

consequence is fully expected. Most churches offer prayers for special requests after the Sunday worship service, and sick people will go to church to have someone pray for them there. Usually, this takes place within small groups. Prayers are said by church elders or, if one is present, by an ordained pastor. Little groups of believers, kneeling at the steps before the altar and lost in prayers which they murmur under their breath, make a familiar Sunday scene in countless congregations in China. The laying-on of hands during such prayers is rarely practised, and normally only by ordained church workers.

Weekly prayer meetings, which are held in most congregations, almost always include prayers for sick congregation members, be they present or absent, and a testimony of healing is expected once healing has taken place. The size of such prayer meetings depends on the congregation, and can reach from a handful to several hundred participants. Their programme usually consists of a short Bible study, the naming of prayer requests, and then a time of prayer during which everyone prays aloud at once. Such prayer times can be intensely emotional, with most participants crying while they pray, but I have never observed the ecstatic phenomena that are common in Pentecostal churches.

Prayer with the sick is seen as important as prayer for them. Therefore, church members will make home visits to care for and pray with sick fellow Christians. Many congregations organize rosters of people responsible for such visits. In the case of a serious illness, the sick person may be visited daily, sometimes for weeks or even months and years, until either healing or death occur.

It is clear that a Christian in China who falls ill will never have to suffer in isolation, but becomes the centre of loving attention of his or her congregation. It is also very obvious that in the eyes of Chinese Christians, prayers for the sick are definitely a task for the whole congregation, even when it delegates it to specially commissioned members.

Special 'healing ministries' or hospital chaplaincies do not exist. Prayers for the sick are a core activity for every church: They will be practised even in the smallest, most scattered and unstructured congregations.

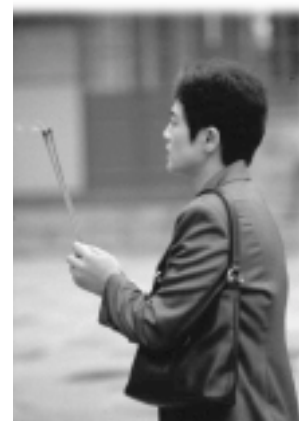
Every Christian in China I have ever met was of the firm opinion that any single believer can pray for the sick and expect healing. Testimonies show that, in many cases, prayers of a single 'ordinary' Christian have led to healing:

"When my son started to get worse, I became more and more desperate... but there was an old woman in the hospital who believed in Jesus. Pretty soon she kept coming and praying with me for the child. And then he started to get better..."

It cannot be stressed enough that prayers for the sick in China take place 'democratically', i.e. without any one person specifically assigned to this role and virtually no fixed ritual applied. Illiterate peasant women as well as university professors, pastors ordained decades ago, as well as newly converted Christians, all pray for those who are sick, without any sense that a special gift or training is needed for this. This is possible because of the extreme simplicity of procedures.

The author is an ordained minister of the Evangelical Church in Rhineland (Germany) and worked for the Amity Foundation of the China Christian Council from 1985 to 1997.

Claudia Waehrish-Oblau, Am Nactigallental 19, D-45149 Essen, Germany. E-mail: acid@vemission.org



Reinhard Elbracht: Ji Ming\VEM

A Christian in China who falls ill does not suffer in isolation

Women seeking solace in prayer at Nanjing, China



Reinhard Elbracht: Ji Ming\VEM

“WE BELIEVE IN

In many African countries the so-called African Independent Churches play a very important role in usually not related to mainline churches and their missions. They practice forms of worship and services is healing. Excerpts from John Pobee and Philomena N Mwaura’s articles published

AFRICAN INITIATIVES IN CHRISTIANITY AND HEALING

Their healing does not aim at supplanting medical treatment but supplementing it

A significant development in Africa is the rise of the African initiatives in Christianity or more commonly African Independent Churches (AICs).

While the churches within this genre vary, three things may be said of them.

First, they represent a dynamic and growing section of the change taking place in the demography of world Christianity by which the heartland of Christianity is especially Africa.

Second, they represent the attempt to change the North Atlantic captivity of Christianity and church as it has come to Africa from Europe and North America, to accommodating the Christian faith to Africa *in vivo and in vitro*. This means that when we talk of health, healing and religion in African cultures, we may not

limit ourselves to traditional African cultures. In this genre there is a meeting or encounter and engagement of Christian faith with African cultures and religions.

Third, the appeal of the AICs has largely to do with their reputation and claim to heal. Of course, the church hospitals also mediate healing but the decided emphasis of healing in the AICs is on

miraculous healing or healing by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Article 13 of Mosama Disco Christo Church’s (MDCC) *Article of Belief* states: ‘We believe in divine healing’. A catechist from the MDCC underlines this : “We are all in this church because we have found healing here. But for this church the great majority of us here assembled would not be alive today. That is the reason why we are here; is that not so?” And the answer from the congregation is an unanimous “Yes”.

John Pobee is an Anglican theologian from Ghana and former co-ordinator of WCC’s Programme on Ecumenical Theological Education.

