentecostalism, faith healing is used, and devotion and faith are necessary for this healing to occur. The Church of Christ, Scientist explains the idea of efficacious religious healing as the work of the Holy Spirit. Seven Day Adventists