
JESUS AND HEALING

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I. QUESTIONS ABOUT RELIGION AND HEALING

Since I first started teaching CFQ formally in 2004, I have frequently been asked how I reconcile teaching qigong and meditation and my practice as an energy healer with the fact that I am a priest in the Anglican Church and a preacher of the Christian gospel. Over the years, I have offered various answers to this question in my training sessions. But here I am going to try to be more systematic in explaining what my thinking is on the subject of healing—in the light of my being a Christian.

People often ask, “Are there conflicts or disagreements between CFQ and being a Christian?” Underlying such a question for some might be further ones, such as, “Are some of these practices inimical to the church's teachings?” or even, “Are you betraying your beliefs?” Even more common is the question, “What sort of reception do you have within the church for what you are doing?” Skepticism tends to run high about the churches’ liberality and I think a concern for me is reflected in this sort of question.

There are regularly Christians in my classes. There are just as many who have little church background, who are alienated from the church, who have other faith allegiances or for whom faith is not an issue. The questions, I would say, tend to come more frequently from non-Christians but the answers are the same whoever they are directed to.

My CFQ instruction has had a largely positive reception within the church. There have only ever been two negative comments brought to my attention. These were both from clergy at the conservative end of Anglicanism who did not bother to find out for themselves what was involved with CFQ. I have trained several clergy and other members of the Anglican and other churches. I have found that those with open and accepting attitudes find little theological reason to object to what they find.

Personally, I have never felt any conflict between what I teach outside the church and my church background. Of course, I am one who has never held to a particularly dogmatic view of Christianity. Since my teens I’ve been attracted to the more mystical side of theology. Dionysius, one of the early spiritual thinkers in the church, distinguished between a positive or affirmative approach (*kataphatic*) and a negative one (*apophatic*). I’ve always been drawn to the latter. Since my twenties I have been interested in Eastern philosophies and practices along with the classics of Christian mystical literature.

A. TWO OBVIOUS QUESTIONS

There is a range of presuppositions about what one can expect from the church, just as there are various kinds of responses within the church, to the idea of alternative or holistic healing. Let me name two obvious issues which frequently raise people’s curiosity.¹

¹ I will not attempt a full discussion of what is referred to as healing ministry within the church.

1. BIBLICAL PROHIBITION?

Many are aware that within the broad umbrella of Christianity there are some who would object to what I teach on the grounds that it is proscribed by the bible. Fundamentalists—with a strong view of the transcendence of God and the unworthiness of humans—might even be expected to use the word “witchcraft.” True, there are sections of the Torah that prohibit “occult practices.”² However, the cultural distance between our society and that of Israel of 2500–3000 years ago is huge and we stand little chance of appreciating the full context of such passages. As well, in the New Testament there is a principle, repeatedly stated, that Christians are not bound by the Torah.³ This being the case, I feel little need to address myself to the matter of such a prohibition—whatever it might have meant originally.

2. THE QUESTION OF OTHER FAITHS

CFQ is not religion. However, it has roots that can be traced to certain eastern traditions, in particular, Taoism and Buddhism. The churches, in their official positions, struggle with the vexed issue of pluralism and, in many people’s minds, these positions can seem intolerant of difference. The slogan “Outside the church no salvation” has long been associated with Christian triumphalism.⁴ The biblical expression “No other name” has received an equally rigid interpretation by many Christians wedded to an evangelizing model.⁵

An honest appraisal of these questions will take into consideration the fact that social attitudes continue to be shaped by the history of European colonialism. Racism, the notion of “cultural inferiority,” the suppression of non-Christian beliefs (think of the fate of Aboriginal beliefs and practices in Canada) continue to exercise a pernicious influence on many people’s attitudes.

On the other hand, the Ecumenical Movement beginning in the 20th Century has contributed to an opening up of greater awareness and interaction among the religions. Dialogue has taken place on many levels. On a cultural level, travel and global migration have brought us into direct contact with other world views. There is a greater openness to other faiths in many circles.

