

## “Our Biblical Call to Healing”

by Stephen Charles Mott

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Vocation means call. Tonight we are considering the implications of the call to healing which many of you have. One of the most significant social meanings of Martin Luther's reformation was a spiritualizing of all vocation. He stated that every person's call has the significance of being a monk in the world. In addition to the priesthood of all believers, we could speak of the “monkhood” of every vocation. Interpreting that biblically for those in healing vocations is an easier task than that for most vocation. We will look at the deep and broad meaning healing has in biblical theology and ethics.

### **Healing motivated by compassion**

We will begin by looking at the healing ministry of Jesus. Jesus' miracles are often traditionally understood as proofs of his deity. This is not the dominant note in the Synoptic Gospels, however. The frequent command to silence by Jesus in the Markan tradition, called “the Messianic secret,” plays down attention being drawn to Jesus' person. In the Synoptic Gospels the miracles are more like samples of the Reign of God, which is breaking in with Jesus' ministry, but which also is to come. They are means, as well as the fruit of the Reign's arrival. What Jesus is bringing about is front and central. The miracles are part of God's intervention for God's human creation,<sup>1</sup> of which the church becomes God's agent.

Healing was so important to Jesus' ministry that were it was an ends in itself. They healing miracles did not merely function as symbols, pointing to a deeper

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Raymond E. Brown, "The Gospel Miracles," in Brown, New Testament Essays (New York, Images Books, 1968), 228.

meaning, nor only to draw attention to Jesus' verbal message. They themselves were the message. The healings were acts of liberation to benefit the recipient. This the meaning of healing and being healed. The significance is what happens is to the recipient, not merely what it says about the healer.

This conclusion is clear when the motivation of the miracles is examined. For example, before the feeding of the 5,000, Matthew writes that "when Jesus saw the great crowd, he was moved with compassion for them, and he healed their sick" (14:14). In five other healings Jesus heals because of his compassion (splagchnizesthai). When blind Bartimaeus told Jesus he wanted him to open his eyes, "because he was moved with compassion," he touched his eyes and he saw again" (Matt. 20: 34; also Mark 1:41 [the text is questionable, however]; Matt. 15:32/Mark 8:2; Matt. 9:36 (cf. 9:35 and 10:1); Luke 7:13. In Mark 5:19 mercy (eleein) moves Jesus is moved to heal. After healing the Gerasene demoniac, Jesus told him, "Go back to your people and tell what the Lord did to you in having mercy upon you you." In six other healing miracles, Jesus responds to a *request* for him to have compassion (splagchnizesthai) or to have mercy (eleein). For example, Jesus healed the boy possessed by a spirit when the boy's father asked, "Help us by having compassion upon us" (Mark. 9:22) and the ten lepers were healed after they called, "Jesus, Master, have mercy upon us (Luke 17:13) (in addition, Matt. 9:27, 15:22; 17:15; Matt. 20:30-31/Mark 10:47-48/Luke 18:38-39).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Before raising Jairus' daughter from the dead in Luke 8:52, Jesus tells those around her body, "Stop weeping." That perhaps should be interpreted as words of compassion not rebuke (cf. James MacKinnon, The Historic Jesus [London, Longmans, 1931], 336). When he raised the son of widow of Nain from the dead, Luke connects those same words to his compassion: "The Lord was moved with compassion for her, and he said to her, 'Stop weeping'" (7:13).

Similarly, when Luke describes the motivation for Jesus' healing before the feeding of the 5,000, instead of saying that Jesus was moved with compassion, as Matthew does, Luke writes, "He healed those who had need (chreia) of healing" (9:11). Genuine healing is motivated by compassion for the desperate needs of humankind, as exemplified in the One who was most complete in his emotional wholeness. Healing is a loving intervention by God in the desperate condition of humankind. Being clothed with compassion is also characteristic of those in the church of Christ (Col. 3:12), and healing is one of the responses.

