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Roland E. Miller

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# CHRIST AND HEALING

*Roland E. Miller*

## THE COSMIC CONTEXT

The church needs to get a sense of the grand design of the God of the universe. It must see itself and set its ministry in the cosmic context of the healing God. As Krister Stendahl said:<sup>1</sup> "God's agenda is the mending of creation."

Mending is an expression for God's total movement of creative love towards 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 (John 1:3-4).<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 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

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1. Stendahl was speaking at a seminar at Luther College, University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, March 1, 1979.

2. Most of the Biblical quotations are taken from the translation of the New Testament by Monsignor Roland A. Knox (London: Burns & Oates, 1958).

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" (Mal. 4:2). 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 (John 1:14).

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 (Col. 1:19-20).

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 (Col. 2:9).

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" (I Cor. 4:6). 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 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 (Col. 3:1).

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

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3. Former India President V.V. Giri regularly visited the small Kerala village of Kottakkal for treatment at its famed Ayurvediyasala.

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 (I Cor. 15:24ff).

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 under way 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" (I Cor. 3:9-11, 23).

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 ministry 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 us what it means to heal."

"Come and see!"

## THE NATURAL QUALITY: SPONTANEOUS LOVE

There is a natural quality to 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 unconditional 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" (John 4:34).

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 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. 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" (John 5:20). 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 (John 15:8ff.).

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 (Matt. 5:17). 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 (John 17:4; 19:30).

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

## THE UNNATURAL QUALITY: SENT TO LOVE

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 (Matt. 5:16).

Why is this word needed? The question may be pressed farther with reference to

the Healer Himself. I am struck by Christ's sense of being sent by God. At least twenty-six times in St. John's Gospel alone, He mentions that He has been sent. 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.

The answer to this question is not found 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, the answer is 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>4</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. 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>5</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" (Matt. 26: 39, 42). The Sent One drank the

4. Cf. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 19f. The religion of Buddhism, an effort to deal with the problem of suffering, sprang from this encounter.

5. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:21.

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 (Mark 10:17).

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.

## THE SHALOM OF GOD: THE ASPECT OF WHOLENESS

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>6</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 (23ff.) 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" (Luke 6:18). 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" (John 9:4), He

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6. 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 pre-occupied 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 had been fulfilled! It was not till 1706 that the first Protestant missionary (Ziegenbalg) arrived in India, and it was not until the 19th 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.

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 couldst understand, above all in this day that is given thee, the way that can bring thee peace" (Luke 19:41).

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.

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 (Luke 4:18).

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" (Mark 5:34). 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 sent His word . . . giving them news of peace (*eirene*) through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all" (Acts 10:36), and Paul asks us to be ready "to publish the God of peace (*eirene*)" (Eph. 6:15).

Christ the Healer asks us to do the same. The passage, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt. 5:9), has been almost universally interpreted as an encouragement to disciples to help in solving conflicts. While that significance should not be lost, especially in view of the conflicts in our world today, it does not plumb the depths of this beatitude. "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" (John 14:27), 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, the 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" (John 5:20).

## THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER: HEALING AND THE RULE OF GOD

Jesus Christ declared, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). 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:

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.<sup>7</sup>

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" (Luke 7:22). 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 under way 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" (Matt. 12:28); 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" (Matt. 11:20).

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>8</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>9</sup> The two things do not

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

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

9. I 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 border-line area and that not everyone will find the distinction valid.

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.

# The Good Samaritan Society

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BOX 8190, STATION "F" T6H 5A2  
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