I believe the focus in the future will be on what the different faiths can be learning from each other. In the long term (eschatologically?), we might look to an eventual convergence of the great world faiths.⁶ I do

² Deut. 18:9–13 “When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord; because of these same detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God.” (All biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version.)

³ Mark 7:18–19 “Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.)” Romans 14:20 “Everything is indeed clean.”

⁴ The phrase originates with Cyprian. “It is after the Christian religion had become the official religion of the empire that we find the Church Fathers applying the axiom “Outside the Church no salvation” to the situation of Jews and pagans” Dupuis 1997, 89.

⁵ Acts 4:12 “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” New Testament passages such as John 14:6 and 1 Timothy 2:5–6 are also used to assert a Christocentric position.

⁶ Dupuis 1997, 389–390.

not believe that such convergence will be the result of the essential sameness of the religions, as some suggest.⁷ But, within a pluralistic framework, the religions will need to work at overcoming their differences in order to cooperate on building peace and justice and support the common good.

Not feeling restricted to my Christian orientation, I have sought to learn about the various spiritual paths that have become so available to us during my own lifetime. My embrace of other faiths, in particular Buddhism, has led me to the point where I am comfortable in referring to myself as a bi-religionist—albeit one who sits lightly with regard to either tradition.

B. THE HISTORICAL POSITION OF THE CHURCHES ON HEALING

Am I at all influenced in my thinking by what the church has had to say about healing over the centuries? My general view is that the church as an institution long ago lost touch with what is involved with real healing. There are enough notable exceptions to this generalization to confirm that for many centuries healing, in itself, remained a given in Christian communities, as among other populations. But on an official level the churches strove to appropriate and control the natural healing abilities of Christians rather than developing and harnessing them. The general attitude has been one of fear. Why this should be the case is part of the larger story of how the radical and revolutionary movement begun by Jesus, Paul and others sank beneath the horizon of accommodation to Roman imperialism and the struggle against paganism.

C. THE REAL TEST

For me the most important point of reference has always been the historical Jesus. I am convinced that healing was at the heart of what Jesus' was doing and that it formed the core of his thinking about the new society he was hoping to build, to which he gave the name the kingdom of God.

In the section below titled Jesus the Healer I will set out some of my analysis of the biblical record on Jesus' healing.

II. ARE THERE THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST HOLISTIC HEALING?

A. "MIRACLES"

Since the advent of scientific objectivism there has been a massive reorientation of people's thinking about healing. Imagine, for instance, what sort of explanation people might offer, within our scientifically oriented culture, for such a fact as spontaneous healing? Spontaneous remissions are well documented but these events seem to fall outside the limits of natural laws and there is little understanding of the causal factors at work.

The term "miracle" has been used and abused⁸ by those seeking to find refuge in the medieval understanding of the supernatural to explain an event that appears inexplicable in terms of the laws of

⁷ This suggestion usually seems to rest on the assertion that all religions are, at heart, neo-Vedantism.

⁸ I take so-called "faith healing" to be part of the fundamentalist response to secularism. While there may, indeed, be instances of genuine healing, I think it is more common that such healing involves a methodical diverting of the mind which in itself can bring short-term relief or suppression of symptoms.

nature. Is it necessary to suppose that an act of God—from outside the framework of human history—is responsible in any or all such instances?

The impossibility of interpreting incidences of holistic healing using the canons of scientific research is a belief held by many.

As an example of the sort of blankness that can enter into such discussions, a report on healing ministries prepared for the Church of England⁹ adopts without demure the straightjacket imposed by an exclusively medical way of thinking. The report discusses policies, procedures, training of counselors, liturgical matters etc. It accepts the categories of prayer, sacrament, spiritual gifts. But nowhere does it discuss how Jesus healed, how healing takes place, or how one can learn to heal!

