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CHRIST THE HEALER

Roland E. Miller

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.

SEE HIS FOCUS

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” (Matt. 12:15). In discussing the attitude 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.¹

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 ministry 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.² 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 Muller 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. When a rushing stream overflows its banks and spills into a broad, flat valley, it 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.³

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, however, does not follow; neither is it possible. Healing has to do with everything, but that does not imply that it must do everything. The area

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

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

3. I have dealt with this development in a chapter (“Missions Tomorrow”) in a forthcoming volume, *The Sending of God*.

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 Wheatridge 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.⁴ There is a place for that kind of ministry, both as a contribution to the building of health and as a signal of *shalom*. Yet, 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 (*bhudan*, 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 (*saru*) 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:⁵ 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.

We return then to the vision of the Healer, and the specificity 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 (Matt. 13:15; John 12:40). Elsewhere and everywhere it is severely focussed on the overcoming of disease. Albrecht Oepke puts it in blunt words: "Physical healings dominate the field of vision."⁶ For the

4. The directors of the program are Dr. Victoria Mathews and Mr. Tharyan Mathews.

5. Quoted from R. MacGillivray, "Religious Populism Rises in Sri Lanka," in *Connections* (Nov./Dec., 1979), p. 5.

6. Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. III (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 204. Oepke's article on *iaomai* and the article on *therapeuo*, both signifying "to heal," are fundamental sources for this study.

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."⁷

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.

SEE HIS ATTITUDE

He was alert, He looked for the sick, and He noticed them. As He passed the pool of Bethesda "Jesus saw him (a disabled man) lying there" (John 5:16). He didn't have to see him, but He did.

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, 16 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" (Matt. 20:32).

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.⁸ Our horror is covered by celluloid. We have seen too much, so what we see no longer moves us. When they brought the deaf and dumb man to Jesus in Decapolis, "he looked up and sighed" (Mark 7:34). But the

7. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

8. *God's Search For Man* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1955), p. 369.

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 (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:2,4). Jesus groaned.

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" (Matt. 21:12). 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" (Matt. 23:23). He almost flaunted His sabbath healings in the face of the Pharisees to awaken them to the priorities of the kingdom of God.

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" (Matt. 8:3). 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" (Matt. 14:14). Love is determined to help: "I will come and heal him (the centurion's servant)" (Matt. 8:7). 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" (John 11:3, 33-34). There is hope in the universe. The sick are loved, and God weeps for man.

At times one almost gets a sense of mass healings. "Great multitudes went with them, and He healed them" (Matt. 19:2). 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" (Matt. 20:34). 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."

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 (Matt. 8:4). Christ the Healer was within His situation. It is in that sense too that we must interpret the combination of physical touching and saliva (Mark 7:34; 8:22-26).

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" (Matt. 8:11). He made the same point when He cast out the unclean spirit from the daughter of the Gentile woman: "Go home content" (Mark 7:29). 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" (Matt. 4:44).

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" (Matt. 12:46). 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" (John 6:15). 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" (Matt. 20:28).

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" (John 5:17).

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

SEE HIS POWER

It is time to look directly at His power. You have witnessed the power of the Healer and believe it. Yet see it again at this time as you plan your onslaught against evil. See His authority that He shared with you along with His struggle.

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" (Matt. 12:28). 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" (Luke 11:20). Spirit and power go hand in hand for the Healer and for His followers.

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" (Luke 6:12). 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" (Luke 11:41).

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.

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. 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." There is breathless awe in the report: "Everyone who touched him was restored to health" (Matt. 4:36).

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 (Luke 13:1; John 9:3; 11:4), 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" (John 1:29). 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 . . . (Matt. 9:4-6).

Some who are engaged in healing ministries may at times have felt 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. 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:

Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee, since thou has given him power over all mankind, to give eternal life to all whom thou has given him (John 17:2).

In Him God as it were "travelled in His strength . . . mighty to save," (Is. 63:11) and Christian healers join with all believers in the paean 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 (Matt. 12:29). God's reign is declared, and the axe is laid to the root of evil's power. Evil recognizes that 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 are, the Holy One of God . . .

Silence! Jesus said, Come out of him! (Mark 1:24)

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!" (Luke 10:18). 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 prepared 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.

SEE HIS SUFFERING

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.

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" (Matt. 15:31). 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" (Matt. 8:34). He was an activist healer, and that leads to danger. The power struc-

tures 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 (John 7:20). It was after He raised Lazarus from the dead that it is reported: "From that day forward, they plotted his death" (John 11:53). 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" (John 12:27).

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" (Luke 22:51). 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?

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 (Matt. 20:18).

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." The 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" (*maccov*) 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.⁹ Yet St. Matthew takes the passage in its narrower sense, viz., "He bore our

9. Following 1 Pet. 2:24, which, however, really refers to Is. 53:12. "Yet he bore the sin of many."

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:

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.¹⁰

The second implication reflects the literal sense of the passage, that is, that the Suffering Servant actually bore out 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” (Matt. 27:34).

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 *sym patheo* 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:

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.¹¹

He goes on to suggest that as Jesus made His own broken body the way to health.

10. *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, tr. by P. Christie, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1877), P. 256.

11. *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Image Books, 1979), pp. 82ff.

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.

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.¹² Sustained by the vision of 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" (Matt. 24:45).

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?" (Matt. 9:28). Often it was the faith of the family that was the critical factor. To Jairus He declared: "Thou has only to believe" (Matt. 5:36). 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" (Mark 9:23). 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,

12. 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).

Jesus "seeing their faith" cured the palsied man (Matt. 9:2). To those who shared His work of healing Jesus gave the call to faith:

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 (Matt. 17:17ff.).

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 prepared 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:

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 (Matt. 25:35ff.).

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. In the end, however, 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:

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.¹³

It may not be the comfortable vision, but it is the inspiring one, the one vision that

13. *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM Press, 1959), pp. 184f.

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!" (Col. 3:16).

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 (John 14:18, 21).

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 word 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."