### **The disaster of disease**

Why did healing have this powerful role in Jesus' response to the needs around him? Disease was a disaster. This perspective is seen in Jesus' defense of his healing, even on the Sabbath. To heal a man with a withered hand is to "save life." The hearts hardened even while observing that deliverance is what angered Jesus (Mark 3:4-5). Jesus compares the danger of disease to that of a child or ox that has fallen into a pit (Luke 14:5). Healing responds to a basic necessity of life which is on the level of thirst, symbol of basic needs; it is like leading a valued draft animal to water (Luke 13:15). Healing involves the dignity of being a human; the physical being of person is important because, Jesus says, they are worth so much more than a sheep, whose urgent distress even met sabbatically approved rescue in the standard interpretation of Jesus' day (Matt. 12:11-12).

The deadly threat of disease was not only its physical nature. It included also its social repercussions. The healings then and now involve more than the physical. Those who were healed were often social victims in other ways.<sup>3</sup> A

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<sup>3</sup> Healing reports in the New Testament all involve persons limited in their self-expression, self-determination, or who were hemmed in because possessed of demons. Like the leaping,

study of twenty-seven Synoptic miracles found that the recipient had been excluded from full identity in the community in one degree or another. Some of the healed were pagans. They had an external exclusion. Others were excluded internally through social status boundaries within the society, such as women, children, having an impurity (e.g. lepers). Matthew 8:1-17 brings three of these groups together: leper, (Gentile) centurion, woman.<sup>4</sup>

Disease has a culture meaning, which can be as destructive as the physical attack. Lepers were most visibly excluded. Begging by the blind was the result of a social construct relating to the consequence of disease. Common in the Middle East has been the forcing of sick males to leave their hamlet when a family's resources are insufficient to maintain a non-producing adult.<sup>5</sup>

The separation away of the sick, as well as the poor in general, has a social function. Separation socially hides the economic injustices which would lead to questioning the system itself. The separation is justified by labeling the disease as sin or impurity. The poor and sickly themselves feel inferior, perhaps as cursed by God or consigned by fate so they do not question.

Two spheres are involved in disease: 1) the sphere of the social situation and 2) the sphere of the disease.<sup>6</sup> A person healed by Jesus was fully restored on both

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praising former lame man at the gate of the temple (Acts 3:6, 8), through the healing people emerge from the passivity of dependence (Helmut Gollwitzer, "Liberation in History," Interpretation 28 (1974), 413-14.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Thierry Maertens, "La structure des recits de miracles dans les synoptiques," Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses 6 (1976/77), 257-58.

<sup>5</sup> Allan Louis Young, "Medical Beliefs and Practices of Begemder Amhara" (Ann Arbor U., Microfilms, 1970), 231-32. (U. of Pennsylvania dissertation, 1970)

<sup>6</sup> Maertens, "La structure des recits de miracles," 258.

of these levels. 1) Jesus in *first* forgiving the sin of the paralytic before healing him put in question the rationalization of the system (Mark 2:9 par.). Jesus liberated him from his negative social situation, reversing the categories which had justified it. 2) In then healing the body of this man, Jesus liberated him from alienation to the created physical world, in terms of the body. The healing had the result of restoration to community, as the condition and the rationalization for oppression were removed.

In this context we can understand the opposition by public authorities to Jesus' exorcism. This is seen in the opposition to Jesus in the Beelzebul accusation (Matt. 12:22-30 par.). In another situation, Jesus' immediate reference to his exorcism when warned about Herod indicates that exorcism was Herod's concern. "Tell that Fox that I continue to cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow . . ." (Luke 13:32). Studies of possession and mental illness in situations of social strain in the developing world show that they provide socially accepted forms of oblique protest and escape from oppression. They contain the aggressiveness, turning it more on the victim than the community. Exorcists are feared not only for their power. They also are feared because they create instability by removing these escapes and inhibitions. Jesus was an exorcist committed to the value of social healing over the dominant value of social stability.<sup>7</sup> In his time the Jewish people had little control over their destiny. Jesus' miracles provided sense of power for

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<sup>7</sup> Paul W. Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs, and Public Authorities: A Socio-Historical Study." Journal of the American Academy of Religion 49 (1981), 567-88. The threat increased when Jesus sent out his disciples doing the same thing (cf. Mark 6:14 [Herod's alarm]) (583). Regarding the Beelzebul accusation, exorcists are held in check by the central ruling group through accusations of witchcraft to discredit them and to diminish their status (577, citing I. M. Lewis, Ecstatic Religion [1977], 122).

the oppressed masses. Your healing today contributes beyond the confines of the bodies you are restoring and links up with other ministries of the church which also do that.

