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# Christ the Healer

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I greet you, healers of God in an ailing world, in the name of Christ the Healer!

I would like to take you on another walk along a well-travelled road. You may feel that there are few surprises left on this road, and perhaps you are right. My hope is, however, that in this walk the Risen Lord will meet you and make himself known to you again, that he will interpret himself to you freshly, that he will cause your hearts to burn within you. That somewhat audacious hope is one that I can hold because I believe that he will be breaking the bread of fellowship with us as we journey together through these hours and days. He who began the mission of healing will help us with his presence and grace as we try to understand it more truly and obey it more purely.

To that end, I wish to put before you the vision of the Healing Christ, and ask you to contemplate what you see. Important as it is, I will not be trying to sketch a broadly inclusive philosophy of healing. Essential as it is, I will not be deliberating upon a total Christian theology of healing. I will not be trying to draw out the comprehensive biblical basis of healing, nor even the full New Testament theology of healing. I am interested, rather, in looking with you at the Healing Christ.

To do this, I think, is to take seriously our theological concern and task. In fact, that focus goes to the heart of theology itself. The core of theology (words about God) has to do with

Jesus Christ (the Word of God). What we call the theology of the church is reflection upon him, and upon what has been revealed and wrought through him. Theology in this narrow concentrated sense leads to theology in the broad systematic sense. As you translate the vision of Christ into the theory and practice of parish healing this week, you will be working on a broad theology of healing. But the starting-point is clear. We cannot think healing or do healing without steadfastly gazing upon the Figure of him who is the Author and Finisher of our healing as well as our faith.

I will attempt to deal with the topic in two major sections: Part A on Christ and Healing, and Part B on Christ the Healer. The distinction is arbitrary, but roughly parallels the use of a broad brush and a fine brush by a painter. I will not try to spell out in any detail the meaning of the picture that emerges in terms of specific applications to the healing ministry of Christian congregations in the 1980s. That constructive task I leave to you—I take it to be the very purpose of this conference.

## A. Christ and Healing

### 1. *The Cosmic Context*

Summary: Healing is an aspect of the total movement of the redemptive love of God.

Let us get a sense of the grand design of the God of the universe. You must see yourself and set your ministry in the cosmic context of the healing God. I heard Krister Stendahl say:<sup>1</sup> “God’s agenda is the mending of creation.” I liked that then, and still do. As my salutation to you I could have said, I greet you, members of creation in a broken world, in the name of the Mender!

Mending is an expression for God’s total movement of creative love toward suffering humanity, of which healing is an aspect. From the beginning of time that movement of love was associated with the Word of God.

It was through him that all things came into being, and without him came nothing that has come to be. In him there was life, and that life was the light of men.<sup>2</sup>

In a sense, we can say that the healing light of Jesus Christ has always been in the world, as a ray of his life-giving and sustaining Presence. When from the Greek genius Hippocrates

(400 B.C.) there poured forth that oath which binds doctors to this day, he was responding to that hidden Light. When Ibn Sina (= Avicenna, d. 1135), the illustrious Arab Muslim philosopher-theologian-physician, composed his "Poem of Medicine" and systematized the entire medical knowledge of his day, he was responding to that Light. When a Hindu ayurvedic practitioner in village India today ministers to and restores the sense of physical well-being of the nation's President, with his combination of herbal treatment and oil massage, he is responding to that Light.<sup>3</sup> God's active goodness pervades the universe, inspiring every form of human goodness, and his footprints are impressed on the sands of life for those who have eyes to see.

Yet the darkness does not comprehend it, or apprehend it. So in the fullness of time the Sun of Righteousness himself appeared, "with healing in his wings."<sup>4</sup> The Light of God was condensed into one solitary incandescent flame, of infinite intensity and power, the true burning and shining light that can lighten every human being that comes into the world.

And the Word was made flesh and came to dwell among us, and we had sight of his glory, glory as belongs to the Father's only-begotten Son, full of grace and truth.<sup>5</sup>

He veiled that Light in human form so that we could see it and live, could share it and give. Some looked and saw only an earthly flicker, the human form of Joseph's son, and they were repelled and received nothing. Others saw in him what we all are intended to see, the fullness of God in his self-giving, life-bestowing Reality.

It was God's good pleasure to let all completeness dwell in him, and through him to win back all things, whether on earth or in heaven, into union with himself, making peace with them through his blood shed on the cross.<sup>6</sup>

In Jesus Christ the saving God went forth to save. In him the Lord of all reclaimed his universe, and established the new situation of healing and hope in which we live.

He is the Light of the world. I do not want to teach you about Jesus Christ—as though I could!—I want you to look at the light, which embodies everything that God wishes to communicate to us and make possible for us, and

go on, then, ordering your lives in Christ Jesus our Lord... (for) in Christ the whole plenitude of Deity is embodied, and dwells in him,

and it is in him that you find your completion; he is the fountainhead from which all dominion and power proceeds.<sup>7</sup>

As we look at that Flame and go on ordering our lives in response to it, the Light enters us. For God who commanded the Light to shine out of darkness "has kindled a light in our hearts, whose shining is to make known his glory as he has revealed it in the features of Jesus Christ."<sup>8</sup> Filled with this Light we now understand, we have power, we desire to live, to love, to proclaim, to recreate, to heal; we have, miracle of miracles!, a share in both the mind of God and the possibility of God.

Risen with Christ you must live your thoughts above....You have undergone death, and your life is hidden away now with Christ in God....There is nothing but Christ in any of us.<sup>9</sup>

The Christ-connection not only enables us to walk in the light, brightening and warming the world, but it is the guarantee that we shall share in its final revelation. It is then that the weak old order in which we suffer and heal, heal and suffer, shall have passed away, and the Lamb shall be the lamp of the city of God, by whose light the nations shall walk, and whom they shall praise and adore as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The total movement of redemptive love shall reach its culmination when he hands over the kingdom to his father and takes his seat at his right hand.

Full completion comes... when he places his kingship in the hands of God, his Father, having first dispossessed every sort of rule, authority and power: his reign as we know must continue until he has put all enemies under his feet, and the last of those enemies to be dispossessed is death. God has put all things in subjection under his feet... so that God may be all in all.<sup>10</sup>

In this brief sketch I have attempted to evoke rather than to describe our sense of participation in a cosmic drama of redemption and re-creation. The mending of creation has been underway since the moment the life of humanity was fractured, and at its centre stands Christ the Healer. Those who follow him are part of that grand design. They are caught up in it. Christian healers are not an isolated, special-interest group. Defensive attitudes, building up our concerns by downing others, pressure tactics, mystery production, mutual ego stroking—all the worst characteristics of such groups have no place among us. If present, they stem from a lack of sense of the

grand design and our part in it. We are members of the body of him by whom all things were made and towards whom all things head, his people on his mission, the signs and builders of his kingdom on earth until he comes. Only, St. Paul says, "Let each man take care how he builds... for no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid in Jesus Christ... You are for Christ, and Christ is for God."<sup>11</sup>

So let us learn from him how to build the kingdom. From the cosmic drama we must go to the vision of the one who walked among us. He is the foundation of every aspect of Christian obedience, including the minister of healing. He promised that we would do greater works than he, and it is clear that he demands no slavish repetition but rather a lively and creative response to his Spirit. Yet there can be no argument that our approach to the healing task, both in spirit and in practice, must be drawn from the Healing Christ. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus once asked some men, "What will you have of me?" When they told him, he said, "Come and see." The context was different but the words are appropriate at the beginning of our planning for this decade.