Regarding biblical and other healing the writers accept the strictures of the scientific definition of “miracle,” which is to say that for them they are inexplicable. While they piously affirm that “miracles” can and do happen and that these belong to a category of non-natural (i.e. divine) occurrences, I don’t think it is unfair to observe that such piety masks a deeper despair about the matter. For such a mindset, there can be only two alternatives—the medical model or unexplainable mystery. On a practical level, there is science or nothing. The church’s healing ministry, then, is relegated to serving as an adjunct to the former.

B. CHRISTOLOGY

Do the stories of Jesus’ healings present “miraculous” occurrences that cannot be explained in human terms but require a supernaturalistic explanation? Or, are can they construed in a way that accords with human nature?

Many have commented on the fact that what frequently gets put forward as an “orthodox” view of the Christ tends to bear more resemblance to the heresy of Docetism than the balanced approach of Chalcedon. Docetism is the opinion that the divine personage of Jesus only appeared to be human. The classic Chalcedonian formula of the two natures, divine and human, within the one person of Christ has tended, more often than not to result in the divine being emphasized at the expense of the human.

To cite one authority, Thomas Aquinas’s view on the matter of the supernatural can be summarized as “Grace does not replace nature but perfects it.”¹⁰ Even for those who hold a strong view of the divine, it is hard to think that the human simply disappears from sight. It cannot do justice to the created order to view it as somehow in opposition to God’s perfection.¹¹ A theological understanding of the supernatural would not detract from the human nature of the Christ. The created order would appear to be wide and

⁹ *A Time to Heal: A Report for the House of Bishops on the Healing Ministry*. London: Church House Publishing, 2000.

¹⁰ Gilson, 343 “Grace does not suppress nature...nor do the supernatural infused virtues do away with the natural virtues; on the contrary, they add to them and they bring them to perfection.” See also *Contra Gentiles*, III, 21 “Anything which tends toward its own perfection, tends toward the divine model.” Also, Luibheid and Roques 1987, Chapter 3, 154–155: “By grace and a God-given power, it does things which belong naturally and supernaturally to God, things performed by him transcendentally and revealed in the [celestial] hierarchy for the permitted imitation of God-loving minds.”

¹¹ Gilson 1956, 184.

deep enough to support the idea that Jesus' healings are fully human, even if they cannot be accommodated with the interpretive frame provided by our cultural setting.

C. NEGATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY¹²

When we turn to considering a human origin for miracles, we come up against certain strongly represented currents within Christian tradition that tend to make it hard for some to see anything positive originating from humanity. There is a strain of thought, frequently traced back to Augustine of Hippo (4th Century), that places a heavy emphasis on human cupidity. Martin Luther's position was that human nature was corrupt at a fundamental level and that human freedom was under compulsion. Calvin held that, while human nature might be good in itself, humanity is irredeemably morally fallen. Views such as these have led many Christians to a position of severe suspicion of anything that smacked of the "merely human." "We are all sinners," is a phrase one hears all too often and which many people take to heart much too seriously.

The Dalai Lama has told of how when he and his monks first travelled to the West they could not understand why so many people were depressed and psychologically disturbed with strong feelings of self-loathing. Nothing in their own culture had prepared them for this. They were confronting one of the enduring afflictions of Christian culture.

III. HEALING IS A NATURAL PHENOMENON

Against such negativity I want to assert the essential goodness of human nature as part of God's creation. This provides a fundamentally affirmative basis for appreciating the natural healing potential of the average human being. Jesus was not a superhuman figure to whom we are unable to relate but a human with peculiarly highly developed healing abilities. However extraordinary, his healing was not a divine prerogative reserved for Jesus as the Son of God alone. We have only to think of the healings performed by the biblical prophets Elijah and Elisha¹³ to appreciate that healing was a feature of the prophetic role. In Mark Jesus refers to himself as a prophet.¹⁴

When Jesus draws on "divine power"¹⁵ what is happening? The fact that his healing required cooperation on the part of those who were to be healed is a clear indication that we are not dealing with a divine imposition that overrides the human. Suspicion, skepticism and doubt proved to be real hindrances to healing, as he discovered in his own town.¹⁶

¹² Here I am using the term "anthropology" to refer to the philosophical or theological study of human nature, not the modern social science. By "negative" I am referring to doctrines that put forward a pessimistic evaluation of human nature.

¹³ See 1 Kings 17:8–24, 2 Kings 4:8–37, 2 Kings 5:1–19.

¹⁴ Mark 6:4. "Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.'"

¹⁵ Luke 5:17 "One day, while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting nearby (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal."

¹⁶ Mark 6:5 "And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them."

Is it possible that Jesus' healing power could have a sinister source—non-human and non-divine? The question is important because it exposes a common dualistic mindset. According to this mindset there is a fundamental split between good and evil principles. People who hold such views tend to maintain an attitude of suspicion and wariness toward others and the world around them. I have dealt in some detail in another article¹⁷ with the accusation, brought by some Pharisees,¹⁸ that his healing power was attributable to Satan. When Jesus squelches the charge that he is in league with Satan, he is doing more than defending the legitimacy of his healing. He is demonstrating the faulty logic behind supposing true healing can have a less than healthy origin. Whereas disease, at times, may be attributable to the operation of evil in human life,¹⁹ healing brings a return to health, a restoration of the created order. (The Latin word *salus* means healthy and is the root of our word salvation). If this principle applies for Jesus, it can apply for us.²⁰

Perhaps, most telling is the fact that Jesus is able to teach others how to heal. The sending of the twelve in Mark 6²¹ was preceded by a period of preparation during which the disciples received training in healing.²² The gospel narratives take for granted a natural capacity to heal that only needs to be developed in accordance with correct understandings and with the appropriate discipline. After the crucifixion the healing activity of the early Christian communities continued throughout the New Testament period, at least.²³ We can infer that not only the ability to heal but also the capability to teach others to heal was sustained.

IV. JESUS THE HEALER

I take largely at face value the stories of Jesus' healings. However, I do not, like many conservative biblical scholars, see them as proofs of Jesus' divinity and, unlike many liberal critics, I see them as more than merely metaphor.

¹⁷ *Healing Power: Jesus Responds to Charges of Satanism.*

¹⁸ Mark 3:23-27.

¹⁹ Luke 13:16 "'And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?'"

²⁰ This is a separate question from whether some forms of "healing" are indeed unhealthy or whether some healing exploits connections to "spirits" in an unhealthy way.

²¹ Mark 6:7-13 "He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.' So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them."

²² Mark 3:13-15 "He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons."

²³ Paul lists healing among the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:9, 28). The fact that Paul says this gift is "activated" by the Spirit should not deflect us toward supernaturalistic interpretations any more than Jesus' statement that he heals by "the finger of God" should (Lk. 11:20). Acts supplies narratives of the healing activity of Peter, Paul and Philip (3:1-10, 5:15-16, 8:4-8, 14:8-11, 28:8-9). Paul's blindness was healed through the laying on of hands (Acts 9:17-19). James 5:13-18 contains instructions for healing ministry within its community.

Before looking at the biblical record of Jesus as healer,²⁴ I need to make a general observation about the state of New Testament studies in regard to this matter. One of the most highly developed literary-critical and hermeneutical sciences that exist has astonishingly little to say about a key factor in the narrative of Jesus' ministry. Healing is analyzed in its literary, political, theological and even, occasionally, socio-cultural perspectives. But rarely in terms of healing itself.²⁵ One can only assume that the scientific mindset makes it very difficult for scholars to see, let alone appreciate, a culturally determined phenomenon that is so at odds with the modern worldview.