### **Healing as justice**

In one of his fulfillment statements, Matthew quotes Isaiah 42:1-4. Jesus has fulfilled the prophesy that the servant of the Lord will "announce justice to the nations" and will not "break a bent reed or extinguish a smoldering wick until he leads justice to victory" (12:17-21). In the context what has Jesus done that could be considered justice? After his healing on the Sabbath, the Pharisees conspire to have him killed. Learning of this Jesus departs; he heals all of the many who come after him and instructs them not to make him known (vv. 15-16). Then Matthew's fulfillment statement follows. The voice not being heard refers to the statement not to publicize the healing. The act of justice is the healing—healing those bent reeds and smoldering wicks caught in the disaster of disease.

How can healing be an act of justice? Justice<sup>8</sup> is a standard by which actions are evaluated. In the biblical understanding, distributive justice, the standard by which the benefits of living in society are assigned, is first of all a distribution according to needs. It provides the basic needs for life in community. Accordingly, biblical justice is associated particularly with the groups which are most needy, such as widows, orphans, strangers, the poor, and wage earners. In active terms justice means taking upon oneself the cause of the oppressed. Justice measures the responsibility of government. It is the standard of the throne and is to be carried out in the city gate. It evaluates public choices. It is legal, supported by

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Stephen Charles Mott, A Christian Understanding of Political Thought (New York, Oxford U., 1993), ch. 5.

authority and power. Justice cannot be separated from politics. How can Jesus' healings be a part of justice?

The relationship of healing to justice can be understood when we do not view it by our modern compartmentalizations, such as which separates your work from other liberating work. We have already seen that disease in the Gospel was closely connected to other social and economic dilemmas and was viewed as a disaster affecting essential requirements of life. In Scripture illness and related bodily impairments are closely associated with basic injustices in life. Looking at these associations in several passages shows how healing would be considered an act of justice.

In Luke 4:18-19 Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61:1-2. We find the following distresses identified as that to which Jesus is sent to relieve: poverty, captivity, blindness, oppression. Blindness, a physical ailment, occurs in the midst of economic and political afflictions. That Jesus did heal the physically blind should be a warning against spiritualizing the list. The description has been strengthened in its sense of injustice by bringing oppression in from another passage in Isaiah, 58:6.

In Luke 7:22 par., regarding the groups which John the Baptist is to be told are being liberated by Jesus, along with the blind, lame, lepers, deaf, and dead, we find the poor. The warning against spiritualizing this list is even stronger. Jesus has just healed many from their diseases, scourges, and evil spirits and has given sight to the blind (v. 21).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The healing of the blind, deaf, and lame is found in the context of joyous coming way of the Lord in Isa. 35:5-6, the straight paths indicate a deliverance from oppression (Isa. 40:3; cf. Ps. 5:6, 8, 9-11; 27:2b, 11f.; Isa. 59:8).

The Hebrew Scriptures frequently associate together the economically weak, the politically oppressed, and the sick and disabled. In Proverbs 31 the king's mother has instructed him to speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute, and to speak out, execute justice and defend the rights of the poor and afflicted [two terms for the poor] (vv. 8-9). Even if "those who cannot speak" could to be taken as a metaphor for those who are silenced socially, the ease of movement from the physical to social probably means that both should be considered.<sup>10</sup> King Lemuel is a non-Israelite king, probably from northern Arabia. These norms apply to government and go beyond the people of God.

In Psalm 107:17 the word sick has been suggested as an emendation of the Hebrew fool. The strophe goes on to describe a situation of affliction, loathing food, drawing near to death. If illness is meant in this section, then in the Psalm we have a series of strophes treating the landless (possibly refugees, v. 4), prisoners (v. 10), the sick (v. 17), shipwrecked (v. 23), hungry and landless (v. 36) (although vv. 33-38 along vv. 39-43 may be a summary and conclusion). The last strophe, vv. 39-43, includes those brought low, those oppressed, and the needy.

