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# The Hygienics of the Soul: Health and wholeness in the Church's Life and Practice

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... For a long time my friend suffered from a high fever and lay unconscious in a sweat that looked like death. When they despaired of his recovery, he was baptized. He knew nothing of this himself, and I paid little attention to the fact of his baptism. I assumed that his soul would retain what it had learned from me and would not be affected by something done to his body while he was unconscious. But it turned out very differently. For he got better and came back to life again, and, as soon as I could speak to him—which was as soon as he could speak to me, since I never left his side and indeed we depended too much on each other—I began to make jokes with him, assuming that he would join in, about the baptism which he had received when he could neither feel nor know what was being done, and yet had now been told that he had received it. But he shrunk back from me as though I were an enemy. With a sudden confident authority which took me aback he told me that, if I wanted to be a friend of his, I must give up talking to him in this way. I was astonished and amazed, and I put off telling him what was in my mind until he should get well again and should be strong enough in health for me to be able to discuss things with him as I wished. But he was taken beyond the reach of my folly, so that with you [God] he might be kept safe for my comfort. A few days later, when I was not there, his fever returned and he died.<sup>1</sup>

This incident which Saint Augustine relates about his pre-Christian life serves as a point of reference in presenting the tensions between Christianity and conceptions of wholeness and healing. Already on the surface we note how Christian baptism became a measure of last resort. The cure, while miraculous, was not reasonable, and so, when Augustine's friend could be fully restored to his senses, the non-sense of baptism could be more closely and reflectively examined. And finally, the outcome with or without the Christian treatment

is the same—the patient dies. But now, as the Christian Augustine who writes this “confession” notes, the point of view regarding death is not the same. Because of his friend’s baptism and his friend’s faith in the promises of God, Augustine does not see the tragedy of his friend’s death as ending in terror, dread, and hopelessness, but in certainty and comfort concerning the well-being of his friend and the graciousness of God.

However, at this point, the problematic is not resolved, but the questions have just begun. In examining the issue of wholeness and health in the church’s life and practice, I will not present a historical telling of what Christians and the Christian church have been doing for the past two thousand years. Rather, I would like to raise some of the questions that the issues of wholeness and health have presented to Christians throughout the ages, and in our time as well, in order to help us more clearly engage in Christian proclamation, service, vocation, and community.

### **The Problematics of Separation and Identification**

Salvation is from the Latin word *salvus* which means healing. In this respect, one can say that whenever Christians speak of salvation they are, therefore, speaking of healing, health and wholeness. But of what kind? What is the healing the pre-Christian Augustine saw in his friend’s baptism? What is the healing the Christian Augustine saw in his friend’s baptism? What is the healing the Christian Augustine saw in himself as he reflected upon this incident some twenty-five years later?

The understanding of salvation as healing gains greater perplexity when it is combined with the Greek philosophical tradition of seeing the human being as composed of two distinct elements, a body and a soul. While both soul and body, together, make up the human being, yet the practices and conduct with which we now approach this “embodied soul” often have split the human into these two respective parts. Thus while the art of medicine and the reflective practice of psychology tend to the concerns of the body and the mind, theology and philosophy care for the soul. Christianity, as it spreads to the gentile world and becomes more and more a gentile religion, adopts and adapts this Greek philosophy. In this way,

the good news of the Christian message was that it "heals the soul". The Christian focus is on the soul, not the body; the concern for the soul makes the Christian message otherworldly, not concerned with this world; proclamation in order to win souls is seen as the Christian mission, not service for the health of the body and justice within the body politic. The tradition within much of Christianity has been to separate the concerns of wholeness and healing from the main topic of soul-winning. Indeed, the body, whether individual or corporate, person or society, is to be ignored or even mortified as much as possible. An active, vigorous, faith-filled soul must have a docile body, a body which submits and obeys. If such is not the case, then, the soul is imprisoned by the body.

While this separation of body and soul within much of Christianity has led to popular pieties which see the practices of health and justice as secondary to the spiritual concerns of the Christian, trends within the last one hundred years have tried to overcome this dualism and separation by identifying issues of wholeness and healing as the same as the Christian Gospel. Known within North America as the "Social Gospel Movement" this approach to Christianity understands that the actions of Christians with regard to the problems of poverty, injustice, health care, hunger, oppression, and the quality of life are the full and total expression of the Gospel. Passages such as Matthew 25:31-46 and James 2 are seen as the full embodiment of the Gospel. It is interesting to note the way James 2 concludes: "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:26). Here again the relationship between body and soul is seen as determinative of the practices that are appropriate for the Christian expression of the Gospel.

Furthermore, within both interpretations of Christianity, either as separating Christian salvation from wholeness, healing, and justice or as identifying Christian salvation as wholeness, healing, and justice, is the question as to whether or not the purpose of the Christian Gospel is that of curing or caring for individual bodies and souls, as well as the church and society. Curing is established within a framework of conquest and victory. The enemies of sin, sickness, and death must be conquered and destroyed. The person is basically the medium in which these enemies have now decided to dwell, but the strategy which the physician, therapist, or pastor employs is how



to defeat and thwart the enemy, the person is secondary. More will be said about this later when the whole institutionalization of curing is discussed. Caring does not follow the same goals and procedures as curing. Caring focuses not on the enemies which have captured or enslaved a person's body or soul, rather caring is concerned about being-with a person during these particular ordeals, trials, and times of suffering. Caring highlights empathy, friendship, and service. Caring is to comfort and encourage the person regardless of how the battle against the enemy is proceeding. Within the history of Christianity curing and caring were often housed together. The church, and particularly certain religious orders, established hospitals and sanatoriums for the cure and care of the sick and the insane. However, with the rise of modern science, modern medicine, and the modern secular worldview in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a much more rigid distinction between the function of curing and caring occurred. Curing was left to medicine and the sciences while caring became the responsibility of the church. Moreover, caring becomes necessary only after all the means by which curing could happen have been exhausted. This division of labor also helped to reinforce the distinction or split within the person between body and soul. One cures the body and cares for the soul. And indeed, if the cure for the body cannot be found, then all that remains is to comfort those battle weary veterans who have lost the war against the enemies of sickness and death. This is the care of the soul.