"What will you have of me?"

"Lord, show what it means to heal."

Come and see!"

## 2. *The Natural Quality: Spontaneous Love*

Summary: Healing has a spontaneous character that results from association with the free and unpremeditated love of God.

There is a natural quality of Christian healing that we must catch.

Jesus Christ's healing ministry is set in the context of his total communication of the love of God. He does not treat it as a special ministry requiring special attention. It is a natural expression of what the God-related person is and does. It is the inevitable reflex of love. As I read the Gospels again in this connection, I tried to expose myself to their message in a somewhat impressionistic way. One thing that I came away with was a sense of the natural, spontaneous quality of Christ's healing. It did not have a super-honed programmatic character, but rather the lively quality of *agape*, the unconditioned

love of God, which was in him responding to human need of every variety. His healing seemed to be part of his living and breathing in God. He had an on-going sense of being one with the Father. As a result, he identified his will with God's, and his commitment to that will, which he understood as love, was as natural as eating and drinking. "My food is to do the will of him that sent me."<sup>12</sup>

Jesus frequently used the picture of a fruit-bearing tree to underline the natural quality of this response. At the same time, there is no suggestion that spontaneity equates to lack of awareness. His own obedience was not unconscious, machine-like. He knew very well what he was doing and was ready to discuss it. His discussion did not stultify the spontaneity of his response, however, as our discussions and plannings sometimes seem to do. I think it was because he always kept a sense of the relationship from which his obedience flowed. He always pointed to the spring from which he drank. "The Father loves the Son, and discloses to him all that he himself does."<sup>13</sup> This conscious sense of direct linkage with the dynamic love of God gave alertness and awareness to the life and ministry of the Healer. That quality too he passes on to his followers.

My father's name has been glorified if you yield abundant fruit and prove yourselves my disciples. I have bestowed my love upon you, just as my Father has bestowed his love upon me; live on in my love. You will live on in my love if you keep my commandments.<sup>14</sup>

Neither does this natural quality of the life of love mean that it is aimless. Spontaneity is not to be identified with lack of direction. The spontaneous life of love can be ordered with plans and purpose. We see that reflected in God's own plan for the mending of creation. The sense of purpose was very prominent in Jesus. Note the phrase that comes at the end of the passage quoted earlier. "My food is to do the will of him that sent me, *and to complete his work.*" He maintained this sense of objective throughout his career.

Do not think that I have come to set aside the law and the prophets; I have not come to set them aside but to bring them to perfection.<sup>15</sup>

I must go up to Jerusalem.

I have glorified thee on earth. I have finished the work thou gavest me to do...It is finished.<sup>16</sup>

Spontaneous love is not only alert, but sets out to do things, and finishes them.

### 3. *The Unnatural Quality: Sent to Love*

Summary: Healing has a deliberate and burden-bearing character that results from the sending of God.

There is an unnatural quality to Christian healing that we must recognize.

If love is natural, spontaneous, outgoing, we may well ask, why is it that it must be commanded? If light shines naturally, why must it be ordered to shine? Yet it is commanded.

Your light must shine so brightly before men that they can see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.<sup>17</sup>

Why is this word needed? We might also ask, why do we need this meeting at all to talk about something so obvious as the healing ministry? The question may be pressed farther with reference to the Healer himself. I am struck by Christ's sense of being sent by God. I have counted 26 times in St. John's Gospel alone where he mentions that he has been sent, and there may be more. It is clear that this fact dominated his thoughts. We must ask, however, why free-flowing Love needed sending, and why the sending was so important to him.

I do not propose to find the answer to the question in the truth that we are at the same time saints and sinners. That truth is applicable to us but has nothing to do with the Christ. Rather I find the answer in the character of evil itself. There is a forbidding quality about evil, evil of any kind. It is horrible. It disgusts and contaminates. The average person is repelled by it. Nothing reveals its shocking nature better than the famous story of Gautama Buddha's first encounter with evil.<sup>18</sup>

Buddha had been secluded by his royal father from every contact with evil and suffering. One day the young prince drove forth from his palace with his charioteer and saw a peculiar sight. On inquiring about it, he was informed that he had just seen a man of great age, and that youth must ever yield to age. Thereupon he cried, "Shame then on life, since the decay of every living thing is notorious." Later he saw a sick man, thin and weak with fever. When the meaning of the spectacle was made clear to him, he cried, "If health be frail as the substance of a dream, who then can take delight in joy and pleasure?" A third time he ventured forth, and for the first time he saw a corpse being carried through the streets. After the charioteer had explained the significance of the weeping and the beating of



breasts Buddha cried: "Woe to the life so soon ended! Would that sickness, age and death might be forever bound! Turn back again, that I may seek a way of deliverance!"

If evil repels ordinary human beings to this extent, how much more repelling is it to absolute goodness! There are two possible reactions for goodness in the face of evil. Neutrality is not one of them. Either goodness senses its incompatibility with evil, is wounded and distressed by the sight of it, is repelled and withdraws from contact with it. Or goodness draws near to evil and seeks to overcome it. I suggest that both reactions are proper to goodness, and this in part explains why it was necessary that Jesus be sent, and that we be commanded to heal.

On the one hand God separates himself from evil—and his separation is the judgment upon it. To be separate from evil is natural for the Holy One who is "majestic in holiness." On the other hand God enters the sphere of evil, draws near to it, yes even becomes identified with evil in order to overcome it.<sup>19</sup> That is the "unnatural" thing for God to do. There is strain in it. There is temptation in it. There is suffering in it. So God who naturally recoils from evil sends himself. The Son of Love who would naturally go must nevertheless be sent into the arena of the evil one. It is evident that it was this sense of being sent by the Father that enabled Jesus Christ to maintain his commitment in his traumatic and unnatural encounter with evil and suffering. "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt...O my Father, if this cup may not pass from me except I drink it, thy will be done."<sup>20</sup> The Sent One drank the cup. Goodness engaged with evil in mortal combat, and in that battle death is swallowed up in victory.

Even so Christ the Healer sends us. He sends us to the unnatural thing, to be in contact with evil, to be involved with sickness and suffering. He commands us to heal. He knows that we require his commission, and gives it. We do not only love, but we are sent to love.

And preach as you go, telling them, the kingdom of God is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils: give as you have received the gift, without payment.<sup>21</sup>

Only those who believe that they have been sent by God to do battle with evil will be able to drink the cup that he drank, and to give as they have received.

#### 4. *The Shalom of God: the Aspect of Wholeness*

Summary: Healing has an integral place in the whole mission of God and the fulfillment of his will.

From all that has been said the integral relation of mission and healing is evident. The mending of creation, which is God's agenda, the all-encompassing movement of love, the engagement with evil, these leave nothing out of their scope and certainly not what we commonly call healing.<sup>22</sup>

In St. Matthew 3:19 the Lord gives his classic call: "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Then, in the next verses (23 ff.) he provides his personal exegesis of that call.

So Jesus went about the whole of Galilee teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and curing every kind of disease and infirmity among the people. . . . And they brought to him all those who were in affliction distressed with pain and sickness of every sort, the possessed, the lunatics, the palsied, and he healed them.