A. JESUS HEALS ON TWO LEVELS

In coming to grips with the healing activity of Jesus I am making use of a distinction, that appears in the anthropological literature, between "illness" and "disease."²⁶ Disease refers to ill health resulting from some physical, mental or spiritual issue. Disease affects individuals, sick persons. Illness, on the other hand, has to do with social relations, with the social consequences of disease. For instance, having a disease in biblical Israel could result in social isolation, exclusion from the community and destitution. Lepers typically occupied a social location at the bottom of the pyramid.

(It is not too hard to think of examples in our own world of social isolation and other consequences of disease, i.e. "illness." Persons with physical disability must deal with issues of access. Those with schizophrenia suffer the stigma of mental illness. Depression frequently leads to a cycle of further disease and consequent poverty. People suffering addictions bear a stigma, are frequently criminalized and forced by circumstances into crime.)

Jesus' healed on both levels of sickness and illness.²⁷

B. HOW JESUS HEALED DISEASE

Jesus does not perform rituals of purification as the priests would have done. He is a traditional or folk healer.²⁸ He accepts fully the culturally specific concepts of disease and health which obtain in his social setting such as spirit possession. His healing frequently involved physical contact with people's bodies.²⁹ He also heals at a distance.³⁰ His healing methods include the use of a word,³¹ touch, saliva and mud, or

²⁴ In what follows I shall steer close to the narratives of Jesus' healings in Mark's gospel. Q does give importance to healing but we need to look to the Synoptics for any narrative accounts. For the most part, I conflate Jesus' healings and exorcisms under the one term "healing."

²⁵ Even in the case of the exceptional scholar (N.T. Wright) who is humble enough to acknowledge his neglect of the subject, we find that, in the end, he has almost nothing to say about it; see Borg and Wright 1999, 222-225.

²⁶ Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology* 2000, 25-24.

²⁷ Contra Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology* 2000, 60, 142, for whom Jesus cures only illness, not disease. Here the suggestion of despair is even stronger.

²⁸ See Pilch, *Sickness and Healing* 1991, 197-200. The term "shamanism" has become loaded with new age meanings. I'm not prepared at this point to offer an assessment of the term's relevance to a discussion of Jesus.

²⁹ Mark 1:30 "Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them."

³⁰ Mark 7:32 "They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and

incantations.³² For several decades New Testament scholars have argued over whether such practices reflected an awareness of (particularly Egyptian) magic on Jesus' part.³³ At the very least, they demonstrate Jesus' understanding of the role that the mind plays in healing.

In Mark 5 a woman with an issue of blood approaches Jesus from behind with confidence that she will be healed simply by touching his cloak. Jesus, we are told, felt power (*dunamis* or energy) go out of him when the poor woman touched him. The power to heal is transmitted even through Jesus' clothing. It is a physical force.³⁴ In brief, Jesus was some sort of energy healer. He healed with energy. During the latter part of the 19th and early 20th Century an offensive was waged, by the recently professionalized medical community, against energy therapies of all kinds. This campaign has left a legacy of prejudice that is hard to overcome to this day. However, the evidence seems clear enough regarding Jesus.

A direct reading of the so-called transfiguration in Mark 9:2–8³⁵ has commonly been obscured by theological interpretations. Jesus' energetic properties—"his clothes became dazzling white"—along with the fact that his disciples are included in the experience make this story relevant to our discussion.

1. PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING JESUS' HEALING OF DISEASE

From the gospel narratives we can infer certain understandings about the conditions that apply around healing.

1. Disease represents a deterioration from an original state of goodness. Healing is a restoring of the created order.
2. The diagnosis of a disease includes all the behavioral and somatic symptoms presented by a patient in addition to the specifically physical or mental aspects of the problem.³⁶

touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.' And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly."

³¹ Mark 1:41 "Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I do choose. Be made clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean."

³² Mark 7:32 "They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened.' And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly."

³³ Smith 1981.

³⁴ Mark 5:27, 30 "She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.'" "Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?'" The whole episode is told in 5:25–34. Note also Mark 6:56 "And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market-places, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed."