Most of us recognize, I am sure, that the separation of body and soul, of curing and caring, salvation as health and justice and salvation as reconciliation of relationship with God is an improper separation. So too, most of us recognize that to identify body and soul, curing and caring and so on as all naming the exact same item is an improper identification. Yet, as I have briefly tried to indicate in this short reflective overview, the practices within the church and in society have most often been in terms of either separation or identification. For the remainder of this article I will look at the distinctive tension Christianity has tried to maintain in its understanding of salvation such that the Christian life and conduct are not separated into Christian and other areas of concern nor all identified as exactly the same. The questions that arise out of this reflection provide us with some insights into how the Gospel provides

wholeness and healing, centered in Jesus the Christ, which encompasses the whole horizon of the human condition under the steadfast love of God.

### Shalom and Wholeness

One of the significant biblical concepts that is part of the Christian understanding of wholeness is the term "Shalom". This Hebrew word is usually translated as "peace", but this is far too constrictive an understanding. Shalom in the Hebrew scriptures incorporates the whole sense of the goodness and blessing of creation as depicted in Genesis 1 and 2. Shalom is most aptly understood as "well-being". Thus one's prosperity, good fortune, bodily health, and a dignified death are all part of shalom.<sup>2</sup> Shalom designates this relationship of well-being or wholeness; a relationship grounded in the God who creates and who in creative goodness has established a "covenant of shalom" with the people of Israel. Ezekiel 34:25-31 vividly portrays the relationship of shalom. Under God's "covenant of peace", security, rain, the fruitfulness of trees and land, deliverance from servitude, absence of fear, prosperity, an end to hunger, and no more national humiliation are all part of shalom. This "covenant of peace" culminates with this promise, "And they shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, says the Lord God" (Ezekiel 34:30).

In the light of this "covenant of peace" we can see how the entire activity of creation and deliverance is the concrete practice of God's shalom. For example, the creation of the human in Genesis 2:7 is a relationship of shalom: "[T]hen the Lord God formed the human of the dust from the humus and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life; and the human became a living being." The human from humus, the form from formlessness, the animate being from inanimate being, all these characteristics describe shalom, a coherence, a well-being brought about by God who provides wholeness but does not deny distinctiveness. Creation as an act of ordering, distinguishes but does not merely separate or identify. Thus shalom is associated with God's righteousness and God's steadfast love. It is a social concept which concerns the individual, the nation of Israel, all the nations of the earth, the earth itself, and the whole created cosmos. "When we consider the rich

possibilities of 'shalom' in the OT", comments Old Testament scholar, Gerhard von Rad, "we are struck by the negative fact that there is no specific text in which it denotes the specific spiritual attitude of inward peace."<sup>3</sup>

The New Testament as well understands "peace" as shalom, not only, or merely, as inner spiritual contentment and/or as a psychologized understanding of the absence of either internal or external conflict. Luke presents this more comprehensive message of peace as shalom on both the occasions of Christ's birth and passion. In Luke 2:14 the angels proclaim, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people with whom God is pleased"; and in Luke 19:38 during Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, the disciples shout, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" The person and work of Jesus are seen as God's concrete shalom in Ephesians 2:14-19:

For he [Christ] is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...

Thus peace is understood in this passage in at least three dimensions. Peace designates the salvific work of Christ in reconciling us to God. Secondly, peace as the salvific activity of Christ abolishes separations between Jewish and Gentile Christians because, third, Christ has creatively embodied a new peace that provides a relationship of access to God and to one another. The full implications of this peace which is ours in Christ through the "God of peace" (Hebrews 13:20, Romans 16:20) are seen in Romans 8. There Paul notes that "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6). It is important to remember that in this passage "flesh" and "Spirit" are not two elements which make up the human being, rather they are the two relationships toward God in which humans participate. The relationship of "flesh" is the way of sin and therefore of



death. The relationship of "Spirit" is the way of faith and therefore of life and peace. This way of peace, which is now already ours in Christ (Romans 8:14-16), will be brought by God to full and total fruition in creation at the end of the ages (Romans 8:22-23). Thus wholeness and healing as a part of God's salvation and peace in Christ, grounded in Christ's death and resurrection, are evidenced in concrete practices and conduct which flow from the steadfast love of God incarnate in Christ, but are not to be separated from nor identified with the special work of God in Christ.

### Salvation and Health

The establishment of this relationship between wholeness, peace, well-being, and salvation is brought into its closest proximity in some of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' activity and pronouncements. Of particular interest is the phrase "your faith has saved you" or "your faith has made you well". This Greek term, *sōzō*, can be translated as "to save" or "to heal" or "to deliver".<sup>4</sup> Two incidents recorded in the Gospels will serve as illustrations. Mark 5:25-34 recounts the healing of the woman who had suffered from an unending menstrual flow for twelve years. She reaches out to Jesus in desperation. Her constant hemorrhaging means that Jewish cultic practices find her unclean and she is not permitted to participate in public worship. The constant procurement of medical treatment has left her economically destitute. In this situation of being both without care and without cure her last resort is Jesus who might supply one or the other or both. Jesus' final word to her is a blessing, "Daughter, your faith has made you well (has saved you); go in peace, and be healed of your disease" (Mark 5:34). Note the interplay of the three concepts in this statement by Jesus—salvation, peace, healing. Each of these terms has its own particular role, yet each is interrelated to the other. Salvation speaks of the deliverance and transformation that has taken place in her situation. No longer will she be an "unclean" woman in society. No longer will she be prevented from worshipping and excluded from the community which should have been the primary care-giver. No longer will she be the docile body of medical practices and financially draining procedures. Salvation restores her to wholeness. This wholeness is what



the term peace, well-being, represents. Peace as shalom indicates the full relationship with God, with community, and with herself which has been restored. It is well-being in its fullest social, material, and spiritual senses. Healing designates the specificity of curing. The disease was debilitating, only a cure could provide a reversal of this physical and social situation.

A second illustration of salvation does not involve the healing of a physical disease but concentrates more directly on a social "illness". Luke 7:36-50 recounts the story of an anonymous "woman of the city" who is only described as "a sinner" (Luke 7:37), and who washes Jesus' feet with her tears, wipes them with her hair, and anoints them with ointment. While all the others reproach both her and Jesus for this shocking show of impropriety, Jesus announces to her the forgiveness of sins, and pronounces this blessing upon her, "Your faith has saved you (made you well); go in peace" (Luke 7:50). There are many parallels between this incident and the woman with the hemorrhage. First, both are women, which in the culture of that time means inferiority, domination, and an understanding that puts them closer to the status of property than to that of human being. Second, the situation of both has placed them in a context in which they are excluded from the community which is the major provider of care. The benefits and support of the social and religious institutions cannot be had by them. They are outcasts. Third, desperation leads them to Jesus for a cure. In the former situation it is an incurable disease, in this latter case, it is the incurable and vicious circle of prostitution. Both are victims of a society which has branded them and which perpetuates certain modes of incurable diseases. I do not wish to allegorize either the illness of the first woman or the social practices of the second woman, but I do want to note how in both situations Jesus' response is in terms of salvation and peace although the difference between a bodily ill and a social ill is not to be minimized. In this second illustration it is Jesus' act of forgiveness that is the act of healing. No longer will this woman be the docile body for the sexual desire of others. Salvation as forgiveness restores her to wholeness; this too is again represented by the final benediction of peace. But unlike the first instance, this woman's restoration to wholeness meets resistance by others within the community. In this way salvation, peace, wholeness, and healing as imparted by Jesus

also manifests the fragmentation and need for healing in others. Jesus' treatment of this individual's ailment is a diagnosis of a deeper and more widespread disease within the social body. A malady whose structure has received approval as the status quo brings not only anger and resentment against this woman, but also against Jesus, for as the agent of healing, he is also the agent of change. In this way, salvation as wholeness and healing in transforming a situation into a biblical view of shalom contradicts and contravenes the usual expectations about peace as the absence of conflict and the establishing of order. Thus the very moment and act of salvation are also the moment and act of judgment. While she is whole, the sickness within the religious community and society remains "incurable".

Now, while these two accounts concerning Jesus' ministry show the integration of service and proclamation, curing and caring, and the physical, social, and spiritual components of salvation, the problematics of maintaining this integrated understanding of salvation within the life and practice of the church are already evident from the very beginnings of the church. Acts 6:1-4 reports:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty [need]. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Note that the concern which arises is a practical concern based in the inequity perceived among ethnic groups: the Hellenists are claiming neglect by the Hebrews. Note also the resolution of the concern along the lines of ethnic and authoritarian power. Key in this decision by the twelve is that their ministry is one of prayer and proclamation. But why have the twelve, the leaders, chosen this over the service of care to the widows? Jesus within the Gospels emphasizes service as the Christian understanding of leadership; his washing of the disciples' feet is a vivid lesson (John 13:1-20). Yet as the followers of Jesus begin to organize themselves, begin to demarcate their mission, they see proclamation as the initial and primary way of spreading the Good News and gaining converts. Teaching

increases while emphasis on healing declines. The anointing of the sick (James 5:14) does not become a prominent rite within the church, while baptism not only is an enactment of God's salvific activity, it becomes the church's action associated with healing—the healing of the “sin-sick-soul”.

## The Logic of Sin and Salvation as Spiritualized Medical Metaphors

We again return to Saint Augustine, the crucial theologian of Latin Christianity since the Apostle Paul and for the tradition of Christianity in the West. Speaking of why he was not baptized as an infant Augustine notes a particular practice of the times, “[M]y cleansing [baptism] was deferred, the argument being that, if I went on living, I should become still more defiled, because the guilt incurred in the filth of sin would be greater and more perilous after that washing than before.”<sup>5</sup> Note the metaphor and the appeal to health Augustine uses in countering what he considers to be a very poor theological practice:

Was it for my own good that I was given, as it were, more free rein to sin?... How is it that even now one is constantly and everywhere hearing it said of one person or another: “Leave him alone; let him do as he likes; he is not baptized yet”? But when it is a question of physical health, we do not say: “Let him have a few more wounds: he is not well yet.” How much better, therefore, would it have been, if I had been made well at once and then, by my own care and that of my friends, had managed to bring it about that the recovered health of my soul had been preserved in your [God's] keeping, who gave it to me!<sup>6</sup>