The rhythm of preaching, teaching, and healing runs all the way through the Messiah's ministry. Those who came to him reflected that rhythm, for they came "to listen to him and to be healed of their diseases."<sup>23</sup> When Jesus made his striking and compelling declaration, "I must work the works of him that sent me; the night is coming when there is no working any more,"<sup>24</sup> he uttered it in the context of the healing of the man born blind.

We have been reminded repeatedly in this present age that Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace, the King of Shalom. The word *shalom*, which carries the inclusive sense of total well-being, is translated in the New Testament by *eirene*, peace. Originally the Greek term *eirene* really meant the absence of conflict. It is used sometimes in that sense in the New Testament, and is especially important in conveying the idea that the warfare between God and man has ended because of Christ, and a new relationship has come into being. But very often *eirene*, peace, is filled with the Old Testament meaning of *shalom*, the total restoration of the true state of humanity. That thought is present both at the beginning of Jesus' life when the angels sang "peace on earth" and at the end when

he wept over Jerusalem: "Ah, if thou too couldest understand, above all in this day that is given thee, the way that can bring thee peace."<sup>25</sup>

Between those terminals of his ministry Jesus sought to establish that *shalom*. His mission was expressed in the famous words of Isaiah that foretold the mandate of the Messiah.<sup>26</sup>

He has anointed me and sent me out to preach the gospel to the poor, to restore the broken-hearted, to bid the prisoners to go free, to set the oppressed at liberty, to proclaim a year when men may find acceptance with the Lord, a day of retribution.

His acts of healing fall within that total *shalom* ministry, and are a sign of it. To the woman with the problem of bleeding the Healer said, "My daughter, thy faith has brought thee recovery: go in peace (*eirene*) and be rid of thy affliction."<sup>27</sup> We have not reached and may never attain to the full significance of that term, *shalom*. Later disciples saw it as the proper description of his ministry on earth. Peter said, "God has sent his word... giving them news of peace (*eirene*) through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all,"<sup>28</sup> and Paul asks us to be ready "to publish the God of peace (*eirene*)."<sup>29</sup>

Christ the Healer asks us to do the same. The passage, "Blessed are the peace-makers"<sup>30</sup> has been almost universally interpreted as an encouragement to disciples to help in solving conflicts. I am not at all minded to lose that significance, especially in view of the conflicts in our world today. But I cannot help but think that this beatitude may have depths we have not plumbed. "Blessed are the shalom-makers, the builders of total well-being," is what it may be saying. To make that kind of total ministry possible he gives his *shalom* to his disciples: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you,"<sup>31</sup> a peace that is connected with his resurrection victory and power. It was when he showed them the scars in his hands and side, the healed wounds, signs of the enemy overcome, that he said, "Peace be unto you." Then to make clear that we have his powerful *shalom* to give to others, he declared again: "Peace be with you; as my Father sent me, so send I you."<sup>32</sup>

##### 5. *The Kingdom and the Power: Healing and the Rule of God*

Summary: Healing is a sign of the rule of God, active among us now and still to be revealed.

Jesus Christ declared, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel."<sup>33</sup> This was his first public word, and it initiated a constant theme in his ministry. The kingdom of God has been described as the central theme of his life and message. Kingdom of God means the reign or the rule of God. Alan Richardson explains the above passage in the following words:<sup>34</sup>

In general terms, this means that Jesus proclaimed as good news the fact that God was setting about the task of putting straight the evil plight into which the world had fallen, or that He was beginning to bring to its fulfillment his original intention in the Creation.

God's reign is here. That which prophets and kings had longed to see is present. God has visited and redeemed his people. The day is at hand. The merciful kindness of our God has dawned upon us to give light to those who live in darkness, in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of *shalom*. The testimony to the fullness of time is Jesus Christ himself, and his words and works. When John the Baptist wondered whether it was he or not, Jesus said: "Go, tell John... how the blind see, the lame walk, and the lepers are made clean, and the deaf hear; how the dead are raised to life, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."<sup>35</sup> Tell him that the kingdom has arrived.

This is the appropriate point to say a word about the miracles of the Christ, especially the healing miracles. Most obviously they were his response to need. But they were more than that. They were signs of the kingdom. They were the signal that the time had come for God to put in his hand, to enter the fray, to personally and powerfully take on the forces of evil. They were not spectacles, intended for oohs and ahs or for personal advance. They were rather the signs that a decisive attack was underway and that the age of salvation had now begun. Like all signs, they were meant to be read. They were the "enacted proclamation" of the kingdom of God, and called for response. They testified not simply that the kingdom had come, but that it had come in Jesus. Thus they were at the same time evidence of his messiahship and a call to faith. He said, "If when I cast out devils I do it through the Spirit of God, then it must be that the kingdom of God has already appeared among you;"<sup>36</sup> and he reproached the impenitence of the communities in which he had performed most of his wonders: "Tyre and Sidon would have repented in sackcloth and

ashes long ago, if the miracles done in you had been done there instead.”<sup>37</sup>

The healing miracles, then, had a special function related to the pioneer ministry of Jesus the Messiah. He shared this authority with the twelve (Luke 9:1) and with the seventy (Luke 10:9) as signs to them. They were the strong overture needed to introduce the symphony of witness. There is no indication that the miracles of healing were to go on as a widespread, permanent feature in the church, or that the healing miracles of the Christ were to be emulated by the mass of his followers. The great, comprehensive commissions of the Master to his disciples<sup>38</sup> are devoid of reference to this theme. It is significant that in his list of the gifts of the Spirit, St. Paul separates the gift of healing and the gift of miracles.<sup>39</sup> The two things do not automatically go together. The building of the kingdom and the establishment of its shalom will not be effected through wonder-working, but through suffering love. The royalty of the King is the royalty of self-giving love. Right at the start of his career Jesus in the wilderness turned his back on miracle methodology as the way of the kingdom. Not by turning stones into loaves of bread, but rather by living contact with God through his Word would his kingdom come.

There is one thing more, however, that remains to be said. Where Jesus did exert his divine power in those commanding demonstrations of authority, he exerted it most frequently and most forcefully among the sick. The kingdom of God is the kingdom of love, and its power is for others. The royal Healer's power was for others, and those others who most needed it were the sick and the handicapped, the poor and the oppressed. So power went out from the Healer. *Everything* that he was and *everything* that he had was offered up to the suffering human beings that he encountered. Therein, *in his holding nothing back*, is the sufficient lesson of the miracles of healing.

## B. Christ the Healer

Let us look more closely at the Healer.

Jesus has meant many things to different people at various stages in the history of the church. In his day, Jesus the Messiah... in the early church, Jesus the Lord and Son of God... in medieval times, Jesus the Spiritual Master... in the Reformation period, Jesus the loving Saviour... in the nineteenth

century, Jesus the Teacher... in the twentieth century, Jesus the Example and Authentic Human... in the present time, Jesus the Liberator. When will the world see Jesus the Healer? Perhaps we are near that time now. To show the Healer and to follow him on his healing way is the task that faces the church in an increasingly disillusioned, fragmented, and troubled world.

See him... see him... is the strong, reverberating antiphony of a great Bach double chorus. It seems to say what we must be saying to the churches. Those who seek to engage the church afresh with the Healer and his tasks, however, must first see him for themselves.

### 1. *See His Focus*

See the focussed Healer.