Rev Canon John Pobee, P.O. Box 48, Korle Bu, Accra, Ghana Email: marpobee@hotmail.com

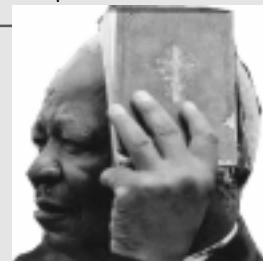
A hospital in Yambio, Western Equatoria



Peter Williams/WCC

Prophet healer

Patients have faith in the prophet healer because of his/her psychic gifts of intuition, telepathy and ability to com-



municate with God through the Holy Spirit, is able to solve their problems. The Prophet healer is also a member of the community, and is therefore seen as sympathetic and understanding. Prophet healers are extremely patient and do not count the costs of attending their patients. Patients are welcome even to their homes for as long as they are unwell.

The important issue to note here is the concern for the person, availability of the prophet healer and his/her knowledge of the patient’s context. This model may not work in a highly structured set up like in the mainline churches but there are values to be learnt in the approach of the AICs. It is also very important to note the gender dimension of the healing ‘profession’. Both men and women are involved equally depending on God’s choice and will. Women’s traditional healing roles are given expression in AICs. Can this be done in mainline Christianity to the same extent?

Philomena N. Mwaura

DIVINE HEALING”

the life of a community, particularly in regard to spirituality and healing. These indigenous churches are spirituality that respond to the needs and cultural expectations of the people. A key element in their in the International Review of Mission (Vol 90 Nos 356/357) throw some light on it.

NEED FOR WHOLISTIC AND CONTEXTUAL HEALING

Though this has been mentioned several times, there is a need for the church in Africa to situate its understanding of health and healing within the African world-view, which perceives health as more than physical wellbeing. It should be seen as a state that entails mental, physical, spiritual, social and environmental harmony. It should still be seen as a state of balance within all these realms. Africans have not lost touch in their sub-conscious self with the world-view that sees disease and misfortune as the result of malicious external factors or the victims' own doing. The fears of witchcraft, sorcery, breaking of taboos, parental curses, bad omens, malicious spirits, evil eye and a host of other evil forces, imbibed due to interaction with Christianity and Islam in the form of Satan, demons and Jinn's, are a reality to Africans regardless of educational level, social-economic status or creed. There is therefore an urgent need to focus further on the issue of inculturation and healing.

Since understanding illness and misfortune and mediating healing is culturally constructed and conditioned, it is important to develop a model of ministry which takes the cultural factors into account. This way the church will be able to adequately interpret and direct the healing ministry. Any healing ministry that does not take the African cosmology seriously (in Africa) is doomed to fail. The AICs have made an impact in this respect. Their healing does not aim at supplanting medical treatment but supplementing it. Their healing message through prayers, visions, dreams, laying on of hands, use of holy water, holy oil, ashes, drums, staves and other



Peter Williams/WCC

"Bind us together O Lord..."

sacraments are aimed at dealing with practical problems of life, just like the indigenous African religion did and still does to some extent. The African world-view is also very much complemented by the biblical world-view and the healing is done in the name of the trinity but particularly Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. We here also emphasize the importance of understanding and taking the social context into account in the understanding of illness and mediation of healing.

The churches are also a therapeutic community. Members are protected against harm from various sources. Healing is provided within the social environment of one's family and neighbours, just as in the traditional African society.

Philomena N. Mwaura, a lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at the Kenyatta University, Kenya. Philomena Njeri Mwaura, P.O. Box 67072, Nairobi, Kenya E-mail: Philomena@iconnect.co.ke

Any healing ministry that does not take the African cosmology seriously (in Africa) is doomed to fail

LAYING ON OF HANDS – A MAGIC WAND?

HEALING IN THE LOCAL CHURCH



Elisabethenkirche is a small church in Basle, Switzerland, where every Thursday (except in the month of July) visitors from far and near come to witness the 'Laying of the Hands'. While some come there out of curiosity, others are propelled because of their firm faith. A first hand account by Rev HR Felix and Beatrice Anderegg.

We are there for people who have tried every treatment without success, those in pain, the heartbroken, the lonely and the desperate

When a new person comes I always explain what we do and how the 'laying on of hands' is performed. Once, a man who said he had just wanted to see what it was all about, suddenly began to talk about deep spiritual matters that had stifled him a great deal. In another instance, a woman who affirmed that she was very well and had only looked in out of curiosity, started weeping during the healing service. Long repressed feelings surged to the surface and, at the end of it, she went away relieved and grateful.

But most people come to us purposely and in many cases regularly. Some are in deep crisis or have a life-threatening disease; others come with some small problem. All are welcome.

What we try do as healers, is to encourage people to be in tune with themselves again and to move their lives forward. What we do not do is make all problems disappear as though by magic.

We are not magicians. So the man who had hoped that the laying on of hands would immediately cure him of snoring no doubt went away disappointed.

Laying on of hands in the Elisabethenkirche

Throughout the year, except in July, three or four healers (all women) are present in the Elisabethenkirche every Thursday afternoon. On each occasion, 30 to 50 people receive the laying on of hands and comfort and encouragement. Some visitors come every Thursday if they can; others come when they are going through a difficult period, yet others use the service only once.

More and more people have been coming from other districts of Switzerland, southern Germany and Alsace in France to have the experience of being received by a healer in a church. For many, our service is a sign of reconciliation, because they feel the church has let them down in the health field.

On the part of the church, and also from doctors and therapists, we meet with a great deal of good will because the healers clearly understand their work as complementary to traditional treatments.

Art and music in the Elisabethenkirche

Keeping pace with the rhythm of life in the city, lunch hour activities like jazz