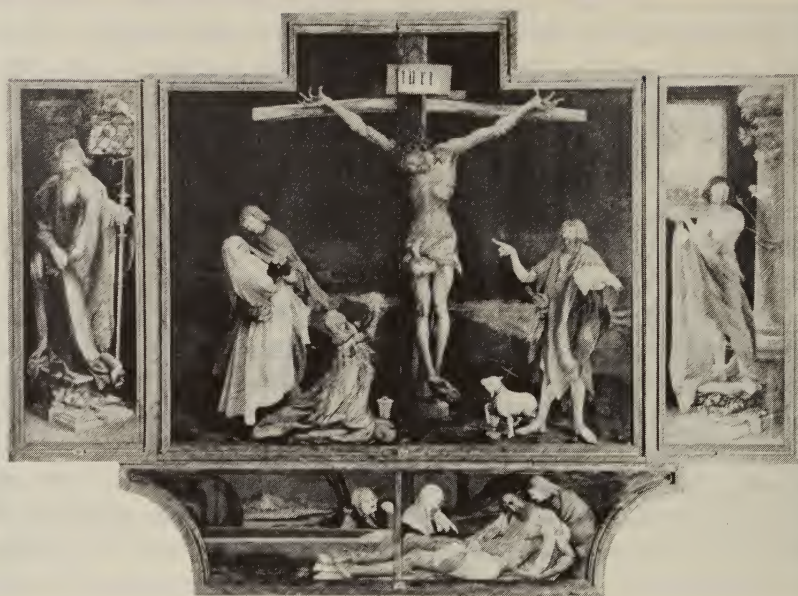
With Augustine the metaphors of health and healing, sickness and cure are fully systematized and placed with the concerns of the soul and the spiritual. Even care is primarily care for one's soul, the body becomes incidental. Sin is the great sickness, grace given to us by God through Christ the healing cure. Peace is not the well-being of shalom which had previously been indicated in the scriptures. Peace is now “reduced” to an inward state, a condition which one is to seek and maintain for the sake of the soul. This does not mean that love and care for others is to be completely neglected or ignored, for not to love the other is the symptom of a sick soul. What is important to note is the hierarchy of value which this logic of the



health of the soul places on the practices of wholeness, healing, and justice. All external affairs serve only as signs which image and mirror the inner health and vitality of our soul. Thus we have a very introspective view of all of our relationships, of history and society, of the cosmos itself. Wholeness is regulated by our assessment of the health of our souls. As Augustine succinctly states in one of his major theological treatises, "... by grace the healing of the soul from the disease of sin, by the health of the soul freedom of will, by free will the love of righteousness, by love of righteousness the accomplishment of the law."<sup>7</sup>

The practices that follow from this theology take a subjective, individual, and psychological course. A great deal of time and effort must be spent in reflection upon the intentions and motivations of each and every action. The disposition of one's will is seen as the indicator of one's "health" before God and before others. Guilt becomes the primary by-product of this intensive soul-searching. It is at this time and particularly following Augustine's theology that the practices of private confession and absolution and the doing of penance became popular and institutionalized within the church. Indeed the church is seen as the divine pharmacy, for as the dispenser of grace, it alone has the medicine to cure the sickness of the soul, the disease of sin. The sacraments as well take on these medicinal metaphors. Baptism is the washing, anointing, cleansing of the soul just as one treats a wound. "You [God] set me in front of my own face so that I could see how foul a sight I was... filthy, spotted and ulcerous."<sup>8</sup> This is Augustine's analysis of his own soul while he is taking instruction in the Christian faith prior to his baptism. The Lord's Supper, too, is filled with the imagery of life giving medicinal and curative food. In sum, one might say that wholeness and healing within the church's life and practice had now developed into a "hygienics of the soul". Today, we are still very much influenced and affected by this past theology and practice. This "hygienics" has much to say about what we preach, why we preach, the way we understand our evangelism, stewardship, and mission programs, and the suspicion that others who are not Christian have of us when we want to provide care for them or work with them in providing care for others.





*Matthias Grunewald's Isenheim altarpiece.*

## The Hygienics of the Soul and the Care of the Body

But what of the care of the body? Has the "hygienics of the soul" meant the collapse of all concern for the sick, the dying, the poor, the widows and orphans? Not at all, but the practices take on a very distinctive character within this theology. Brevity dictates that I look at only one illustration to indicate wholeness and healing within this theological framework. My reflections will be based upon the Isenheim altarpiece which was commissioned by the Antonite community, a religious order which established hospitals and was devoted to the care of the sick. The monastery church in the hospital at Isenheim was where this altarpiece was originally located and the panels on the altarpiece were painted by Matthias Grünewald between 1508 and 1516. My analysis will be of the closed position of the altarpiece which has as the centerpiece panel "The Crucifixion", is flanked on the left with "Saint Sebastian", on the right with "Saint Anthony", and has as the predella "The Lamentation" (see illustration). What does this piece of religious art and of Christian worship in a monastic, hospital context tell us about the Church's understanding of wholeness and healing at this time?

