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LITURGICAL NOTES

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No. 2: A Liturgy of Healing

The Bible has a great deal to say about sickness and healing. To understand it rightly, we have to bear in mind that man was created as the particular symbol of God (Gen. 1:26,27), and the universe is the general symbol of God (since all creation reveals—symbolizes—its Creator). Thus, the foundational level of all human intellectual apprehension is the symbolic. The true meaning of any thing or event can be found only when it is seen as revealing (signifying or symbolizing) God and His relations to man and the cosmos.¹ This Biblical creationist perspective inverts the normal (sinful) way of thinking, which assumes that things and events have meaning *in themselves*, and that any symbolic dimension (which may or may not be present) is *added* to the fundamental non-symbolic and self-contained meaning of things and events.

Applying this to the subject of sickness and healing, we find that under the influence of rationalism, the orthodox churches in recent centuries have often maintained the following notions. First, that since the healings in the Bible invariably have a symbolic and topological meaning, such healings were appropriate only for the periods in which special revelation was being given. With the completion of the work of redemption and the close of the canon of Scripture, no such sign-healings are needed. This approach assumes that the symbolic dimension is special, and adventitious to the "brute fact" of healing itself. In fact, the symbolic dimension is the primary one.

Secondly, following on this, rationalistic orthodoxy has downplayed the Biblical evidence which indicates that the coming of the New Covenant is the coming of an age of healing, and that a healing ministry is part of the normal work of the church. The tendency in rationalistic orthodoxy is to eliminate as much as possible the mystical or non-rational element in faith and worship. This tendency is nowhere better seen than in the "Zwinglian" view of the presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist, advocated by virtually all evangelical and Reformed groups for several centuries now.² In view of this, it is no wonder that the healing ministry has all but disappeared from such churches.

Predictably there has been a reaction against the rationalism of orthodoxy, and we see it in the cultivated non-rational

experientialism of the charismatic movement. Unfortunately, the charismatic movement tends to err as much on the one side as orthodoxy does on the other. Not infrequently, hard theological reflection is seen as damaging to the irrational work of the "Spirit," and all too often, irrational experiences are sought for their own sake, and in terms of what we must call (with severe frankness) a pleasure principle. The massive quest for pleasurable ecstatic experiences is part and parcel of a uniquely American kind of Christianity, which is of a piece with the American "fun and games ethic" as a whole. (This is not to say that rationalistic orthodoxy is necessarily preferable to pentecostalism; only that their problems differ.)

The charismatic theologians note rightly that the New Covenant is a time of healing, and that the Bible indicates a certain expectation that God will heal the diseases and afflictions of His people. Such promises were found in the provisional administration of grace to Israel under the Old Covenant (as in Ex. 15:26; Dt. 7:15; Prov. 4:22). It is particularly with the ministry of Christ and His disciples, however, that we find abundant healings manifested, as tokens of the nature of the New Covenant era.

The problem that most charismatic theologians have with applying this data is that they are Americans, afflicted with the overly-individualistic approach to life which characterizes American Baptist Cultures. In fact, all sickness signifies the curse on man for original sin, and all healing (whether mediated through a physician or through the church) signifies salvation in Christ. As Job's friends had to learn, however, this does not mean that any particular affliction which comes upon an individual indicates some particular sin on his part. And it follows, then, that we cannot say to each and every afflicted Christian, "Jesus wants you well." There may be many reasons why Jesus does not want a particular person well at a particular time.

By itself, this fact eliminates virtually all encouragement to pray for healing. We may well just seek to relax fatalistically in whatever Providence seems to decree for us. It is at this point that the charismatic theologians have a salutary corrective to offer, for in fact we do have a general (not a particular) warrant for believing that the normal Christian experience is one of health, not of sickness. This is especially true in terms of the coming of the New Covenant. God has judicially declared the world cleansed of evil; that is, God has re-symbolized the world from darkness to light. This re-symbolization or redefinition is the foundation for the re-creation of the world. God has re-symbolized man as healed,

1. This is the doctrine of natural revelation, particularly as developed in consistent creationist form by Cornelius Van Til.

2. For a corrective to this view, see Ronald Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Tyler, TX: GDS Press, 1982). Available from the publisher (708 Hamvasy, Tyler, TX 75701) for the discount price of \$8.50, postpaid (list price: \$12.95).

3. This phenomenon is discussed at length in James B. Jordan, ed., *The Failure of the American Baptist Culture*. Christianity and Civilization No. 1 (Tyler, TX: GDS Press, 1982). Available from GDS Press, 708 Hamvasy, Tyler, TX 75701 for \$9.95, postpaid.

and since the symbolic dimension is primary, this means that man is to be physically healed as a consequence. Thus, the healings performed by Jesus were not "merely" symbols of Spiritual healing, but were tokens of the fact that physical healing is normally a consequence of Spiritual healing.

Rampant illness in our society as a whole simply indicates that we are under the Egyptian curse, because of secular humanism and the refusal of the Christian churches to deal seriously with it.⁴ Reformation and revival will do the most to bring about deliverance from disease. All the same, since the Church is the society of the saved, a ministry of physical healing is an important part of the work of the Church, both ministerially and evangelistically.

Problems with the Modern Healing Movement

The preeminent problem with the modern healing movement in America is the fact that it is not connected with the God-ordained ministry of the Church. This is part and parcel of the American ecclesiological heresy, as seen in the abundance of "parachurch" organizations which siphon off time, money, and personnel from the Church.⁵ Briefly, we may say that this basic problem has manifested itself in three plagues.

1. The healing movement has been plagued with autonomous man-centered ministries. The Biblical method is for the elders of the church as a group to pray over an individual, with confession of sin. The modern movement focuses attention on the claims of a few "Spiritual giants" who ostensibly carry a gift of healing around with themselves. 1 Corinthians 12:9 does refer to a gift of healing which is bestowed on certain members of the church for the benefit of all. There is no Biblical warrant, however, for such persons to leave the church and engage in personality-cult oriented, parachurch, "healing crusades" of their own.⁶ The circus-like atmosphere which pervades such meetings and television ministries serves to alienate sober Christians, and turn them away from any consideration of the Biblical healing ministry.

2. Part and parcel of the previous plague is the plague of charlatanry. A few years back, it was possible to write and obtain a "healer's kit" which would teach one how to become rich as a charlatan healer.⁷ It is well known, and has been repeatedly documented, that certain famous "healers" have carefully worked out methods of controlling what kinds of afflicted persons are permitted to "come forward" to be healed. Woe to the person who tries to get in line without an approval slip which indicates that he has been checked out beforehand! Well-known healing ministry hospitals refuse to take under care any but the simplest kinds of sicknesses, to keep their rate of success high. The phenomenon of "slaying in the Spirit" is, sometimes at least, accomplished with the assistance of cattle prods. Naturally, this type of fakery serves

4. For instance, in spite of all the yelling about abortion, and all the rhetoric about abortion's being murder, how many evangelical leaders have come out and demanded the death penalty for conspiracy to commit abortion? Has anybody? No wonder God does not take evangelicalism seriously!

5. I am not opposed to all parachurch ministries. They are the Protestant equivalent to the monastic orders of the Catholic churches, and are an inevitable sociological bipolar counterpart to the fragmented ecclesiastical situation in American protestantism. The problem lies in the normalization of these abnormal parachurch ministries, and their exaltation over the supposed deadness of "churchianity." On this see James B. Jordan, cd., *The Reconstruction of the Christian Church*. Christianity and Civilization No. 4 (Tyler, TX: GDS Press, 1984), forthcoming.

6. In England, persons with such gifts have normally functioned within the Church. See Charles W. Gusmer, *The Ministry of Healing in the Church of England* (1974; available from Seabury Books).

7. This was brought to light by Carroll Stegall in a privately published pamphlet, "The Modern Tongues and Healing Movement," which is long out of print.

to put off sober-minded Christians.

3. The third plague is demonism. Demonism accompanies the charismatic movement for the simple reason that pleasure-seeking irrationalism provides an open door to the demonic. When one hears a nationally respected charismatic leader state that "Jesus" appeared to her and told her to quit reading her Bible and just-yield to him moment by moment, one realizes that one is dealing with the Arch-deceiver, who can appear as an "angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14).⁸ Satan can grant temporary physical healing, and those who seek health for reasons of personal pleasure may thus find their latter state worse than their former. The rationalistic orthodox never fail to note this, and it only serves to arouse further suspicion regarding any kind of ministry of healing.

Let me say that certain recent trends in some charismatic circles indicate a return to a church-centered form of ministry, and a desire to downplay the fabulous and ecstatic in favor of the theological and practical. This is all very encouraging.

The Use of Oil

The Bible prescribes the use of oil in healing.⁹ There is no need to "consecrate" such oil, and what kind of oil is used does not matter (Olive Oil and Baby Oil are two we can recommend). The use of oil is not medicinal, contrary to the assertions of some in the camp of rationalistic orthodoxy. The Bible distinguishes between the proper ministry of physicians (such as Luke) and the proper ministry of elders. The anointing with oil is a ceremony, performed "in the name of the Lord," by the elders. It does not conflict with or take the place of the labor of physicians. Rather, the healing ministry of the Church forms the (symbolic) foundation and (whole-life Christian) context for medicinal help.

This answers a fourth problem with the modern healing movement, which is its tendency to despise God-appointed ordinary means of healing (and in extreme cases, the rejection of medicine altogether). It is true that the Bible condemns King Asa for consulting physicians, but only because He did not first consult the Lord (2 Chron. 16:12). Paul had no problem making use of the services of Luke.

Services of Healing

There is no reason to think that healing services have to be conducted as part of the weekly liturgy, but there is no reason to think that such should not be done either. In some churches, persons are invited to come forward during the long prayer (called the Pastoral Prayer, or the Prayer of the Church), and at that point they make confession of their sin or of their need, and are prayed over by the elders, while the rest of the congregation engages in silent prayer. God has blessed this where it has been done.

It is also possible, of course, for the elders to visit a sick person at home or in the hospital, and administer the rite of healing. The elements set forth by James are confession of sin, request for healing, prayer for healing, and anointing with oil. James also indicates that several elders should be present, and this again works against the modern one-man-show approach.

We have used, additionally, from time to time, a liturgy of healing as part of our Lord's Supper service. We have placed the rite of healing at the same time as Holy Baptism is ad-

8. This incident reportedly occurred in New Zealand. The charismatic leader was national head (female!) of a Pelagian (heretical) youth mission group.

9. Mark 6:13; James 5:13-16. Note the symbolic connection between the Eucharist and healing in Luke 10:34. The meaning of this is discussed later in this essay.

ministered. Before administering the rite, the sick person (here called the penitent) should be interviewed by the elders and given opportunity to confess any particular sins which may be on his mind. The following rite is a modification of the Order for the Ministration to the Sick, found in the *Book of Common Prayer* (New Edition).

The Order for the Ministration to the Sick

Officiant: Dearly beloved, the apostle James tells us that if anyone is sick, "let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed."

Also we read of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the Gospel of Mark, that He sent out His disciples, "and they were casting out many demons, and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them."

In Scripture, anointing with oil is a sign of the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life. Anointing with oil, and the laying on of hands, is not a sacrament, since it is not a sign nor a seal of the New Covenant. At the same time, however, this outward rite finds expression in the New Covenant as an act of confession, a confession that only the power of the Holy Spirit can heal men of sickness, and a confession that God's ordained government of elders is, ordinarily, the place at which an appeal for special healing should be made.

The apostle James indicates that the person seeking special healing should confess sin, be anointed with oil, and then be prayed over by the elders of the church. [Here should follow a general explanation of the circumstances of the present ministration, for instance, "Mr. N. has approached the session and asked to be anointed with a view to his coming heart surgery;" or, "Mrs. N. has approached the session and asked to be anointed and prayed over concerning a certain affliction from which she has suffered for a long time;" or, "Mr. and Mrs. N. have brought their child, N., to the session because. . . ,"]

[Then, addressing the sick person, or the parents of the child]: We therefore ask you the following:

Do you (on behalf of this child)¹⁰ confess that you have sinned against God, not only in outward transgressions, but also in secret thoughts and desires which you cannot fully understand, but which are all known to Him? If so, answer: I confess my sin.

Penitent: I confess my sin.

Officiant: Do you (on behalf of this child) confess that you are deserving of all misery and wrath in this world, and even of the eternal fire of hell, for your sins? If so, answer: I confess it.

Penitent: I confess it.

Officiant: Do you (on behalf of this child) flee for refuge to God's infinite mercy, seeking and imploring His grace and healing, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ? If so, answer: I do.

Penitent: I do.

Officiant: [The officiant shall dip his finger in the oil, and place it upon the head or forehead of the penitent, saying:] (Name,) I anoint you with oil in the Name of the Father, and

of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. As you are outwardly anointed with this holy oil, may our heavenly Father grant you the inward anointing of the Holy Spirit. Of His great mercy, may He forgive you your sins, release you from suffering, and restore you to wholeness and strength. May He deliver you from all evil, preserve you in all goodness, and bring you to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Then shall the elders place their hands upon the penitent, and the officiant shall pray one or more of the following prayers, as appropriate:] (The prayers are taken from pages 458-460 of the *Book of Common Prayer*.)

AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLE

by Gary North

No. 22: The Strength of Capital

The rich man's wealth is his strong city: the destruction of the poor is their poverty (Prov.10:15).

The structure of each proverb in the tenth chapter presents a "positive-negative" contrast. First, a benefit or desirable goal is presented. This benefit is linked to wisdom or righteousness. Then a negative is presented. This undesirable outcome is said to be the product of foolishness or wickedness.

When Proverbs speaks here of the rich man, there is no suggestion that the rich man is in any way morally compromised. The reference to him is in the first half of the proverb. Thus, it would be misleading to conclude that there is anything innately objectionable either to riches or to the idea that the rich man's wealth does serve as a means of safety for him.

Conversely, there is nothing said in favor of poverty. The poor man's condition is not desirable. His poverty constitutes his destruction. He is unable to place much confidence in his external condition. He has no high wall.

The question then occurs: Why are riches referred to elsewhere in the Bible as a snare, a temptation? And why are poor people singled out repeatedly as being blessed by God? If this verse is true, then what information are we missing to make sense out of all the other verses that seem to teach the opposite?

The premier temptation is to be as God. Men look at their condition in life, and they make a false conclusion, namely, that the work of their hands is responsible for all that they possess. This temptation clearly is greater in the life and experience of a rich man. The poor man may prefer not to take credit for his impoverished condition. The rich man is proud of what his efforts supposedly have produced (Deut.8:17).

The danger to the successful person is that he begins to regard his "wall" as an autonomous source of protection to him. Like the walls that surrounded ancient cities, the rich man's wall may appear to be nearly impervious to attack. His enemies are outside the gates; they cannot bring him down.

The poor man sees his poverty and recognizes that he is already destroyed. What the rich man fears, the poor man is experiencing. He is less tempted to place his trust in his environment. His environment has already proven to be a weak source of defense. He is less likely to place much confidence in it.

Is it an advantage to have a protecting wall? Most certainly. The fact that Jericho's wall did not withstand the blast of God did not mean that Israel was to build cities without walls or to tear down the walls that existed when the Canaanites were destroyed. The people of Jerusalem were supposed to keep the walls in repair. Under Nehemiah, the people of Jerusalem began the reconstruction of the wall,

10. This formula is used when parents are speaking on behalf of children 100 young to speak for themselves. Since children are members of the New Covenant by baptism, they are counted as and treated as having faith, and thus as desiring to serve Christ in wholeness of health. The parent articulates what the child is assumed to desire, but cannot as yet articulate. Children who are not baptized, of course, cannot be the recipients of the ministry of healing, since they are outside of Christ,

which had been broken by Babylon (Neh. 2:17-18).

What good does a wall do? It forces an enemy to think twice about the cost of attacking a stronghold. The defenders have time to prepare a defense against the onslaught of enemy forces. The capital investment in the wall serves as a source of security later on, when troubles and dangers appear. A wall is a standing testimony to the future-orientation of the builders: they cared enough to sacrifice present consumption expenditures in order to defend themselves and their heirs from attack.

A wall is an admission that the unexpected event can overturn a city's plans. It is a testimony to the power of the unexpected. The same is true of riches. Capital in the form of cash or other negotiable assets can be used to defend a business during hard times, or to buy legal advice, or to establish a new business when conditions change. The "high wall" of wealth is a barricade against hard times. It protects the rich man from disasters that would bankrupt a poor man, causing him to sell himself into slavery, or to go deeply

into debt.

The truly rich man is a man with net assets. He has little or no debt. His capital is his own. It is not a wall with a hole in it, as heavily indebted capital is. He is not on the verge of poverty. The market normally cannot bring him to his knees, making him destitute.

Walls can be breached. Destruction can come to all men, including the rich. But the rich man has a barrier that the poor man doesn't possess. The higher the wall, the more difficult it is for enemies to scale it. The rich man has a high wall. He is not easily overrun by his enemies.

This is the description of a desirable condition. All men want safety. All men fear the coming of destruction—the defenseless condition of the poor man. Thus, one of the blessings of covenantal faithfulness is wealth: capital resources that reflect economically the spiritually protected status of the redeemed man. The outward condition of the man who is blessed by God ideally reflects his inward, eternal condition.

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