³⁵ Mark 9:2–8 "Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus."

³⁶ Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology* 2000, 199.

3. Healing comes from inside, not from an external, supernatural imposition. Attitude or “faith” is crucial.³⁷
4. Health is understood as a person’s own responsibility. The leper in Mark 1 approaches Jesus and even offers him an opportunity of refusing his request for healing.³⁸ The woman with a hemorrhage takes her healing into her own hands.
5. Healing is not seen in terms of extirpating the immediate organic causes of disease, nor simply alleviating symptoms. It affects the whole person in their social as well as physical dimensions. (Re)establishing health is understood in terms of happiness.

What we have listed is enough to demonstrate that Jesus’ healing is supported by a model of how healing occurs. This model, if we had adequate information to elaborate it further, would constitute a radical alternative—though not inimical—to the one that underlies modern medicine. It is important to realize that there are other—and equally valid—ways of knowing which have been obscured by our recent cultural investment in science. It can come as a surprise, for instance, to learn that there are more people in our world receiving healing attention from Traditional Chinese Medicine than Western medicine. TCM has behind it, perhaps, the most highly developed theoretical basis of any of the alternative healing modalities. But there is huge world-historical experience with a whole range of magic, shamanic, and traditional healing practices from which we could be learning.

C. HOW JESUS HEALED ILLNESS

Jesus healed sinners and outcasts. His healings paralleled his welcoming and public intercourse, especially dining, with such sorts of people. As well as healing them of sickness, Jesus restored people to their communities. Some lepers, for instance, were restored to their family and kin but also to the covenant people of Israel.³⁹ A possessed boy was restored to his father.⁴⁰ The Gerasene demoniac was told to “go

³⁷ Luke 17:19 “Your faith has made you well.”

³⁸ Mark 1:40 “A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, ‘If you choose, you can make me clean.’”

³⁹ Mark 1:40–45 “A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, ‘If you choose, you can make me clean.’ Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I do choose. Be made clean!’ Immediately the leprosy* left him, and he was made clean. After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.’”

⁴⁰ Mark 9:17–29 “Someone from the crowd answered him, ‘Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so.’ He answered them, ‘You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.’ And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it threw the boy into convulsions, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, ‘How long has this been happening to him?’ And he said, ‘From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes.’ Immediately the father of the child cried out, ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’ When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, ‘You spirit that keep this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!’ After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, ‘He is dead.’ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand.²⁸ When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ He said to them, ‘This kind can come out only through prayer.’”

home to your friends.”⁴¹ The woman with a hemorrhage, impoverished by many doctors, was restored to her family. More than that, she was addressed as “daughter,” in comparison with the (rich) daughter of Jairus, a ruler of the Synagogue. This status elevation was a full restoration of her humanity. As well, a bent woman was, as a result of being healed, now able to live as a daughter of Abraham, a full member of the people of Israel.⁴²

Jesus was reconstituting the people formed by the Covenant between God and Israel. Every healing or exorcism was a gathering of the (social) exiles. These restorations of individuals to the community were a first step in gathering in the lost and reconstituting Israel as the people of God. The parable of the lost sheep is about the need to bring about wholeness through including the marginalized.⁴³

In Mark 2 Jesus heals a paralytic with the words, “Your sins are forgiven.”⁴⁴ To remove “sin,” the label placed on people by religious authorities under the purity code, is to heal illness, the social consequences

⁴¹ Mark 5:1–20 “They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; and he shouted at the top of his voice, ‘What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.’ For he had said to him, ‘Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!’ Then Jesus⁺ asked him, ‘What is your name?’ He replied, ‘My name is Legion; for we are many.’ He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. ¹¹Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; and the unclean spirits begged him, ‘Send us into the swine; let us enter them.’ So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned in the lake. The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. Those who had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus to leave their neighbourhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus⁻ refused, and said to him, ‘Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.’ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed.”

