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*Calvin Theological Seminary*

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CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

“AS GOOD AS IT GETS:”  
A REVIEW AND CONSIDERATION OF “HEALING PRAYER,”  
ITS THEOLOGICAL AND MINISTRY IMPLICATIONS,  
AND THE HOPE FOR CHANGE IT EVOKES

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE  
MASTER OF THEOLOGY

MINISTRY DIVISION

DEPARTMENT OF PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELLING

BY  
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GRAND RAPIDS, MI  
MAY, 2011



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**THESIS APPROVAL**

This thesis entitled

"'As Good as It Gets': A Review and Consideration of 'Healing Prayer,' Its Theological and Ministry Implications, and the Hope for Change It Evokes."

written by

Henry Kranenburg

submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Theology**

and successfully defended

has been accepted by the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the following reader:

Prof. Dr. Ronald Nydam, Supervisor

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mariano Avila".

Prof. Mariano Avila, Th. M. Director

August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Date

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### Abstract

If healing is possible, and Christian prayer is a means to achieve it, how do Christians ‘make it happen’? The answer to this question has had renewed and increasing interest for Christians in Reformed circles (Chapter 1). While different healing ‘ministries’ have claimed to unlock (some aspect) of healing, there has been limited assessment of these ministries in both their methodologies and their claims. This paper reviews four of these ministries, first looking at aspects of their teaching and methodology (Chapter 2). It then reflects on these from a behavioural-psychological perspective by asking a number of questions (Chapter 3) before moving to a behavioural-theological analysis that looks a little more deeply at the foundations, methods and claims of these ministries (Chapter 4). This includes critique of these ministries (weaknesses, lacunae, inconsistencies) but also an recognition that God offers something more for healing than what many have experienced in traditional faith groups. The paper ends with a section on implications for ministry that challenges the faith community to coordinate efforts in some areas of this ministry, focus on a proper understanding of the place of healing and community, and consider some first steps to move forward in healing prayer.

## Chapter 1 – Naming the Subject

About midway into my ministry I became the mentor of a newly ordained young pastor. In one of our first sessions, I invited him to disclose some of the challenges and uncertainties he anticipated as he moved into ministry. His answer was deeper and more theological than the answers others whom I mentored had given. His answer was also striking in how it resonated with an increasing area of reflection for myself. In short, he admitted wondering about how to understand the numerous biblical passages and references to the power of faith and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in light of what he perceived to be so little power within the church. He identified this same observation about his own journey fighting specific sin and temptation. The simple and honest uncertainty of this young pastor affirmed my own journey and concern with this question about the ministry of the church and the often disappointing fight against sin.

While there are many passages that connect the word ‘power’ (Greek: *dunamis*; used 121 times in the NIV New Testament) with ministry and the followers of Jesus, the references in Ephesians became a focus, specifically the following two passages:

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. (Ephesians 1:18-19)

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen. (Ephesians 3:14-21)

The more objective question asking about power in faith often quickly becomes a question about one’s personal faith journey (what does my seeming lack of power say about who I am?) as well as a question about one’s ministry (what does this seeming lack of power say about my ministry, let alone my connection - or lack thereof - to God?). In my journey, the heart of that question distilled to a pastoral concern tied to specific needs in the congregation I served.



As I would look over the congregation on any given Sunday and see people whose suffering physically, emotionally, relationally and spiritually I had come to know, I wondered: is there something more that I or we could do for them, or is this as good as it gets? If this is as good as it gets, then it would be incumbent on me to tell those folks, and assure them that going to other evangelical churches, or the Airport Vineyard in nearby Toronto or a Benny Hinn healing services to pursue something beyond what they were getting in the local congregation was not necessary. They could instead be encouraged to embrace where they were in life, pray for strength and healing as they discerned was appropriate, and simply leave their circumstances in the hands of God. This may or may not lead to healing, but their simple goal would be to bloom where they are planted.

On the other hand, if there is something God has made available, a power that could heal or speak or open doors, then I would want to know that as a leader of His people; I would also want to pursue that as best I could.

What has become striking is that the preceding account of my journey is one that has been echoed in the journey of many of those whose material I began to read and whose methods of pursuing healing – and especially healing prayer – I began to study.