There is no mystery about his ministry. It is so accessible to our observation. He was, and is, so real. After all the volumes have been written on that subject, he remains the epitome of down to earth practicality and concrete obedience. He was, in a sense, so narrow. He focussed on sick people, and healed them. Many heard about his concentrated attack on physical disease and demonic power, and they thronged about him, bringing their ailing and distressed. Christ the Healer responded to them. Though we see him withdrawing at times, we never see him ignoring. Again and again we read the phrase, "and he healed every kind of disease and infirmity." "Great multitudes followed him, and he healed all their diseases."<sup>40</sup> In discussing the attitudes of Jesus toward evil, J.B. Phillips states that "His particular genius lies in concentration upon what is really essential." That is, he does not discourse about the origin of evil and suffering, but rather he accepts the human situation, focusses on the core realities, and deals with them.<sup>41</sup>

There is some reason to emphasize this point in view of the current stress on holism, that is, a broadly comprehensive view of the healing task. This development followed upon a new appreciation of the fact that an individual human being is an interactive totality of body and mind and soul, emotion and will, together with a new awareness of the fact that the health of human beings in community is affected by almost every condition and influence that runs through corporate life. These discoveries brought new depth and breadth to the understanding of the healing task. We must also ask, however, whether

and to what extent the development represents a movement away from the focussed Healer.

A minor question relates to the language usage that has developed. I am mildly concerned about the jargon that is turning the healing mystery into an arcane mystery for ordinary Christians at a time when they are to be challenged to involvement and action. The term, "holism," for example, is very much the property of the few. Even dictionaries have not yet caught up to its usage connected with healing.<sup>42</sup> Of greater significance is its effect on the average person in the church: try out the term on a fellow member of your congregation and observe if you receive much more than a blank stare! From time to time every discipline needs self-examination and a modicum of reform at this point, since we all suffer from what Max Müller called "the disease of language." Is it possible, however, that we may have to consciously revert to the concrete language of the Healer himself if we wish to move the church?

A larger question relates to the concept of holism itself. I am wondering to what extent it has inadvertently introduced a diluting effect upon healing, so that the latter has lost much of its distinctive meaning and power. If I may use an analogy—a rushing stream when it overflows its banks and spills into a broad, flat valley, no longer sustains its power and soon becomes a placid pool. The phenomenon that has taken place with respect to healing has a parallel in what has occurred with respect to the concept "mission." The latter has been so broadened as to include every aspect of Christian obedience, and as a result it has partially lost the force of the root idea of sending.<sup>43</sup>

While the adjective "holistic" attached to healing conveys a powerful meaning, it must be emphasized for the sake of definition that holistic ministry and healing ministry are not co-terminous. Healing ministry is an aspect of the shalom creation, and is not identical with it. All of life is interrelated and plays on health. The conclusion that since everything is somehow interlinked, the healing ministry must deal with every link in the chain does not follow, however; neither is it possible. Healing has to do with everything, but that does not imply that it must do everything. The area of healing ministry that crystallizes the problem under discussion is the field

of preventive medicine which, by its very nature, has an inclusive concern. We faced this problem as we developed our Community Health Project at Malappuram, South India, with the assistance of the Wheat Ridge Foundation and Canadian Lutheran World Relief. Water supply, latrines, health education, nutrition, gardens, job-training, loans—you name it—we incorporated it all into a promising pilot project with the object of a healthier community and the goal of replication. The project is still continuing, and is in good health.<sup>44</sup> Since I believe that there is a place for that kind of ministry, both as a contribution to the building of health and as a signal of *shalom*, I would do it again. Yet I must admit that the true sign of the kingdom for the Mappila Muslims of Kerala, and that which has enabled some of them to see Christ and to follow him, has been the focussed care of the sick in the name of the Healer that has been carried out over the years in that part of the world.

An interesting parallel to the dilution problem from outside the Christian tradition is the Gandhian Hindu concept of Sarvodaya, advanced by his great followers, Vinobha Bhave (*bhūdan*, land-gift movement) and the recently deceased Jaya Prakash Narayan (*gram raj*, village power), as well as by the Indian government through its community development programs. Sarvodaya means total (*sarv*) well-being (*daya*). It includes every aspect of concern that Christians attach to the achievement of total health, with the exception of sin-sickness. A congress of Sarvodaya adherents several years ago identified the following as the ten basic goals for village communities:<sup>45a</sup> clean environment, water, clothing, a balanced diet, housing, basic health care, communication facilities, fuel, education, and the satisfaction of spiritual and cultural needs. Despite great efforts to make this a practical program, however, in part because of its utopian scope it has remained the concern of the few, and its impact has been effective primarily in societally isolated village areas. There is obviously great symbolic significance in movements such as these in an increasingly fragmented society, and they deserve recognition and praise. Their problems, however, speak to our basic question of how we should follow the focussed Healer.

I will return us then to the vision of the Healer, and the specificity I see in that vision. The term healing as used in the



Gospels has concreteness and particularity. Its object is always sick persons, not circumstantial conditions. You may ask, does the figurative use, including the wider sweep of human ills, not appear? The broad, figurative sense of healing is found in the Old Testament, but it is not the mark of New Testament usage and does not represent the language of the Healer himself. The only time the term "healing" is used in the broadly inclusive sense in the Gospels is in a quotation of an Old Testament passage.<sup>45b</sup> Elsewhere and everywhere it is severely focussed on the overcoming of disease. Albrecht Oepke<sup>46</sup> puts it in blunt words: "Physical healings dominate the field of vision." For the Healer that certainly included also the root of physical disease, the sin of humanity, which it was his mission to overcome. It is suggested, in fact, that the uniqueness of his healing rests in the way that "it embraces the outer and inner in man."<sup>47</sup>

What shall we say about the focussed Christ as we chart our objectives for parish healing? Does his concentration on the care of the sick reflect the limitations of his time? Is this too restricted a vision for healing in our day? Are not the wholesome aspects of holistic healing perhaps endangered thereby, so that we stand to lose everything we have gained through that understanding? I do not regard this focus of the Healer as a threat to the basic principle of holism, but rather as a challenge to a renewed acceptance of a fundamental function and to the development of clear objectives. Christ's ministry to sick persons was a concentration on an aspect of *shalom* that needed to be done in his day and needs doing today. Holistic theology means that we have a conscious sense of the wholeness of the church and the diversity of its gifts; in that light, it is possible, for example, that we should allow Christian economists, businessmen, and government servants, the sent ones of God in their situations, to minister to primary economic conditions that admittedly affect the standard of health. All similar vocational ministries need recognition and maximizing by the church. As our priority for the healing ministry of parishes, however, perhaps we should return to the physically sick. Are they not there? I do not know where it will take us in our practical decisions, but the vision of Christ beckons us on. Without being simplistic, antiquated, or fundamentalist in our understanding of either sickness or healing, without lowering our own commitment to general justice, without failing to recognize the value

of all programs that contribute widely to the improvement of human conditions, we are clearly called to follow the Healer who healed the sick.

## 2. *See His Attitude*

See him... see him...

He noticed.

He was alert. He looked for the sick, and he noticed them. As he passed the pool of Bethsaida "Jesus *saw* him (a disabled man) lying there."<sup>48</sup> He didn't have to see him, but he did.

He stopped.