In Isaiah 42:7, which comes a few verses later than those quoted in Matthew 12:18-21 (in which justice is ascribed to the Lord's servant), we find the servant's mission to the blind, to prisoners in dungeon, to those who sit in prison.

In Job 29:14-17, Job states that he has robed himself in justice. He then describes the groups he has defended. He mentions the blind, the lame, the poor, and the stranger. Here the language of justice is specifically present. This is true also of Psalm 146:7-9. After describing God as one who does justice for the

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<sup>10</sup> This would be true also if "opening the eyes of the blind" (e.g. cf. Isa. 42:7 below) is a metaphor for release from prison.

oppressed, the following groups are listed: hungry, prisoners, blind, those bowed down, the just, strangers, orphan, and widow.

Similar associations of physical malady with economic or social distress are found in other passages. In Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, her barren womb (v. 5) is described with the justice language of raising the poor and lifting the needy (v. 10). In Isaiah 33:23-24 in describing God's future just Reign, the promise is made that economic spoil will be in abundance. The lame and sick are then specifically mentioned as beneficiaries. Their hope is economic, reflecting the economic catastrophe of their physical affliction. The healing metaphor for God's coming justice in Malachi 4:2 is not surprising. "The sun of justice will rise with healing in its wings."

From looking at what these groups have in common in their distress, several conclusions can be made. 1) The body is a person's link with the outside world, the physical and social environment. How one relates to the body determines the way one relates to the world. As Augustine said, the body is not an ornament; it is part of our nature<sup>11</sup>. In that, the body is our basic contact with society; it is the basic unit of society. The physical healer is connected to a wider spectrum. 2) Disease is one of the sources by which the body is attacked,<sup>12</sup> but it is linked with other sources, such as economic oppression and negative social status. 3) Sickness

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<sup>11</sup> Augustine, City of God, trans. M. Dods (New York, Modern Library, 1950), 1.13, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Disease is approached most frequently in the Old Testament as trauma--a blow inflicted from the outside; it is an intruder (K. van der Toorn, Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia: A Comparative Study (Van Gorcum, Studia Semitica Neerlandica 22, 1985), 68-69.

is part of the spectrum of economic and political oppression.<sup>13</sup> Healing is part of a continuum which ranges from restoration of physical health to the overthrowing of fallen institutions. 4) Justice includes healing of the sick. In contributing to healing we are linked to broader actions of justice.

Healing is a part of justice, which controls the distribution of power and empowers those who are weak in the necessities of life. In contributing to healing we are a part of the social mission of release, deliberation, and liberation from forces all of which afflict our somatic-social existence.

### **Healing and empowerment**

In Ezekiel 34 there is powerful prophesy against the shepherds. As elsewhere in Ancient Near East, the shepherd is a symbol of the ruler. Here is a critique of the political and religious leaders of the nation who as shepherds have oppressed their sheep. They have been using the sheep to feed and clothe themselves instead of feeding the sheep (vv. 2-3).

You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them. (v. 4, NRSV)

The sheep have been scattered with no one to seek them (vv. 5-6).

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<sup>13</sup> This spectrum was recognized elsewhere in the Mediterranean world. Plato stated that a sin like greed is called a disease (nose\ma) in physical bodies; in the case of the state and polities, the same sin is called injustice (adikia, Leges 906c). Criminal justice which cures diseases of the soul by curing people from gaining by acting unjustly is called "the cure of justice" (he\ iasis adikias, Leges 862c).