⁴² Luke 13:10–17 “Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, ‘Woman, you are set free from your ailment.’ When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. ¹⁴But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, ‘There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.’ But the Lord answered him and said, ‘You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?’ When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.”

⁴³ Lk. 15:3-7 “So he told them this parable: ‘Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.” Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.’”

⁴⁴ Mark 2:5–11 “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ‘Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, ‘Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to

of disease. In addressing himself to official categories, his ministry to individuals can be seen to be part and parcel of his public ministry.

There is a political-social context to his healings. The exorcisms in Mark address questions of social oppression. The situation of the people under Roman occupation is reflected in the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac.⁴⁵ “My name is Legion; for we are many,” the demons say, using a specifically military term. Additional military terms ensue as the “troop” of swine “charges” down to the lake’s edge for a climax reminiscent of the drowning of Pharaoh’s army in the Sea of Reeds.⁴⁶

The pursuit of wholeness through healing and restoration is integral to Jesus’ social project. The people are restored to health at the same time as they are restored to community and communities are restored to covenantal relations. Healing, then, is seen as justice.

The question of authority figured centrally in this public activity from the outset.⁴⁷ Normally reserved for religious-political leaders, authority now becomes Jesus’ through his control of “unclean spirits.”⁴⁸ As the only way in which Jesus exercised power within his social context, healing allowed him to occupy public space and gained him an audience for his prophetic voice.

His exercise of this authority pushes the boundaries of what is permissible and brings him into conflict with the religious authorities. In forgiving the sins of the paralytic in Mark 2, Jesus is accused of blasphemy. This comes after he has contravened the prerogatives of the priests in his healing of a leper in Mark 1. The purity code embodied in the Torah sets out requirements for the treatment of leprosy. A priest will diagnose ritual impurity where two colours of skin are involved. The result of such a declaration is social isolation.⁴⁹ After the diagnosis is reached, a priest must preside over ritual purification and make a declaration of cleanliness.

the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven”, or to say, “Stand up and take your mat and walk”? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins—he said to the paralytic—‘I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.’”

⁴⁵ Mark 5:9 “Then Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ He replied, ‘My name is Legion; for we are many.’” See further Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark’s Gospel* 2001, 140-148, Horsley, *Jesus and the Powers: Conflict, Covenant and the Hope of the Poor* 2011, 110-129. I do not think that spirit possession—understood persuasively by him as introjection of alien forces—can be interpreted entirely in political terms but Horsley’s analysis is cogent as far as it goes.

⁴⁶ Exodus 15:1–10.

⁴⁷ Mark 1:22 “They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”

⁴⁸ Mark 1:23–27 “Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.’ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent, and come out of him!’ And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, ‘What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’”

⁴⁹ Leviticus 14:45–46 “Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ As long as they have the disease they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the camp.” See Lev. 13:2-14:57.

When the man approaches Jesus for healing we can infer that he has already been to the priests and been rejected by them. Jesus is indignant⁵⁰ at their treatment of him. He heals him by touching the man. This touch conveys many things. Jesus is assuming the priestly role of healing. He demonstrates his willingness to have social contact with and include an ostracized man thus subverting the purity code. The disease is not communicated by Jesus' touch, a fact that undermines the message of this code. In effect, Jesus' healing redraws the boundary between "clean" and "unclean."

After healing him Jesus sends the man to the priests to show himself and "witness against them." The term is that for confronting one's opponents publicly.⁵¹ The liberation of a sinner has provoked conflict and the defenders of the Law are viewing Jesus' actions as lawless defiance. They will escalate their attacks on him and he is forced to reformulate his overall strategy.

This strategy will centre around a rejection of the monopoly over healing exercised by the temple system and its priests. Jesus declares that the priests and High Priests, through their control of the sacrificial system, are not fulfilling their supposed role as brokers of God's patronal power and covenant love.⁵² Jesus' presents an alternative to the Temple system.⁵³ He acts as a broker of God's power in breaking that monopoly and opening the door for the power of forgiveness to flow freely, outside the sacrificial system, to the poor and outcasts.