First, "Saint Sebastian". As is evident from the painting, Sebastian was martyred by bow and arrows. Theologically this was linked to Job 6:4, "For the arrows of the Almighty are in me; my spirit drinks their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me." Thus sickness is understood as the unleashing of arrows of affliction by God upon humanity as an indication of their sin. However, in the case of Sebastian, he survived the first attempt to kill him with arrows, indicating his righteousness before God. Indeed, these were not the arrows of *God's* infliction, but of human sin against God and God's martyr (witness). Thus within the medieval hagiographic tradition Sebastian is invested with the power to protect against the plague. "Let us be released from this epidemic's pestilence and from every tribulation of the flesh and the spirit!", reads a petition from a prayer to Saint Sebastian formulated around 1516.<sup>9</sup> Within popular piety of the times Saint Sebastian came to be associated with the repelling and warding off of general bodily harm and of sudden, devastating, and epidemic disease.<sup>10</sup>

Saint Anthony, patron saint of this religious order, was said to have been as sorely tempted as Job when he went out into the wilderness to fast and pray and be close to God. Indeed, the temptation was said to be worse, for Anthony, who was acclaimed by many as the founder of monasticism, was Satan's target in order to prevent his vision of monasticism from ever becoming a reality. The pestilence with which Satan plagued him was later called "St. Anthony's Fire". It was a terrible disease whose symptoms included intestinal dysentery and bleeding, a distended stomach, profuse black boils which often burst and developed gangrene, and convulsions. (Later the disease was discovered to be caused by a fungus which infests rye and makes the grain and flour poisonous for consumption.)<sup>11</sup> As with Sebastian, since Anthony's disease was not caused by God, but by Satan, and because of Anthony's faithfulness to God, he was endowed with special curative powers.

Flanked by Saints Sebastian and Anthony, representatives of dire illness and miraculous cures, our focus is on the central panel, Grünewald's famous depiction of the crucifixion. Here is death in its imminence. ("The Lamentation" in the predella shows the body in the state of death.) Jesus with extended arms and distended fingers is both a grotesque and inviting figure. In a community of pain and suffering this figure of Jesus intensifies the understanding of the human as a sinner in that disease was often considered a manifestation of punishment for sin. But Christ on the cross also means redemption. The pointing finger of John the Baptist does not let one turn away. We *must* look; we *must* come face to face with our sin and with Christ's magnanimous act of redemption. Here is the true medicine, for here is the true physician. Here again we can recall some of Augustine's words on the curative power of the crucified Christ: "But he bore with his revilers, because he accepted the cross not as a test of power but as an example of patience. There he healed your wounds where he long bore his own. There he healed you of an eternal death where he deigned to die a temporal death."<sup>12</sup>

Because this panel is part of an altarpiece, the connection between Christ the healer and the medicine of the sacraments is profound. Not only does the lamb and chalice suggest the Eucharist, but the figure of John the Baptist and behind him in the middle distance a body of water suggest baptism. Indeed,



water and wine are both purifying and rejuvenating agents. The healing nature of both is signified for both body and soul, although again the soul is the primary focus. Thus within this hospital context of illness and death there is also comfort and hope. Not only is there the certainty that Christ's death has healed the soul, but Sebastian and Anthony witness to the possibility of divine intervention in the healing process for this life as well. This entire altarpiece is a message of promise—the promise of perhaps good health, but certainly the promise of a place with Christ beyond the confines of this world and this sin-ridden, diseased body. These panels draw us and call us to participate in the life of the church which is the body of Christ, the living Christ. This participation in the church's life is what will give us life, for it gives us life with God. If nothing else, we must learn like Job and Sebastian and Anthony, and indeed as salvifically exemplified by Christ himself, to bear our sufferings faithfully and with patience. In so doing we will find peace, for to bear these infirmities with patience testifies to the health of our soul. The words of John the Baptist are the prescription that all must recognize in order to be healed: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

The practice of the church, therefore, did not disregard wholeness and healing, but the "hygienics of the soul" mandated that the care of the soul be the first and foremost concern even within a hospital context. While one could hope and pray for the cure of the body, the cure of the soul and its health was not to be neglected. Disease could either be God's punishment for sin or God's testing of one through the wiles of Satan. In either case, one should not be foolish, faint-hearted, or faithless. Disease too can be the measure of the soul's health. To be patient, faithful, and actively participating in the life of the church would signify and assure one that one's salvation, wholeness, and health before God are sure. Thus the responsibility of the church is to establish centers where the sick too can go to participate in the care of their souls. The fear surrounding the contagion of disease meant that the diseased and infirm were often isolated and excluded from kin and community. It was the church, then, which exercised compassion through the establishment of hospitals, sanatoriums, orphanages, and so on. However, we must always keep in mind that these practices were for the well-being of the soul and its eternal destiny. In



this way to neglect to treat the body could jeopardize the care and health of the soul. This the church could not do, for to do so would be to go against the command of Christ and the church's very reason for being.

### Justification By Faith, Being Well, and Well-Being

With the Reformation in Germany in the sixteenth century, and particularly with Martin Luther, comes a new view regarding wholeness and the wholeness of the person. The reason for this is the primary focus of the Reformation—justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake. Why would such a high-sounding theological concern constitute church practices regarding wholeness and healing? Luther and many of the other reformers contend that the practices within the church that had been implemented for the care of the soul no longer do so. Thus the sale of indulgences or the doing of penance in order to show true contrition so that God will forgive sin as God has promised places conditions upon grace and "obscure[s] the glory and the blessings of Christ, and... rob[s] pious consciences of the consolation offered them in Christ."<sup>13</sup> In other words, the practices of the church were no longer "healing the soul" but, rather, causing situations wherein "terrified consciences waver and doubt and they seek to pile up other works to find peace."<sup>14</sup> Therefore the theological emphasis on justification by faith and the forgiveness of sin is very much a pastoral concern which is foundational for the issue of wholeness and healing in the church's life and practice.