Gordon Fee, a Pentecostal scholar identifies in Paul, the Spirit and the People of God, that what drove him in writing this book was “the generally ineffective witness and perceived irrelevancy of the church in Western culture.”<sup>1</sup> Fee asked why it is we experience the reality of the Spirit’s presence so much less than some other cultures. If the coming of the Spirit indicates the return of the divine presence, and the future has begun as attested by the gift of the outpoured Spirit, how do we understand that for the church today?

Henry Wildeboer, from my own tradition of the Christian Reformed Church, writes

Does God bring healing in ways other than common medical channels? If so, is there a ministry that the church should be developing?... Disconcerting questions were growing within me. “Is the church the empowered body of Christ, or is it simply another club?” And worse, “Am I doing what God really wants me to be doing? Is there more to this?”<sup>2</sup>

That wonder is not confined to a few conservative or evangelical religious traditions or

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit and the People of God* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996), viii.

<sup>2</sup>Henry Wildeboer, *Miraculous Healing and You: What the Bible Teaches; What You need to Know* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1999), 10,12.

denominations, and is not only a question about the church. It is most especially a question about God. Francis MacNutt in his helpful and comprehensive book, *Healing*, asks,

Is it possible that God directly heals people? Does it really happen? All other questions in this ministry [of healing] depend on this first question of all: is there such a thing as healing?" This is a question more specifically about God and whether there is from God's side an option and channel for healing to take place.<sup>3</sup>

It is striking that virtually none of the material questioned whether God has the ability to heal, and few questioned whether post apostolic age healing might be closed to God's people (this may of course simply be due to the natural bias of the literature selected for this paper). The vast majority of resources considering the healing assumed it is possible for the church to facilitate healing and therefore the questions to ask center around what *the church* is doing wrong or leaving undone as the key to whether this is 'as good as it gets.' Those closer to the reformed tradition seemed – not surprisingly – to work with an increased concern about personal or corporate guilt in not having done or understood more about the miraculous, and exhibited a tendency to blame the tradition or its roots for their inability to do more in the way of demonstrating the power of God in healing (consider for e.g. Wildeboer, Algera, Dykstra).

What is also not surprising is that those who are looking to understand healing in the power of the Holy Spirit by and large conclude that healing, whether directly from God or through those specially gifted by the Holy Spirit, is not only possible today, but something the heart of God desires. Mark Pearson, in *Christian Healing*, writes:

Healing is at the very heart of who God is... To say that God is love and yet not see Him at work in people's lives is a cruel contradiction. The God who we worship is not an absentee landlord but a loving, caring Father who ministers to His children at their points of need. Sometimes the need is for healing.<sup>4</sup>

In a report submitted to its Synod in 2009 (Synod Report), the Christian Reformed Church received and recommended this position as well<sup>5</sup> for study in the churches.<sup>6</sup> While there has been significant theological debate about the possibilities of healing, one characteristic of the journey to accepting healing as a present gift of God is the degree to which this acceptance

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<sup>3</sup>Francis MacNutt, *Healing* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1974), 21.

<sup>4</sup>Mark A. Pearson, *Christian Healing: A Practical and Comprehensive Guide* (Grand Rapids: Chose Books, 1995), 13.

<sup>5</sup>Christian Reformed Church, "Committee to Study Third Wave Pentecostalism II," *Acts of Synod*, 2009, 388.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 392.

is influenced by experience. MacNutt writes:

...the healing characteristic of the early church should somehow continue happening in our day. We still have the sick with us and we are still standing in the need of being made whole. All around us in the pew on Sunday morning we see broken persons. And sometimes those in the pulpit or at the altar are broken, too. Since the Church is made up of people, we still need healing as much as ever.<sup>7</sup>

MacNutt goes on to point that Saint Augustine himself had first thought that the age of miracles had ceased, but miraculous cures which he had seen changed his mind.<sup>8</sup>

Ed Smith represents the heart of all this when he describes his journey toward, and understanding of what he has called Theophostic Prayer Ministry (TPM), a ministry for which he is a key representative and leader. When considering the healing of traumatic memory (inner healing) that influenced his journey to pursue healing he writes: “I honestly did not think true resolution from traumatic memory was possible. It seemed more reasonable to teach people how to compensate and live life in spite of one’s losses.”<sup>9</sup> But

...everywhere I go, I find the church is basically the same: a building with many emotionally wounded people trying hard to pretend that everything is well... Emotionally wounded people can be healed and can find peace and freedom – but not everyone who needs renewal is lining up for his or her portion.<sup>10</sup>

These questions about healing are not limited to the increasing interest or concern of more recent years. In addition to being understood and experienced differently in other cultures, healing and healing ministry has been experienced in varying degrees over time. In The Awakening, the recounting of Pastor Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805-1880) and his battle with darkness and healing, an excerpt of a letter from this pastor regarding his pursuit of healing for those suffering demonization states:

You do not know or do not bear in mind the full, horrible extent of magical practices and alliances with the devil in Christendom and in the world at large. But to come to know this, to be quite certain of it, and then to back out – why, that would make me worse than the devil!<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>MacNutt, 58.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>9</sup>Edward M. Smith, *Healing Life's Hurts through Theophostic Prayer* (Royal Oak: New Creation Publishing, 2005), 58.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 131-132.

<sup>11</sup>Friedrich Zuendel, *The Awakening* (Farmington: The Plough Publishing House, 2002), 45.

At the same time, what has made it more difficult to identify a broader framework for understanding healing ministry is the differing definitions of healing or the lack of clear definition altogether. Some resources identify healing primarily as inner healing, others focus on physical healing and yet others understand demonic influence as the ‘monkey on the back’ behind any concern for healing. Additionally, it is not clear if the principles that apply to one area of healing transfers to other areas or is specific just to that area.

MacNutt, whose writing in *Healing* is one of the most comprehensive descriptions, addresses this in identifying three kinds of sickness: 1. sickness of our spirit caused by our own personal sin; 2. emotional sickness and problems (e.g. anxiety) caused by the emotional hurts of our past, and 3. physical sickness in our bodies, caused by disease or accidents. To this he adds what in essence is a fourth area of sickness/influence: that caused by demonic oppression.<sup>12</sup>

Brad Long of the Dunamis Fellowship (Dunamis) further expands this into a list of seven, adding ‘relational healing’, ‘restoration of the created order’ and ‘a holistic vision of human nature and of Jesus’ healing work.’<sup>13</sup> What is helpful in the analysis that Dunamis provides is the suggestion that healing is not simply about elimination of suffering or pain, though it is very much that. Healing is understood as ‘death going backwards,’ a way in which through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, God works to restore the original vision of creation. While this healing will not be complete until the return of Jesus, to some degree it can happen in the lives of people today.<sup>14</sup>

The question that this spawns is inevitable: to what degree can ‘death go backwards’ in the pursuit of healing? And how does that happen? Is there a formula, or are there criteria that can be known and applied to ensure God’s healing promises? Are there specific actions godly people need to do to enable God to give the healing some believe He longs to give? When everything has been done according to the principles confidently discerned and yet healing does not happen, how is that to be understood? Is there a point at which it can be claimed that a particular suffering is something not to be exorcised but embraced for a higher good?

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While all these questions can’t be answered in a paper this size, there are some things

<sup>12</sup>MacNutt, 162.

<sup>13</sup>Zeb Bradford Long and others, eds., *The Dunamis Project: The Healing Ministry of Jesus* (Black Mountain: Presbyterian-Reformed Ministries International, 2000), 39ff. This book will be referred to as *Manual*.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 38.

that a survey of the literature and the experiences they point to can affirm, and some questions that need to be asked. One specific and growing area of healing ministry is healing prayer. As such, it is a ministry of the church that needs thoughtful review from a Biblical and theological perspective. This paper will pursue that by doing a review of the literature from and about four basic approaches of healing prayer, consider a psychological and then theological perspective on these four approaches, and conclude with considering some implications for the lived theologies of the church.

Behind this search, though not specifically pursued in this paper, is the pastoral heart that is reflected in these words from Pearson:

If the ministry of Christian healing is nothing more than a pleasant but ineffectual ritual, we should stop it immediately... If, on the the other hand, there is something to this ministry of healing, if God actually does wish people to be healed, we need to press on to identify and remove whatever barriers are blocking the healing from taking place.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Pearson, 54.