This passage had a pervasive presence in Jesus' definition of his mission and his related critique of the leaders of the people. It influenced his parables and references to the shepherds and sheep. Its influence is seen in the fact that in Luke 19:11, when Jesus states that he has come "to seek and save the lost," lost is in the neuter gender); yet he is talking about people (which in Greek would require a masculine or a feminine). The reason for the neuter is that, even though sheep are not mentioned, what is in mind are the "lost *sheep*" (sheep, to pro\baton, is neuter), showing the influence of Ezekiel 34 (cf. v. 16).<sup>14</sup>

In Ezekiel 34:4 God accuses the leaders that they "have not strengthened the weak nor healed the sick." In this verse weak and sick both have the same root, h>lh. h>lh is the most important and frequent root used to designate sicknesses in the Hebrew Bible. It refers to a state of weakness. There is slackness and exhaustion because the vital power somehow has been snipped.<sup>15</sup> The weakness is not only physical but also derives from social aversion and isolation and economic exploitation. In the well known passage, Isaiah 53:3, the one who is acquainted with infirmity [h>lh, also v. 4a] is despised, rejected, has faces hid from him, is held to be of no account. The negative social context is an element of the weakness of sickness.

Lack of power is true also of poverty. Biblically, there is a link between sickness, which you treat, and poverty. In Leviticus 14:21 the identification of the

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<sup>14</sup> The references to "the lost" in Ezekiel 34:4, 16 in the Septuagint are in the neuter. The people are symbolized as sheep to go along with the image of the rulers as shepherds "who have not sought the lost."

<sup>15</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, Anthropology of the Old Testament (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1974), 143. One may compare a New Testament term for illness, arro\stos, which literally means "powerless" (BDAG<sup>2</sup> 109) (Matt. 14:14; Mark 6:5, 13; 1 Cor. 11:30).

poor is literally that their "hand does not reach." Hand used metaphorically usually means power. The poor are those whose economic power is insufficient to provide them with the essentials of life; their power does not reach. Leviticus 25:35 is a key passage on power. The situation of poverty is one of weakness when a member of the community "becomes low [mu[k] and his or her power wavers<sup>16</sup> in relation to you." They are lacking in power to maintain themselves in the community ("in relation to you"). The obligation is then stated. In the Hebrew it literally is "you shall make him strong" [ha\zaq in the Hiph'il (causative) conjugation].

In Ezekiel 34:4 this empowering imperative is the obligation placed on the rulers. This is the responsibility of the political institutions, the leading public institutions. "You have not strengthened the weak [h≥lh, which we have seen to be the key term for the sick]"; the verb is the same as that in Leviticus 25:35. In Isaiah 3:7 a person who (vv. 5, 13-15) refuses to be a ruler in a situation of oppression states, "I am not one who binds up [ha\bas=<sup>17</sup>] a wound. In my house there is no bread and no garment." The idea of the ruler as a restoring healer of social needs was more broadly shared in the Mediterranean world. Plato wrote that the lawmaker must do what is possible to undo harm [blabe\] by "delivering what is lost (apolomenon), restoring what is fallen, and making healthy [hygies] what is dead or wounded" (Leges 862b).

Ezekiel states that when human institutions fail, God takes over the responsibility. "I will seek the lost . . . . I will bind up [ha\bas=] the injured, and I

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<sup>16</sup> Literally, "his hand trembles."

<sup>17</sup> The term for "bind up" is same term used in critique of the rulers in Ezek. 34:4 ["you have not bound up the injured"] and of the ruler's responsibility that God takes back in Ezek. 34:16, cf. below.

will strengthen the weak . . . . I will feed them with justice" (v. 16). The promise is that God will do that with God's shepherd, David, God's servant who is coming. "He will feed them, and he will be their shepherd" (v. 23). By fulfilling that promise, healing is part of Jesus' ministry of restoration. As healer, he is one who empowers. He is an agent of justice. The one who heals physically is part of a process that extends as far as the crucial governmental responsibilities of politically and economically empowering the weak and the poor.

### **Reign of God and Reign of Satan**

The fulfillment of such promises of the prophets was summarized in the concept of the coming Reign of God. In the increasing apocalyptic outlook in the Jewish background and the early church, the Reign of God was countered by the reign of Satan. Satan and other fallen powers or angels were a force of rebellion, perverting their guardian functions in creation, and penetrating people and institutions with their fallen rule. That rule touches every facet of human existence. The Reign of God is the restoration from it. Wherever the reign of Satan is found, there the restoring Reign of God will be found at work. Christ enters to destroy that rule and to introduce God's final rule.