That noticing was not a passing by on the other side or a clinically detached observer attitude. He responded to what he saw. He took the initiative and acted. Surrounded by the teeming throngs as he left Jericho on his way to his final entrance to Jerusalem, sixteen miles away, two blind persons came to his attention. The sight caused him to bring to a halt a cosmically significant journey. "Then Jesus *stopped* and called to them."<sup>49</sup>

He was horrified.

He was horrified at what he saw. The suffering and sadness he encountered was not the intention of God. Abraham Heschel observes that modern man is brutalized and has lost his sense of horror.<sup>50</sup> Our horror is covered by celluloid. We have seen too much, so what we see no longer moves us. When they brought the dead and dumb man to Jesus in Decapolis, "he looked up and sighed."<sup>51</sup> But the word that is usually translated as sighing (*stenazo*) is the same as the one used in the New Testament to signify the groaning of creation.<sup>52</sup> Jesus groaned.

He was angry.

He was not only horrified but angry. He hated everything that distorted God's objectives and turned them against the welfare of people. He was especially angry, therefore, with the "church." Up into the temple of God he went and drove out the buyers and sellers. "My house shall be known as a house

of prayer....And there were blind and lame men who came up to him in the temple, and he healed them there.”<sup>53</sup> That is what the church is for, he seemed to say. “Woe unto you... you hypocrites that... have forgotten the weightier commandments of the law: justice, mercy and honor; you did ill to forget one duty while you performed the other.”<sup>54</sup> He almost flaunted his sabbath healings in the face of the Pharisees to awaken them to the priorities of the kingdom of God.

He loved.

He was moved to compassion. Practically the sum of the Christian message is found in the simple dialogue with the leper: “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” “I will; be clean.”<sup>55</sup> That will was the will of love. Love moves out of itself: “When he came ashore, he saw a great crowd; his heart went out to them, and he cured those of them who were sick.”<sup>56</sup> Love is determined to help: “I will come and heal him (the centurion’s servant).”<sup>57</sup> There was a profound intimacy in his love. It was not casual. “Lord, he whom thou lovest lies here sick...He sighed heavily and was deeply moved... then Jesus wept.”<sup>58</sup> There is hope in the universe. The sick are loved, and God weeps for man.

He loved widely, yet personally.

At times one almost gets a sense of mass healings. “Great multitudes went with them, and he healed them.”<sup>59</sup> There was a reckless profligacy of healing power and love. At the same time, he was intensely personal. He wanted to get in touch with the individual, and sometimes that meant physical contact. “And Jesus, moved to compassion, touched their eyes.”<sup>60</sup> Strikingly, “he reached out his hand and touched him (the leper).”<sup>61</sup> This dramatic act, a totally unusual thing in his tradition and environment, is full of implication. To everyone he was saying: “God’s health is for you.”

He healed relevantly.

Jesus kept cultural contact. He healed understandably. To touch a leper was not understandable. The new wine was breaking the old skin. Once the point was made, however, he stayed within the context. “Go, show yourself to the priest,”

he ordered the healed man.<sup>62</sup> Christ the Healer was within his situation. It is in that sense too that we must interpret the combination of physical touching and saliva.<sup>63</sup>

He crossed lines.

He healed inclusively. Of the Roman centurion whose servant he healed at Capernaum, he said "Many shall come from the east and the west, and will take their places in the kingdom of God."<sup>64</sup> He made the same point when he cast out the unclean spirit from the daughter of the Gentile woman: "Go home content."<sup>65</sup> In the full sense of the term, he was "the man for others". Is it not this that people outside the Christian fold have always noted and wondered? His extension of the principle was absolute: "Love your enemies... do good to those who hate you."<sup>66</sup>

He healed as a servant.

He healed without ostentation. Alongside his rejection of the raw use of power, he turned his back on acclaim. So often "he laid strict charge on them that they should not make him known."<sup>67</sup> He deliberately withdrew from the popular results of his healing activity. "Knowing then that they meant to come and carry him off so as to make a king of him, Jesus once again withdrew on a hillside alone."<sup>68</sup> He set the tone for all future healers when he pointed out that he had not come to have service done to him; "He came to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."<sup>69</sup>

He was urgent.

He was urgent in his task. He had a sense of little time. In fact, he had only three years. (Do we have more?) He knew that the night was coming, and he must work while there is day. So he kept himself available and worked to exhaustion levels. In that he was in touch with the secret of the universe. The secret is that God has exhausted himself for us. "My Father has never yet ceased his work, and I am working too."<sup>70</sup>

The attitude of Christ the Healer is a many-splendoured thing of love.

### 3. See His Power

See him... see him.

It is time to look directly at his power. You have witnessed the power of the Healer and believe it, I know. Yet see it again at this time as you plan your onslaught against evil. I will be reminding you of his struggle and suffering, but first see his authority that he shares with you along with his struggle.

The Spirit and power.

From the *human* aspect the power of Christ the Healer had a source outside of himself. It was strongly related to his anointing by the Spirit of God and to prayer. Both of these are within the reach of the people of God.

At his baptism the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, and he returned from the Jordan "full of the Spirit." By the same Spirit he was led into the wilderness, and from there he came back into Galilee "with the power of the Spirit upon him." Then as he declared his Messianic mission in the synagogue at Nazareth, he announced, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has anointed me." That Spirit was the source of his authority over demonic power and disease. In an important passage that I have quoted earlier, he declares: "But if, when I cast out devils, I do it through the Spirit of God, then it must be that the kingdom of God has already appeared among you."<sup>71</sup> St. Luke puts the same thought in slightly different words: "But if, when I cast out devils, I do it *through God's power*, then it must be that the kingdom of God has suddenly appeared among you."<sup>72</sup> Spirit and power go hand in hand for the Healer and for his followers.

Prayer and power.

The second source of his power was prayer. Prayer seems to have been the contact point and conduit for his grasping of the power of his Father. He felt the need for prayer, particularly in his task of healing. After the multitudes came to him and he healed them of their infirmities, it is said that "he would steal away from them into a desert and pray there."<sup>73</sup> Prior to his dramatic, and everlastingly meaningful cry to Lazarus, "Come forth!", he had lifted up his eyes and said: "Father, I thank thee for hearing my prayer."<sup>74</sup>

At the same time as we recognize these elements viewed from the human side of Jesus' healing power, we must also recognize from the divine side a supra-rational power that is unique to him. How shall we distinguish between these different levels of healing power represented by Christ, church, and world? Perhaps we may speak of a rational therapy that is the common gift of God to all human beings. Further, we may speak of a supra-rational therapy that is the extraordinary power resident in Christ, which he shared in a partial way with his first disciples. Finally, we may speak of Christian therapy that combines the best strengths of rational therapy together with the same resources of Spirit and power that Jesus possessed. These when joined and placed in the service of his kingdom, under the blessing of the King, give to the healing ministry of Christ's people a special character, authority, and possibility.

The power unleashed.

In the mighty struggle against evil the power of the Healer was unleashed at two points: against sickness, as the result of evil: and against satan and sin, as the cause of evil. The effects of his healing power we know, and I shall not repeat those familiar episodes that demonstrated it so clearly. The Word of the Lord brought re-creative energy in a kind of Genesis II. "Who touched me... somebody touched me...I can tell that power has gone out from me."<sup>75</sup> There is breathless awe in the report: "Everyone who touched him was restored to health."<sup>76</sup>

He also unleashed his power against sin and Satan as the cause of evil. In Christ's day the Jews had inherited the view that there was a direct line leading from a specific sin to a specific punishment. If there was sickness, it indicated retribution for a sin. Jesus breaks through this rigid dogma,<sup>77</sup> but he nevertheless recognizes that sin is the fundamental evil. His ultimate concern is to liberate humanity, indeed all creation, from its shackles. "Look," says the Baptist, "This is the Lamb of God: this is he who takes away the sin of the world."<sup>78</sup> It is the passage reporting the healing of the palsied man that illustrates the Healer's concern.

Tell me which command is more lightly given, to say to a man, Thy sins are forgiven, or to say, rise up and walk? And now to convince you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sin while

he is on earth (here he speaks to the palsied man), Rise, take up thy bed with thee, and go home. And he rose...<sup>79</sup>

Some who are engaged in healing ministries may at times have felt a certain hesitation about the affirmation that Christ's core concern was the overcoming of sin. A kind of nervous tic has developed as a result of the bland assumption by some Christians that the healing of the sick is therefore a secondary concern. We need to be healed from this nervous reaction as much as others need to be healed from the disease of false comparisons between the preaching of the Gospel and the healing of the sick. I suppose that of all people healers will be the first to recognize the need to penetrate to and deal with root causes. Jesus came to deal with the root cause, leaving for us the ample task of proclaiming the good news that he has done so and ministering to its lingering effects in the agony of creation. In his last high priestly prayer the Healer prayed:<sup>80</sup>

Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee, since thou hast given him power over all mankind, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him.

In him God as it were "travelled in his strength... mighty to save,"<sup>81</sup> and Christian healers join with all believers in the paeon of praise for the one who has broken the power of sin and removed the sting of death. "Thanks be to God!" all healers cry, and will yield to none in their devotion to the task of proclaiming his victory to the world.

Even dealing with sin, however, was not dealing with the final issue. Behind sin stands the Evil One, whom the Healer called the father of lies. Much has been written on the subject of demon possession as it expressed itself in Jesus' day, and consideration has been given to its possible relation to mental disorientation and disease. That is an unfinished exploration. Despite all natural explanations that may be adduced, however, we are faced with the overwhelming fact that the Healer regarded himself as engaged in warfare with the Evil One and all his powers. Reading the events of Christ's encounter with the devil is like viewing a titanic struggle on a screen. The devil is strong indeed, but a stronger one has come, and he has entered his house and bound him up.<sup>82</sup> God's reign is declared, and the axe is laid to the root of evil's power. Evil recognizes this and recoils in fear.

Why dost thou meddle with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Hast thou come to make an end of us? I recognize thee for what thou art, the Holy One of God. . . Silence! Jesus said, Come out of him!<sup>83</sup>

Like a cheerleader after a Steelers game, when the seventy disciples came back, rejoicing that the devils were subject to them, the Healer cries: "I watched while Satan was cast down like a lightning flash from heaven!"<sup>84</sup> We, in our turn, have watched and cheered in faith, as he rose from the dead, breaking the power of evil once and for all, ascended into heaven and took captivity captive. The mighty act of redemption is all but complete, as the Risen Lord prepares to come again.

The power of Christ the Healer is greater than the power of the devil. Do you identify with that?

But the warfare goes on, and now it is time to see the Healer broken for the world.

#### 4. *See His Suffering*

See him... see him.

The devil bruised his heel, and the Healer is wounded. Christ the Healer suffered to heal. He is the prototype of all healers, who must suffer as they heal; who, in fact, must suffer in order to heal.

In his temptations.

Jesus suffered to heal. He suffered in his temptations. He was tempted like any other healers.

He was tempted both by his popularity and by his unpopularity. He was invited to yield to the siren call of popularity and prestige, and to take the credit due to God. Sometimes when the multitudes saw the dumb speaking, the lame walking, and the blind receiving their sight, "they praised the God of Israel."<sup>85</sup> That was the result that Jesus sought. Other times they wanted to exalt him, for what Jesus regarded as the wrong reasons. The path of glory beckoned him, as it has beckoned every healer and resistance took spiritual effort. "Get thee behind me, Satan," he had to cry.

On the other hand, he was tested by his unpopularity, in that pendulum experience known to healers. He took on the cause of the ailing and the oppressed. That is not always a popular cause. "They entreated him to leave their country."<sup>86</sup>



He was an activist healer, and that leads to danger. The power structures hounded him and sought his life. He wondered at that. "Why do you design to kill me?" he asked, after he had healed on the sabbath.<sup>87</sup> It was after he raised Lazarus from the dead that it is reported: "From that day forward, they plotted his death."<sup>88</sup> He had a feeling of depression and was tempted. "And now my soul is distressed. What am I to say? I will say, Father save me from undergoing this trial."<sup>89</sup>

In his loneliness.

Jesus suffered in his loneliness. Healers know the feeling. It is profound and enervating. Who understood what he was doing as he healed? No one had a clear sense of what it was all about. His own brothers grappled with him and tried to drag him home. His disciples attempted to dissuade him from his insane course. Again and again, he had to chide those nearest to him for their lack of understanding, not an easy thing to do. There is a remarkable little note in the Gospel of Luke that seems to illustrate the point. When Peter struck off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant, Luke reports that the Healer "touched his ear and healed him."<sup>90</sup> That information, however, is not found in any of the other Gospels, although they report the incident. Luke noticed, but he was a physician. Healers are lonely, and their true efforts and real sorrows are seldom known. Will we ever know how lonely the Healer was and what this meant to him?

He suffered to heal.

Christ the Healer did not only suffer *as* he healed, however; he suffered in order *to* heal. That is, suffering is not an accidental component of healing, but it is a part of the function itself. His healing task could not be accomplished without his involvement in that which he was healing, and that meant suffering of profoundest measure. Can we follow him along that road?

We are going up to Jerusalem...Have you the strength to drink the cup I am to drink of? They said, we have. And he told them, You shall indeed drink of my cup.<sup>91</sup>

Part way they went along that road with him, and part way you will go with him, but not all the way. Now we are

penetrating into the deepest mystery of God the Healer—he himself bore our sorrows and our griefs.

One of the most important passages for the understanding of the ministry of Christ the Healer and our own healing ministry is Matthew 8:16–17.

And when evening came, they brought to him many persons who were possessed, and he cast out the evil spirits with his word, and he healed all that were sick, in fulfillment of the word spoken by Isaiah the Prophet: He took our infirmities upon himself and *bore our sicknesses*.

The words “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases” are a direct quotation of Isaiah’s prophecy (53:4): “Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” That Old Testament passage, more literally translated, would read: “Surely, he has borne our pains and carried our afflictions.” The Hebrew terms “pains” (*kholi*) and “afflictions” (*maccōv*) can be used to denote either physical suffering resulting from disease, or in a wider metaphoric sense, to denote the grief that results from calamities. In view of the total context of Isaiah 53 this passage is normally interpreted in the broader sense—the Suffering Servant is bearing the calamitous sorrow of sin.<sup>92</sup> Yet St. Matthew takes the passage in its narrower sense, viz., “He bore our *diseases*.” The intention is clearly to point to our physical sicknesses, for the prophecy is fulfilled by Jesus in the healing of the mother-in-law of St. Peter.

This remarkable shift of emphasis points minimally to the intimacy of the healing of soul and of body, the healing of sin and the healing of the consequences of sin. But certainly this thought has not exhausted the meaning. Two implications are possible. The first is that the Healer bore our physical sicknesses, but only in a manner of speaking; he bore them in the sense of bearing them away, penultimately by healing some of the ailing, ultimately by destroying sin itself. This meaning is preferred by commentators such as H.A.W. Meyer:<sup>93</sup>

But when their ailments are taken away from the disease, the marvellous compassionate one who does this stands forth as he who carries them away, and, as it were, bears the burden lifted from the shoulder of others. The idea is plastic, poetical, and not to be understood as meaning an actual personal feeling of the diseases thus removed.

The second implication reflects the literal sense of the passage, that is, that the Suffering Servant actually bore our sicknesses. In some way in his ministry Jesus felt and bore the

weight and sorrow of our illness, just as he felt and bore the weight and punishment of our sins. The text seems to indicate a real bearing and not a bearing away. To what extent shall we take this possible implication seriously? Healing of any kind, physical or spiritual, is costly. (Who has ever said that it is easy to heal?) Christ the Healer was not a magician. When he takes away sin, he suffers for sin. When he takes away disease, in some way—and I leave with you and your own experience to decide in what way—he suffers that too. He is wounded to heal. He is totally wounded to totally heal. From that suffering there is no escaping: “They offered him a drink of wine, mixed with gall, which he tasted but would not drink.”<sup>94</sup>

As we encourage Christians in parishes to become more involved in healing we are inviting them not to a theology of glory but to a theology of the cross. Those who have the vision of Christ the Healer and would follow his healing path, must participate in and really bear the sorrows of the wounded, even as they proclaim the victory of God. How shall they do this? One way is by sympathy, by suffering with (that is what *sympatheo* means). The other way is by dealing with their own wounds in such a way that they become a resource for others. As to the former, we know how wearing true sympathy can be; to feel with another person involves giving, the expenditure of energy, frequent stress, a participation in suffering. As to the latter, let me share with you the valuable thoughts of Henri Nouwen regarding the wounded healer:<sup>95</sup>

Since it is his task to make visible the first vestiges of liberation for others, he must bind his own wounds carefully in anticipation of the moment when he will be needed. He is called to be the wounded healer, the one who must look after his own wounds, but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others. He is both the wounded minister and the healing minister.

He goes on to suggest that as Jesus made his own broken body the way to health, to liberation and to new life, so must we.

Like Jesus, he who proclaims liberation is called not only to care for his own wounds... but also to make his wounds into a major source of healing power.

Perhaps that is as close as we can come to the Healer in the bearing of the griefs of those we serve, and as Nouwen indicates, the ministries of such healers will be

a witness to the living truth that the wound which causes us to suffer now, will be revealed to us later as the place where God intimated his new creation.

He healed in hope.

The path of the healing Christ goes through suffering to victory. The way of the kingdom is suffering love. The promise of the kingdom is that love conquers in the end. He suffered to heal, but the victory was always in sight for the Healer. Every healing confirmed for the Son of Man that the kingdom is coming. He did not and could not heal all the sick. He was content with partial victories, for he saw a vision too. His vision was the vision of God the Healer and his final victory. He saw a new heaven and a new earth, God's tabernacle pitched among humans, God wiping every tear from their eyes, with no more death or mourning or cries of distress or sorrow, God making all things new.<sup>96</sup> Sustained by the vision the Healer passed through his suffering and claimed the victory. To those who are still on the field of struggle he is the sign of the kingdom, and the signal he gives to us is: "Patience, I am coming soon."

That promise puts his victory in sight for us too. We are healing in the end time. We are healing in the shadow of the final victory. The Healer has taken his power and reigns. The suffering is bearable, our partial victories are sufficient signs, and our hope is alive. Our one overriding concern is to be faithful to him. "Blessed is that servant who is found doing when his Lord comes."<sup>97</sup>

### *5. The Community of Faith and Love*

We are the doers.

Until he comes we represent him and continue his healing ministry in a suffering world. We, the community of faith and love, are his healing body walking through Jerusalem, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world.

Christ's healing body is a community of faith. Faith surrounds the ministry of Christ the Healer. It appears both as a pre-condition and as a consequence of his healing. Sometimes it is the faith of the sick person that is involved. To the blind man he said, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?"<sup>98</sup> Often it was the faith of the family that was the critical factor. To Jairus he declared: "Thou hast only to believe."<sup>99</sup> To

the father of the demon-possessed son the Healer announced, "If thou canst believe, to him who believes everything is possible." Whereupon the father cried aloud, "Lord, I believe, succour thou my unbelief."<sup>100</sup> Sometimes it was a friend or friends who had the faith. Looking up at the bearers of the sick man as they suddenly appeared in the breach of the ceiling, Jesus "seeing their faith" cured the palsied man.<sup>101</sup> To those who shared his work of healing Jesus gave the call to faith:<sup>102</sup>

Why was it that we could not cast it out?... Because you had no faith....There is no way of casting out such spirits as these except by prayer and fasting.

Faith is involved in both the receiving and the giving of healing. That means nothing less than that the community of faith, the Christian congregation, is poised to carry on healing ministry both within the body of believers and at the same time to be a healing body for those around them. As it prepares to follow the Healer on his mission, such a congregation will plead: "Lord, succour our faith!"

His healing body is a community of love. As faith surrounds the ministry of the Healer, selfless love provides its motif and heart. Faith placed in God the Healer works by love. The body of believers is now the loving, healing Christ in the world. The Lord of Healing who "purchased and won us... with his holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death" did so that we might be his own and serve him and his world as he served it. The leader says to his followers: "Continue ye in my love." In so continuing the community of love sees the world as Christ saw it and responds accordingly. Beyond that, it sees Christ himself in the world it serves, and in serving the world therefore serves and loves the Lord himself. When the Healer comes again in his kingdom of glory, he shall say to his community of love:<sup>103</sup>

I was hungry, and you gave me food, thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you brought me home, naked, and you clothed me, sick and you cared for me, a prisoner, and you came to me....When was it that we saw thee sick....And the King will answer them, Believe me, when you did it to one of the least of my brethren here, you did it for me.

Thus we bind up the wounds of the Healer who was wounded for us.

The Christian congregation, the assembly of those called out to follow Jesus Christ, is then a community of faith and

love. A community of faith and love is a healing community. It is a sign of the kingdom of God. How shall the members of the community of faith and love become what they are? How shall such a healing community organize itself to take up the healing task of its Lord with new and creative energy? How can we help? There are certainly many practical things to be done. I am convinced, however, that in the end there is only one possible starting-point for us all, and that is a fresh involvement with Jesus Christ. I have therefore tried to put the vision of Christ the Healer before your eyes. It may not be a comfortable vision. Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it well when he said:<sup>104</sup>

All the activity of the disciples is subject to the clear precepts of their Lord. They are not left free to choose their own methods or adopt their own conception of the task. Their work is to be Christ-work, and therefore they are absolutely dependent on the will of Jesus. Happy are they whose duty is fixed by such precept and who are therefore free from the tyranny of their own ideas and calculations....The proclamation and activity of the messengers are identical with that of Christ himself.

It may not be the comfortable vision, but it is the inspiring one, the one vision that will lift us up and out of our comfortable pews, the only one that will set the church on fire for God. He is both the Pattern and the Power. That is why St. Paul affirmed: "May all the wealth of Christ's inspiration have its shrine among you!"<sup>105</sup>

See him... see him.