At the same time we can see how Luther, for example, is firmly within the tradition of the church as established by Augustine. Metaphors of health, healing, and medicine are still applied to the sacramental practices of the church, but the body, while distinct, is not abrogated as it has been in the past. Luther remarks concerning the Lord's Supper, "We must never regard the sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but as a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in both soul and body. *For where the soul is healed, the body has benefitted also*" (emphasis added).<sup>15</sup> Luther scholar, Heinrich Bornkamm, has noted:

This insight of Luther into the wholeness of man was also a psychological discovery of the highest importance over against the ancient

attempts to divide man into body and soul or body, mind and soul. The self is always inseparably one, but the self can also be set in rebellion, in rebellion against itself...[God] no longer regards the past, he cancels it out as we are never allowed to do, he forgives it all. To believe this, to let this light of the gospel into our hearts—this is the beginning of the new life. Then the gifts which God has furnished us take on new meaning and power....In [God's] gracious eyes, which look at us in the face of Christ, we are again what he wanted to make of us: a new creature Adam as God thought of him.<sup>16</sup>

What is noteworthy here in Luther is that he has retrieved the biblical understandings of shalom and salvation and sees them as integrally the same activity of the same God in both redemption and creation, for indeed to be redeemed is to be created anew by God. Through Christ and in our baptism not merely has the old, rebellious, sinful self been cleaned up a bit, but it has been put to death, and God has created us anew. "... [T]he power and effect of Baptism... is simply the slaying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new man, both of which actions must continue in us our whole life long. Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily Baptism, once begun and ever continued."<sup>17</sup> Here there is no split in the person; here the distinction is between the relationship with God in terms of sin and the relationship with God in terms of faith—"flesh" and "Spirit", respectively, as Paul had described it in Romans 8:6.

Thus living in faith under the promises of God in Christ we can see all of creation from this perspective. Indeed, creation is not a one time occurrence of the past—"back then"—but it is a wholistic understanding of what God is doing for me, now, in the present time, in my body, and in the midst of society and nature. "I hold and believe that I am a creature of God," Luther confesses, "that is, that he has given and constantly sustains my body, soul and life..."<sup>18</sup> With this understanding of creation, wholeness, health, and justice cannot be overlooked, nor seen as secondary.

Moreover, [God] gives all physical and temporal blessings—good government, peace, security. Thus we learn from this article that none of us has his life of himself, or anything else that has been mentioned here or can be mentioned, nor can he by himself preserve any of them, however small and unimportant. All this is comprehended in the word "Creator."<sup>19</sup>

The implications, then, for this understanding of creation as well-being are based upon an understanding of "being well". Well-being, wholeness, is a gift that occurs to any creature who, with obedience in praise and thanks, serves and acknowledges a loving Creator. But this well-being can only be lived by one who has been "made-well", who is in the relationship of "being well". In this way well-being or being created is intimately connected with being saved, our relationship of "being well". Luther's last sentence on creation reaches its conclusion with this observation: "For here we see how the Father has given himself to us, with all his creatures, has abundantly provided for us in this life, and, further, has showered us with inexpressible eternal treasures through his Son and the Holy Spirit...."<sup>20</sup>

### **Faithful Living As Free For...**

This understanding of wholeness, health, and justice, while it overcomes the separation between salvation from God as eternal life and this world as tangential to that concern and while it does not engage in identifying the forgiveness of sin as the same thing as justice or health, does have its own particular ambiguities. In particular, what within this understanding of the wholeness of creation is to be acknowledged as God's good creation? This historical, personal, dynamic, and relational sense of creation does not seem to provide clear answers for establishing clear practices. What counts as "good government", for example? Monarchies? Democracy? Communism? Did God create any of them or all of them? Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer poses for many Christians an irresolvable dilemma as to whether or not his participation in a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler was the God-pleasing action of a saint or the rebellious and traitorous conduct of a sinner. The issues which confront us today are no easier. What is the Gospel-centered, new life conduct of a baptized Christian concerning abortion, homosexuality, nuclear energy, or revolutions of liberation and justice in many nations of the Third World? Most frustrating is, why are my ethical activities as a Christian walking in the new life no different from many old life, rebellious sinners? Does the Gospel make a difference?

The Lutheran "answer" to these questions does not provide rules and regulations within which one can deduce definitive



answers, but it does delineate the context in which all our discernments about these questions can take place. "No one except God alone can separate the corruption of our nature from the nature itself. This will take place wholly by way of death in the resurrection. Then the nature which we now bear will arise and live forever, without original sin and completely separated and removed from it..."<sup>21</sup> What follows from this is that Christians should not immediately become defensive regarding the questions in the previous paragraph. The above quotation recalls Jesus' words to the two women, "Your faith has saved you/made you well." Our well-being is in terms of our "being well" and our "being well" is in terms of God's gift of faith. To want the distinctively, uniquely Christian practice or to impose one particular approach as *the* Christian practice is again to live under regulation, exclusion, a law- and rule-governed existence which has no reason or room for faith. This is the rebellious relationship of sin. What was lost in our relationship of sin, in the Fall, is faith—faith in God and God's creation. To be saved, to be healed, to be renewed for peace and wholeness is to have received faith back again as God's gift. In this way we are given our selves again—our new selves as a good creation.

What this understanding of salvation as faith recognizes is that the tension between the life of faith and the life of sin cannot be resolved by some absolute prescription or by a relativist description. What Luther said concerning baptism becomes paradigmatic for Christian life and conduct. To die and to be raised to newness of life, by faith, in baptism, is to die to all escapism into a regulative ideal for wholeness and healing. Rather, the church is that body which believes and bears witness to the coming of God's reign by the power of God's unconditional grace. Precisely in this light the church engages in its activity in and for the world. This Christian vision of wholeness and healing leads us into the world, to be with others, indeed perhaps to suffer for others, in the faithful anticipation that God's creative and redemptive will for shalom is being made manifest. This promise by God which will be fully, totally, completely realized in the future, is already at work among us in the present. The aim for us, then, is not projects of self-realization built upon constrictive models and laws, but to care for all of God's creatures and all of God's creation.



## Dependency and Law

One of the benefits of this approach to the practice of wholeness and health and justice by the church is that it helps the church remain self-critical of its own conduct. One must be wary that in providing care for the other, that other is not eclipsed by our own programs, rules, methods, and procedures of caring. At its extreme would be the kind of action in which through our care for the other we would leap in with such intensity that we take over for the other and indeed the other loses his or her own identity. Through our program of wholeness and healing the other is thrown out of his or her own position and we take over completely, for after all, we are the experts, we are the care-givers, we are right. In this kind of situation the other becomes one who is dominated and made dependent. While often unintentional, the results can be devastating. Not only can this happen at a personal level where one person in caring for the other diminishes the other to such an extent that dependency rather than wholeness results, it can happen between pastor and congregation, and the most tragic, historical example, it has happened in many of the nineteenth and twentieth century missionary movements where caring for other peoples and spreading the Gospel has resulted in their dependency, their loss of identity and culture, and their perception of Christian care as simply a guise for colonization and conquest.

In many ways the domination and dependency form of caring and curing has been institutionalized within our contemporary society and churches. These institutions have developed sophisticated and elaborate technologies of health, wholeness, and justice in terms of such practices as medicine, therapy, counselling, welfare assistance, and advocacy programs. Unfortunately, what has often resulted from this is a self-imposed form of oppression which perpetuates the assumption that we are benefitting from this. The church is in a unique place to reflect upon this situation because within so much of society it has been marginalized when it comes to the issues of caring or curing, particularly curing. The church is often seen as the place of last resort, as that place for the miraculous cure, and if that doesn't happen, at least it's the place which prepares us for death and assures us of the life to come. From this

peripheral vantage point of last resort many things come into focus. First, priority has been given to curing rather than caring for people. Physicians and health care professionals are perceived primarily as the enemies of abnormality, disease, and death. The person's body or mind is the battleground upon which this strategy is conducted. Surgery, pharmaceuticals, therapy—both physico and psycho—are the weapons. But what happens to the person in all this? In many respects the person is lost. We do not treat people, rather we now encounter patients and clients. This objectification of the person is significant because now, since we are seeing the other as an object, that relationship with the other is technologized into "procedures".

Power also comes into the picture here. Since doctors and professionals employ procedures on patients or clients in order to defeat the enemies of abnormality, disease, and death they are given, or simply take, authority over and control of our bodies and our selves. Under the ensign of wholeness and health a process is carried out which advocates that the person needing cure and care turn over the responsibilities for her or his well-being to someone else and sacrifice care such that the enemy can be defeated and the experts be acclaimed the victors. While stating the case in a radically forthright way, I do not think I am exaggerating. Think of the tremendous power and authority that is rendered by the term "normal". What procedures are you willing to undergo, what sacrifices are you prepared to make in order to be "normal"?

Yet, what is "normal"? What is "healthy"? In asking these questions from the theological perspective of the church, I am not trying to advocate a relativism that says, "Since we can never know precisely what 'normal' and 'healthy' are, let's learn to live with anything." Rather, to ask the question theologically enables us to acknowledge that concepts such as "normal" and "healthy" are usually paradigms constructed by a certain group of people in order to effect particular responses, behaviors, and attitudes. Within a more political context, one would recognize that terms such as "normal" or "healthy" are ideological and determined by particular interests. Sometimes, and this is becoming more and more the case, concepts such as "normal" and "healthy" are arrived at through the compilation and analysis of statistics. Pollsters such as Angus Reid

and George Gallup exercise a tremendous amount of influence when it comes to determining what is "normal" and "healthy" or a "good" political decision. Theologically, whether "normal" and "healthy" are depicted as paradigms, ideology, or statistics the analysis remains the same: these concepts function as "law". That is, as distinct from the Gospel, not necessarily opposed to the Gospel nor identical with it, the concepts of "normal" or "healthy" as law place certain conditions upon the person and require the person to work and strive to meet and to fulfill these conditions.

The dangerous use and practices of terms like "normal" and "healthy" can more easily be seen when juxtaposed to the understanding of the Gospel. When "normal" and "healthy" become the total understanding of wholeness and well-being an aberration results. Now the procedures for "normal" and "healthy" take upon themselves salvific attributes. Salvation is understood as "being normal" and "being healthy". Thus salvation and our "being well" depend upon the conditions we can meet to fulfill these demands. This again is the relationship of sin, of the "flesh" as Paul called it, of the "old self" as Luther called it. What is lost here is the relationship of faith, that gift of a gracious relationship with God which grounds our wholeness and well-being because it has "made us well". In other words, wholeness and healing in the church's life and practice do not engage in a process whereby the well-being of a person or group or society is arrived at through procedures of self-realization. Rather wholeness and healing are first recognized as gifts which are given to us by God through the gift of faith. With this faith we can then enjoin others to live and to work and to serve in this world in order to incarnate and to make as real and concrete as we possibly can the faithful relationship of a loving God who is always with us and who cares for us.

The greatest problematic contemporary Christianity confronts with regard to its own theological position is that in proclaiming this new life with Christ in and for creation it tends to abstract and generalize this "life-of-being-well" such that it becomes some mystical, ethereal essence which can be poetically proclaimed, but not concretely lived. With this tendency toward mystical abstraction and generalization the problematics of separation or identity reoccur. Since it is abstract,



Christian life and conduct are perceived as preparation for another life and another world, thus all the problematics of a "hygienics of the soul" are reintroduced. Alternatively, since it is abstract, Christian life and conduct are seen as identical with certain procedures for health, wholeness, and justice and the entire theological enterprise is seen as a particular political position or a certain psychological and therapeutic paradigm. Thus the Gospel again has been reduced to certain regulative programs and procedures; it has become law.

### Christian Community and Vocation

The constraints of this essay do not permit a fully developed exposition on what this theological practice concretely entails; two themes for further reflection must suffice. Both themes are incorporated in an offertory prayer in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*: "O Lord our God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you have made...."<sup>22</sup> What a radical commitment! Only in faith could one dare to express it! "... [W]e offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you have made...." This expression of faith, prayed in hope, proposes that the life and practice of the church become concretized and actualized first through the Christian community and secondly through the vocations of each and every one of the baptized.

The Christian community is the first locus because it is the body of Christ in the world. Here is where we as individuals receive our identity as people of God, as ones, who, having received the new life of faith through baptism, participate with one another in the world in service for the care and redemption of all creation. As a community constituted by God's gifts to us and God's love for us in Christ, our task is not simply the self-preservation and self-perpetuation of the community. Rather, the community is a place to gather in order to be sent out, in order to be with the suffering, extend care and healing, work for justice and life within structures of oppression, abuse, and death. The community as it is renewed and strengthened by the Gospel now is dedicated to serve and renew all creation. This sense of "mission" should be reflected in its proclamation,



its worship, its educational programs, its committees, and its finances.

Secondly, from this understanding of community follows the practice of vocation. A community that dedicates itself to service and to the care and redemption of all that God has made does not simply have the pastor as the minister. All, by virtue of their baptism, are ministers. The pastor is one whose particular vocation is the ministry of Word and Sacraments. But the community cannot serve, cannot be with, cannot care for and heal unless it is out in and among all creation. One area where the church has been particularly weak, and often negligent, is enabling and equipping the baptized to see their vocations as their ministry. How can one as parent, plumber, nurse, secretary, office worker, farmer, civil service employee, manager, or teacher engage in the care and redemption of all that God has made? Does the sermon offer input? Does worship provide encouragement? Do the congregational programs provide insight? Here is the crucible of the church's life and practice, the baptized believer in the world, and yet so little attention is paid to refining, enhancing, and reflecting upon this most vital area of our ministry and conduct.

Health and wholeness have always been a part of the church's life and practice, but they have been a problematic part of the church's history. Salvation has always included this concern. However, how one understands salvation, the social and cultural context in which one lives, the understanding of what it is to be a human being, and the regulative and normative prescriptions for "healthy" and "normal" all raise more questions. Although there may be no absolute answers, there are a few key insights. To separate wholeness and healing from salvation or to identify wholeness and healing as the same thing as salvation are pitfalls which the church should avoid in its life and practice. Such strategies would vitiate the centrality of the church's Gospel proclamation. Furthermore, the church's life and practice are always seen as arising out of God's gracious gift of faith. Faith designates the primary and essential relationship to God which gives the church its vitality and enables it to participate fully in God's creation. Faith is the way of being-in-the-world for the Christian. Finally, baptism can serve as the paradigm for the church's life and practice. It gives us our identity and enables us to see

how the church as the community of Christ nurtures each of us to pursue the ministry of the baptized through our vocations for the care and redemption of all creation. "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God" (Romans 5:1-2).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: The New American Library; Mentor Books, 1963) 74.
- <sup>2</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume II, s.v. "Shalom in the OT," by Gerhard von Rad, pp. 402-406. This entry provides a detailed examination of the nuances of shalom and their scriptural references.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid. 406.
- <sup>4</sup> Again, the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume VII, s.v. "*sōzō*, *sōtēria*, *sōtēr*, *sōtērios*" pp. 965-1024 provides a thorough discussion of the term with regard to its Greek, Jewish, Hellenistic, New Testament, and Post-Apostolic contexts.
- <sup>5</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 29.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Augustine, "On the Spirit and the Letter," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Volume V, ed. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975 reprinted) 106.
- <sup>8</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 173.
- <sup>9</sup> Andrée Hayum, *God's Medicine and The Painter's Vision* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 17.
- <sup>10</sup> Marie-Madeleine Antony Schmitt, *Le Culte de Saint-Sébastien en Alsace* (Strasbourg: Colmar, 1977) 63-64.
- <sup>11</sup> E. Wickersheimer, "Matthias Grünewald et le Feu Saint Antoine," *Ier Congrès de l'Histoire de l'art de guérir* (Anvers, 1920) 3-11.
- <sup>12</sup> Rudolph Arbesmann, O.S.A., "The Concept of 'Christus Medicus' in St. Augustine," *Traditio*, Volume X (1954) 23.
- <sup>13</sup> Theodore G. Tappert (ed.), *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959) "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," IV:3, p. 107.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., Apology IV:20, p. 110.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid., Large Catechism V:68, p. 454.
- <sup>16</sup> Heinrich Bornkamm, *The Heart of Reformation Faith: The Fundamental Axioms of Evangelical Belief*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Row, 1965) 110.
- <sup>17</sup> *Book of Concord*, Large Catechism IV:65, pp. 444-445.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., Large Catechism II:13, p. 412.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 413.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Formula of Concord, Epitome I:10, p. 467.

<sup>22</sup> *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978) 68.