Disease is one of the binding, destructive reaches of Satan. A crippled woman is described as being bound by Satan (Luke 13:16). One of the terms for sickness is *mastix*, which means scourge, whip. Perhaps it presents disease as a persecution by Satan (Mark 3:10; 5:29, 34; Luke 7:21).<sup>18</sup> Jesus' miracles in the non-human

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James Kallas, The Significance of the Synoptic Miracles (London, SPCK, Biblical Monographs 2, 1961), 96. Kallas is alert to many possible references to Satan but at times reaches too far in that attempt.

created world reveal Satan's presence as being much more than the possession of individuals. The stilling of the storm is followed by the exorcism of the Gerasene Demoniac (Mark 4:35-5:20 par.). When Jesus cast the demons from the man into the swine, the rush of the swine into the sea exposed Satan's destructive damage to God's creation (Mark 5:13 par.)

In Matthew 12 (also Luke 11:14-23), the statement about Jesus' healing as fulfillment of the promised time of justice and restoration, is followed by his healing of a person who was both demonically possessed and blind and mute. To the accusation that his undeniable power was from Satan (Beelzebul), Jesus stated that since he had cast out the demons by Spirit of God, the Reign of God had come upon them (v. 28). The Reign of God is concretely present now in the somatic sphere in the restoration of the body, mind, and spirit of this man.

Jesus goes on to identify the significance of the healing over against Satan's rule. Satan's presence is described in political terms. It is a house, a city, a kingdom. Satan's hold is not merely spiritual or individualistic. It is also structural, institutional, and political. Jesus' healing is a pillaging of spoils gathered by the strong man. Healing is recapturing God's creation from destructive hold of Satan. The individual is delivered from a vast socio-cosmic order. To that degree, God's control and purpose in creation is reestablished. The central forgiveness of sins and reconciliation of the individual with God exists within a broader concentric circle that is the greater whole of cosmic redemption and world renewal.<sup>19</sup> Healing contributes to that greater whole and is a part of that work of which the church is the chief instrument of God.

### **Healing continued by Jesus' followers**

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<sup>19</sup> Kallas, Significance of the Miracles, 87.

Jesus' ministry of justice in healing is continued by his followers. In John 9 after the dilemma of a blind man is presented, Jesus states, "*Our* doing the works of the one who sent me is necessary as long as there is day" (v. 4). He goes on to say, "When I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (v. 5). "After he said that," he proceeds to heal the blind man (v. 6).

Similarly in the Synoptic Gospels, the disciples are sent to do that for which Jesus was sent. In Luke 9:11, Jesus is described as speaking to the crowd "about the Reign of God and healing those who had need." In Luke 9:2 the twelve are sent to "proclaim the Reign of God and to heal" and in verse 6 they carry that out. Similarly, Matthew 9:35 (cf. 4:23) provides this summary of Jesus' work: "proclaiming the good news of the Reign and healing." Matthew 10:7-8, which follows is Matthew's parallel to Luke 9:2 of the sending of the twelve for this dual mission. They are sent to do what Jesus did.

The sending of the *seventy* symbolizes that the mission of the *twelve* in proclaiming and healing is the mission of the whole church (10:9). (The sending of the twelve itself is a paradigm of the mission of the church as the restored Israel, represented by the "twelve" of the twelve tribes.) The seventy report back to Jesus that even the demons submit to them (v. 17). Jesus' response is his vision of Satan falling from heaven. The followers' activity against the demons is significant for God's conquest of Satan. Jesus goes to speak of their power over snakes and scorpions. These represent the hostility of nature against humans in a world of sin and Satan. Believers in Jesus in their mission make a contribution to God's Reign even in its more apocalyptic elements in the conflict of God and Satan. The mission of proclamation and healing is a world and cosmos penetrating activity. Those who resist it face the final judgment of God (vv. 11-12).

### **Responsibility to the whole spectrum**

The mission to heal given to the disciples was closely related to the Reign of God. It accompanied the proclamation of the Reign breaking into history with Jesus. In this mission the disciples are agents of that Reign. This mission is continued in the church, whom the disciples represent. The command to heal must be understood in terms of the whole spectrum of actions of justice of which healing is a part. It must be interpreted in light of the physical, economic, political, social, and spiritual promises of God's Reign to which healing was intricately connected.