See him with his hand outstretched over the doubting and faltering people of God. "Eirene-Shalom-Peace be upon you! Even as the Father sent me, so send I you!" As his final gift of grace to those whom he sends to be the members of the broken world, he who was and is and is to come declares:

I will come to you...He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.<sup>106</sup>

The Healer has not gone. He is with us on the plain. To every healer who heals for him, he says, I love you and I will meet you on the way.

I close in the name of Christ the Healer, and leave you with a strong word and a word of hope.

The strong word is a word from the Lord: "How is it that you call me Master! Master!, and will not do what I bid you?"

And now the words of witness and hope:

"The centurion said, Come down before my child dies!"

"Go back home, thy son is to live."

"And the man began his journey home, putting his trust in the words that Jesus had spoken to him."

## Notes

- 1 Stendahl was speaking at a seminar at Luther College, University of Regina, Regina, SK, March 1, 1979.
- 2 Most of the biblical quotations are taken from the translation of the New Testament by Monsignor Ronald A. Knox (London: Burns & Oates, 1958).
- 3 Former India President V.V. Giri regularly visited the small Kerala village of Kottakkal for treatment at its famed Ayurvaidyasala.
- 4 Mal. 4:2.
- 5 John 1:14.
- 6 Col. 1:19-20.
- 7 Col. 2:9.
- 8 1 Cor. 4:6.
- 9 Col. 3:1.
- 10 1 Cor. 15:24 ff.
- 11 1 Cor. 3:9-11, 23.
- 12 John 4:34.
- 13 John 5:20.
- 14 John 15:8 ff.
- 15 Matt. 5:17.
- 16 John 17:4; 19:30.
- 17 Matt. 5:16.
- 18 Cf. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964) 19 f. The religion of Buddhism, an effort to deal with the problem of suffering, sprang from this encounter.
- 19 Cf. 2 Cor. 5:21.
- 20 Matt. 26:39, 42.
- 21 Mark 10:17.
- 22 Christian healers often wonder why there is not wider recognition of healing in the program of the church. In this area it is well to avoid on the one hand the Scylla of judgmentalism, since in fact many Christians are engaged in healing ministries, in, with and under their daily life. On the other hand, the Charybdis of immobilization also needs avoiding, for we may be so preoccupied with the fact of neglect and its causes that we lose sight of our function. It is true, of course, that very few congregations of the church have engaged themselves with the question of their healing mission, which is a matter of great concern. The church has revealed a tendency to be more alert to one dimension of its task while ignoring others in various periods of its development. In the

Reformation age, for example, Protestant Christians had very little consciousness of the global mission of the church. Some even argued that the apostolic command to go into all the world has been fulfilled! It was not till 1706 that the first Protestant missionary (Ziegenbalg) arrived in India, and it was not until the nineteenth century that we reached "the great century" of mission. It is part of the task of healers—and it will be a continuing one—to minister to the inadequate understanding and implementation of this aspect of God's mission. It should be pointed out that the church has typically been responsive to strong leadership from its midst.

23 Luke 6:18; cf. Matt. 7:29–8:1, 19:1–2.

24 John 9:4.

25 Luke 19:41.

26 Luke 4:18; cf. Isa. 61:1–2.

27 Mark 5:34.

28 Acts 10:36.

29 Eph. 6:15.

30 Matt. 5:9.

31 John 14:27.

32 John 5:20.

33 Mark 1:15.

34 *Theological Wordbook of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1950) 119.

35 Luke 7:22.

36 Matt. 12:28.

37 Matt. 11:20.

38 Matt. 24:14; 28:19; Mark 13:10; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8.

39 1 Cor. 12:9–10. I have therefore chosen not to deal with the difficult and disputed matter of "faith healing" in this essay. That, I believe, has more to do with the continuation of special powers under the charisma of miracle working, rather than having to do with the charisma of healing. I realize that this is a borderline area and that not everyone will find the distinction valid.

40 Matt. 12:15.

41 *God our Contemporary* (New York: Macmillan, 1960) 102.

42 My unabridged Random House Dictionary (1967) lists the term only in connection with a philosophic theory. Dictionaries of the last decade have slightly expanded the meaning.

43 I have dealt with this development in a chapter ("Missions Tomorrow") in my book, *The Sending of God: Essays on the Mission of God and His People* (Calgary: Concord Canada, 1980) 111–134.

44 The directors of the program are Dr. Victoria Mathews and Mr. Tharvan Mathews.

45a Matt. 13:15; John 12:40.

45b Quoted from R. MacGilliwray, "Religious Populism Rises in Sri Lanka," in *Connections*, November/December 1979, 5.



- 46 Gerhard Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 204. Oepke's article on *iaomai* and the article on *therapeuo*, both signifying "to heal", are fundamental sources for this study.
- 47 Ibid. 212.
- 48 John 5:16.
- 49 Matt. 20:32.
- 50 *God's Search for Man* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1955) 369.
- 51 Mark 7:34.
- 52 Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:2, 4.
- 53 Matt. 21:12.
- 54 Matt. 23:23.
- 55 Matt. 8:3.
- 56 Matt. 14:14.
- 57 Matt. 8:7.
- 58 John 11:3, 33-34.
- 59 Matt. 19:2.
- 60 Matt. 20:34.
- 61 Matt. 8:3.
- 62 Matt. 8:4.
- 63 Mark 7:34; 8:22-26.
- 64 Matt. 8:11.
- 65 Mark 7:29.
- 66 Matt. 5:44.
- 67 Matt. 12:16.
- 68 John 6:15.
- 69 Matt. 20:28.
- 70 John 5:17.
- 71 Matt. 12:28.
- 72 Luke 11:20.
- 73 Luke 6:12.
- 74 John 11:41.
- 75 Luke 7:45.
- 76 Matt. 4:36.
- 77 Luke 13:1; John 9:3; 11:4.
- 78 John 1:29.
- 79 Matt. 9:5-6.
- 80 John 17:2.
- 81 Isa. 63:11.
- 82 Matt. 12:29.
- 83 Luke 1:24.
- 84 Luke 10:18.
- 85 Matt. 15:31.
- 86 Matt. 8:34.
- 87 John 7:20.
- 88 John 11:53.

- 89 John 12:27.  
90 Luke 22:51.  
91 Matt. 20:18.  
92 Following 1 Pet. 2:24, which, however, really refers to Isa. 53:12, "Yet he bore the sin of many."  
93 *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, trans. P. Christie, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1877) 256.  
94 Matt. 27:34.  
95 *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Image Books, 1979) 82 ff.  
96 Rev. 22:4-5. While this is St. John's vision, it provides an essential summary of what is intimated in the eschatological passages of the Gospels. Again and again Jesus refers to his "going to the Father." He looks forward to the time when he will drink with us of the fruit of the vine "in the kingdom of my Father" (Matt. 26:29).  
97 Matt. 24:45.  
98 Matt. 9:28; cf. Matt. 15:28.  
99 Matt. 5:36.  
100 Mark 9:23.  
101 Matt. 9:2.  
102 Matt. 17:17 ff.  
103 Matt. 25:35 ff.  
104 *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM Press, 1959) 184 f.  
105 Col. 3:16.  
106 John 14:18, 21.