When he declares that he heals with the "finger of God,"⁵⁴ Jesus is presenting his healings as signs of the Kingdom of God. He is performing God's prototypical act of liberation. It is through Jesus' release of the power of the reign of God that the people of the exodus liberation are able to be reconstituted. "Something greater than the temple is here."⁵⁵ Ultimately, Jesus is drawn to Jerusalem to stage a very public set of prophetic actions denouncing the temple.

Along the way, Jesus sent the disciples,⁵⁶ to whom he had given personal instruction, out to teach and heal.⁵⁷ There was strategic purpose behind this decision. Healing was a means of extending the Jesus movement. His project of teaching and exorcism needed to be spread to the villages of Galilee. The fact

⁵⁰ There is a credible textual variant at Mark 1:41 that supplies "anger," "ire" or "indignation" in place of the frequently translated "compassion" or "pity."

⁵¹ See Mark 6:11, 13:9.

⁵² Mark 3:1-4 "Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Come forward.' Then he said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent."

⁵³ Herzog, *Prophet and Teacher: An Introduction to the Historical Jesus* 2005, 82-91.

⁵⁴ Lk. 11:20 "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the reign of God has come upon you."

⁵⁵ Mt. 12:6.

⁵⁶ The term shifts to "apostles" (Mark 6:30) as they fulfill the function of carrying the mission forward.

⁵⁷ Mark 6:7 "He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits." Mark 6:13 "They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them." Mark 6:30 "The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught."

that an apparent competitor⁵⁸ was treated as assisting in this effort shows how the emphasis was on extending the movement, certainly not on the social status of Jesus or the disciples nor on any theological significance of his “person.”

V. CONCLUSION

The picture that emerges from, especially, Mark’s gospel of Jesus as healer-teacher-prophet is a rich and meaningful one. Gregory Baum, a theologian I frequently find myself in agreement with, has said that the tendency in some—particularly “Protestant”—quarters toward an early understanding of Jesus, before the emergence of the doctrines of the Incarnation and Trinity,⁵⁹ is not persuasive. “Disregarding the world-historical drama of redemption revealed in the story of the man Jesus robs so many biblical passages of their meaning that the New Testament would fall apart.”⁶⁰ I think it is truer to say that the Roman Catholic Magisterium would fall apart. Indeed, many biblical passages, including those in Paul’s letters, that have consistently been read in terms of “the world-historical drama of redemption” begin to make more sense when read in the light of the social-political objectives of the movement continued by Paul and his co-workers.⁶¹ In some quarters, at least, Christians and the church have been able to hold onto the truth that social justice—and not doctrine—is at the heart of the gospel.

However, it is less common for them to appreciate fully how Jesus’ practice of justice is intimately connected to his healing work.

When I reflect on it from a Christian perspective, I see what I am doing with CFQ to be a sort of latter day participation in the project begun by Jesus, Paul and others. The preacher in me wants to draw some connecting lines from Jesus to our own times and look for ways in which it might be possible to pursue similar objectives. Of course, healing can apply to our world in many ways—ecological, economic, sociopolitical. But at its base it centres around the health of people’s bodies and that of the communities they live in. Reclaiming for ourselves what healing means and undertaking to learn how to heal ourselves and others can, at a minimum, help us understand that fact.

⁵⁸ Mark 9:38–40 “John said to him, ‘Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.’ But Jesus said, ‘Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us.’”

⁵⁹ I would add resurrection. As odd as it may seem, I find myself, of these three, most favourably inclined to the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of the clear expressions in the Pauline literature of a recurring experience of something to which they gave the name “spirit.”

⁶⁰ Baum 2005, 131.

⁶¹ See the works in the reading list by Neil Elliott and the volumes on Paul by Richard A. Horsley.

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