Healing is part of a continuum of actions of deliverance from forces which deny people's basic needs for life in community. Individuals and groups of Christians differ in their gifts and opportunities for carrying this out. What is in common, and what is the principle at stake, is using our skills, gifts, and power to meet basic needs according to opportunities which God opens up in history. Some, like many here, have natural and spiritual gifts of healing. Others have gifts which can contribute effectively at points on the spectrum of justice other than that of physical healing. Some may have opportunity to go further in terms of political or economic occasions for change, openings which were lacking in first century Palestine. In a democracy the opportunities are much broader. As Proverbs 3:27 commands, "Do not keep back good from those whose right it is [literally, "its owner"] when you have the power to do it." We have an obligation to see that the basic rights of our fellow humans are met. Where we come in on the healing-justice spectrum will depend on our abilities, training, and opportunities. We are a part of a spectrum, however, and we need to work together.

The responsibility to heal as one which has a variety of physical social, economic, and political applications is confirmed in the tradition of the church. Augustine in writing about love of the neighbor states that there is no surer step toward loving God than the love of one person to another. One form of sinning against a neighbor is not helping him or her when it is in one's power to do so.

This requires more than good will. Love involves doing good partly to a person's soul and partly to a person's body.

Augustine then applies the healing metaphor:

What benefits the body is called medicine . . . . Medicine here includes everything that either preserves or restores bodily health. It includes, therefore, not only what belongs to the art of medical men, properly so called, but also food and drink, clothing and shelter, and every means of covering and protection to guard our bodies against injuries and mishaps from without as from within.

He explains that this is because "hunger and thirst, and cold and heat, and all violence" are forces from without that produce the loss of health. Warding off these distresses happens when the compassionate and wise person "assists the needy, when he clothes the naked, when he takes the stranger into his house, when he sets free the oppressed . . . ."20 Healing includes all that prevents and relieves human suffering and preserves life. Physical healing obviously continues as an important element of that.

John Wesley, important for Free and unfree Methodists, similarly saw the wider spectrum of which physical healing is a part when he stated that by sick he meant "not only sick in the strictest sense but such as are in a state of affliction, whether of mind or body."<sup>21</sup>

William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army (and before that a Methodist local preacher), noted another important dimension in the range of

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Augustine, Of the Morals of the Catholic Church, chs. 26-27, in Christian Social Teachings, ed. G. Forell (New York, Anchor Books, 1966), 77-79.

21 John Wesley, Sermon 98, "On Visiting the Sick" 1.1, in The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 3, Sermons 3 (Bicentennial Ed.) (Nashville, Abingdon, 1986), 387.

healing. Disease and thus healing apply not only to individuals, but also to the social and institutional context in which they find themselves. Booth wrote of the situation in which a person's "*circumstances* are sick, out of order, in danger of carrying him to utter destitution."<sup>22</sup>

The response for the individual and the church in every situation is to examine their abilities and opportunities to heal. Those with natural and spiritual gifts of physical and psychological healing should affirm their vocation and place in the church, and be affirmed.

All need to look to the heart of healing which is to empower. People are empowered when they can fully participate in the community certainly physically, and also socially, politically, economically, and religiously. People are empowered not to dominate new victims but to participate with others in community so as to control that which diminishes both individuals and their circumstances. Empowerment involves not only individuals but a mutuality in community that enhances the growth and self-reliance of every individual and family.

A healing relation is not one in which an altruistic person with power takes full responsibility for an innocent, helpless, disabled, wounded person without power. Healing occurs in a relationship in which a person who had, for any reason, been excluded from mutual participation becomes able to participate, in whatever way he or she can, in the community.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> William Booth, In Darkest England and the Way Out (London, International Headquarters of the Salvation Army, n.d.), 221.

<sup>23</sup> Roy Herndon SteinhoffSmith, "The Boundary War Mystery," Religious Studies Review 24 (1998), 139.

"He sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal."