

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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SAFE SECTS: BOTTLING UP CHRIST'S HEALING

by Gary North

In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the LORD of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction. In that day shall there be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the LORD because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them. And the LORD shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the LORD in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the LORD, and perform it. And the LORD shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the LORD, and he shall be entreated of them, and shall heal them. In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance (Isaiah 19:18-25).

God is the healer of men and institutions. He is the healer of the nations in history, before His Second Coming.¹ The healer is also the judge, and His judgment is closely connected to His healing.

To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For the LORD shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left. And he shall say, Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted, Which did eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offerings? let them rise up and help you, and be your protection. See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revengers upon the enemy. Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people (Deut. 32:35-43).

If God heals in history, then He must bring judgment in history. To deny the one is to deny the other. Yet the modern church denies either or both of these aspects of God's work in history. Churches do not want judgment, for it begins at the house of the Lord (I Peter 4:17). So, they reject the biblical idea of healing. They are consistent — consistently wrong.

Calvinist Rationalism vs. Physical Healing

The Reformed Presbyterian churches are less likely than the other traditions to practice the required healing ceremony prescribed by the New Testament:

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him (James 5:14-15).

The American Reformed Presbyterian churches are still laboring under the burden of Scottish common sense rationalism, an Enlightenment philosophy. They have not understood the comprehensive nature of Cornelius Van Til's devastating critique of all rationalist, common-ground philosophies, including the "Old Princeton" apologetic tradition. They interpret this passage rationally — stripped of all transcendence.

The best example of this older rationalist approach to New Testament healing is Jay Adams' explanation of the anointing of the sick with oil. This liturgical requirement is interpreted not as the formal invocation of the healing power of God by the church, but as the best medical technique known to the early church² — a self-conscious rejection of the judicial meaning of oil in the Old Testament, including its connection with the Holy Spirit. Why, if this technique is strictly medical, are the elders to be called to anoint the sick person, and not a physician? Why is this anointing an ecclesiastical function? Adams does not even raise the question, let alone attempt to answer it.

To proclaim the power today of God's physical healing of individuals as part of the modern church's liturgy is to bring down the contemptuous wrath of at least the more vociferous Calvinist seminary professors. They mince no words: such a view of the church's authority is Pentecostal. Writes Reformed Theological Seminary librarian and amillennialist John R. Muether, who was Westminster Seminary's librarian when he wrote this:

Gary North, a professed convert to charismatic thought, writes: [Pentecostals] recognized that God moves in

1. Gary North, *Healer of the Nations: Biblical Blueprints for International Relations* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

2. Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1970), pp. 107-8.

history to heal the sick and dying. Always in the back of any Pentecostal's mind is the nagging question: 'If God can heal a sick person, why can't he heal a sick society?'³

This highly confident critic of "charismatic thought" seems utterly unaware that the Anglican community has held healing services from the beginning. To him, a church healing service is just modern Pentecostalism—deviant and heretical. (As a seminary librarian, he needs to read some of the books on church history that he catalogues.) That my wife was healed in one service from an affliction that had burdened her for 25 years means nothing to this hard-nosed Enlightenment Calvinist. He is clear: only the Calvinist Presbyterian tradition is true, and to say anything else is to adopt relativism:

Gary North draws this startling conclusion about the "healing services" [note the contemptuous use of quotation marks—G.N.] that his Tyler, Texas church [a Reformed Episcopal Church congregation, a denomination dating back to the 1870's—G.N.] recently adopted: "[The healing] did not lead to tongues-speaking, but it did lead to a new willingness to accept the fact that no one ecclesiastical organization has all the answers." This ecclesiastical relativism is astonishing from an allegedly Reformed author, but it is consistent with contemporary evangelism.⁴

Notice the mindset: the church of Jesus Christ is the Reformed Presbyterian tradition, and that tradition only; any other belief is "ecclesiastical relativism." An interesting idea, indeed. Why, then, has the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition always accepted the validity of baptism by other Trinitarian denominations, going so far as to declare rebaptism (Anabaptism) heretical? The critic does not tell us. He is a defender of strict Calvinist sectarianism, pure and simple; his tradition has all the truth, and no other tradition, no other "accent" in God's universal church brings anything of unique value to the communion table. The division of labor in Christ's church (I Corinthians 12) only applies within the Reformed Presbyterian tradition, this man is saying. Wherever such a sectarian view exists, there we find tiny churches without cultural influence, with defeatist eschatologies to justify their irrelevance. This defender of political pluralism,⁵ meaning political polytheism,⁶ dismisses all those who believe that the church of Jesus Christ is wider than Presbyterianism with what he regards as his coup d'grace: they are defenders of "ecclesiastical pluralism."⁷ That this was also the implicit accusation of the Papacy against Luther and Calvin does not seem to have occurred to him.

Charismatic Dispensationalism vs. Cultural Healing

My original point regarding healing is true: the charis-

3. John R. Muether, "The Theonomic Attraction," in William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey (eds.), *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 1990), p. 251.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

5. John R. Muether, "The Era of Common Grace: Living Between the 'Already' and the 'Not Yet,'" *RTS Ministry*, IX (Summer 1990). For a critique of his theology, see Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), ch. 8.

6. Gary North, *Political Polytheism: The Myth of Pluralism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

7. Muether, *Theonomy*, p. 253.

matics preach and practice bodily healing, but they deny the possibility of cultural healing. Why? Because they are dispensationalists. This puts them in a difficult position. On the one hand, traditional dispensationalists who set the theological and institutional standards of the position agree with Mr. Muether. The gift of healing is understood as exclusively charismatic. They reject it as anti-dispensational. This gift is not part of the so-called Church Age. The dispensationalists who control Dallas Theological Seminary fire faculty members who defend healing and tongues-speaking.⁸ Both of these signs ended with the closing of the canon of Scripture, the orthodox dispensationalist insists. Both are outside this dispensation.

On the other hand, by preaching physical healing through the authority of the church, the charismatics raise a crucial issue: establishing the limits of God's healing in history. God heals individuals, not cultures, insist the traditional charismatics. By what theology can such limits be placed on God's healing? Dispensationalism? But dispensationalism denies the legitimacy of all church-invoked, church-administered healing, not just cultural healing. Traditional dispensationalism is in this sense consistent; charismatic dispensationalism isn't.

The charismatics are caught: to the extent that they defend dispensationalism, they are in violation of dispensationalism's rejection of the formal power of healing. Yet to the extent that they extend their doctrine of healing to anything other than the individual, they depart from the narrow pietism of dispensationalism, which the charismatic movement has long embraced. The majority of them prefer to live with this schizophrenia rather than think through the social implications of healing. A few, however, have read David Chilton's *Paradise Restored* (1985) and have become postmillennialists, despite the official declaration by the Assemblies of God hierarchy in 1987 that postmillennialism is heretical. An eschatological war is now inevitable. So is a judicial war: the question of the continuing role of biblical law—in the hearts of believers, but also in the church, the family, the state, and society in general.

Question: Which theology today accepts church-invoked healing, but without placing institutional limits on its efficacy? There is only one: Christian Reconstruction.

Conclusion

Everybody brings something to the communion table. Every Christian group does. Each brings its traditions, good and bad, right and wrong. As progressive sanctification takes place over time, the good steadily displaces the bad. Thus, ecclesiastical division produces precision, but this division will be overcome over time, with new creeds and new resolutions to seeming paradoxes. The church will progressively conform to the truth.

This is bad news for the sect mentality. Holed up in their churches, desperate to avoid responsibility for anything outside their ecclesiastical sanctuaries, pessimillennial sectarians try to keep Christ's healing power sealed up inside their little monopolies, where it is safe. Like new wine in old wineskins, this healing power cannot be contained. It is about to burst the wineskins.

8. Dismissed: Three Professors Part Paths With Dallas," *Christianity Today* (Feb. 5, 1988); Jack Deere, "Being Right Isn't Enough," in *Power Encounters*, edited by Kevin Springer (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), ch. 8.

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