## Chapter 2: An Overview of Healing Prayer

### Introduction

This chapter will review some of the literature that speaks to the practice and understanding of healing prayer. The review will primarily consider four approaches, namely that of Dunamis, Neil Anderson's "Freedom in Christ" ministry (FIC), TPM and the tradition represented by MacNutt. One of the challenges in attempting to compare different approaches to healing prayer is that much of what has encouraged and fed the healing prayer 'movement' is based on the experience of those involved with it.<sup>1</sup> This experience-base has shaped the understanding of the theory that is now used to drive it, that is, the theory is an attempt to explain the accepted experience rather than determine if the experience is justified (or real). This weight given to the strong influence of experience goes back to the time of St. Augustine and his change in understanding as identified above.<sup>2</sup> Notably, the literature reflecting the long standing Roman Catholic tradition of healing (MacNutt identifies that there was not a time that this was not a part of the Roman Catholic life, only seasons of more or less awareness) is also the most comprehensive.

Smith (TPM) and Anderson (FIC) have received more criticism of their theologies of healing and Smith especially has been refining his theologies 'on the go' in response. Elliot Miller of the Christian Research Institute has dialogued significantly with Smith and identifies a good spirit of cooperation in working through a number of concerns levelled against TPM.<sup>3</sup> FIC - a ministry that has been in existence somewhat longer - has been less open to critical dialogue

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<sup>1</sup>The Passantinos write: "Anderson's objectivity is compromised by his reliance on unverified personal stories and his credulous acceptance of the reality of widespread, multigenerational, nearly invincible satanic conspiracies that routinely engage in torture, sexual abuse, and murder. Anderson's books and materials are almost wholly bereft of objective research, but replete with undocumented, mostly sensational stories. Anderson refers for substantiation to the many stories he is told by those who attend his conferences or write him, or by those who are relating someone else's story." (Bob and Gretchen Passantino, "The Bondage Maker: Examining the Message and Method of Neil T. Anderson (Part 4) -- Spiritual Warfare and the Myth of Satanic Conspiracies and Ritual Abuse," *Christian Research Journal*, 21 no. 4 (1999): 1. Online: <http://www.equip.org/articles/the-bondage-maker-examining-the-message-and-method-of-neil-t-anderson-part-four-spiritual-warfare-and-the-myth-of-satanic-conspiracies-and-ritual-abuse/>. Accessed May 6, 2011.)

<sup>2</sup>MacNutt, 58.

<sup>3</sup>Miller writes of this: "TPM's stance on spiritual warfare was once a major concern for CRI. Deliverance from demons, breaking demonic curses, and other unbiblical and superstitious practices were heavily emphasized in TPM teaching and practice. Smith has so radically changed his thinking and approach in this area that our remaining concerns are relatively minor; indeed, his biggest critics on this topic now are more likely to be his former colleagues in the Christian deliverance movement." (Elliot Miller, "Teachings in Transition: Recent Changes and Remaining Concerns with Theophostic Prayer Ministry," *Christian Research Journal*, 29 no. 3 (2006): 7. Online: <http://www.equip.org/PDF/JAT206-2.pdf>. Accessed May 6, 2011.)

and so many of the criticisms and questions raised against it remain unanswered. Dunamis has written extensively from a reformed perspective and has worked toward being more theologically articulate, but their theology is written with some looseness, dis-organization and many words, making it harder to analyse in a critical fashion.<sup>4</sup> However, over the last twenty years as healing prayer has received more attention, there has been more effort to understand what it is and how it works biblically, theologically and psychologically.

Rather than introducing and describing each approach separately, this review will use a number of subject headings to describe some significant aspect of healing prayer and, where appropriate and possible, compare and contrast some of what the different approaches have said. This will set the stage for chapters three and four to consider some psychological and theological perspectives to these approaches of healing prayer.

### **Spiritual Healing**

One way to assess whether healing prayer is a means for spiritual healing is by determining whether such healing prayer considers God (or Jesus or Holy Spirit) as primarily the means to an end – healing - or if God Himself is the end of the healing. In this the literature evidences some differences.

It is understandable that considering Jesus as a means to an end suggests an inappropriate selfishness and so it is not surprising that most of the literature does not suggest it, and in fact speaks against it. However, the methodologies and descriptions themselves suggest how important the actual healing (where healing is understood as net benefit to the one healed) is to both the healer and the healed. While MacNutt is the clearest in identifying *spiritual healing* as an aim of healing prayer, one can get the impression that this is not a strong priority in the healing prayer practice. There seems to be a genuine hope that healing leads to renewed lives of discipleship, but even those who specifically identify the need for follow up care in order for this to happen tend to focus more on the healing and the maintenance of the healing than the further pursuit of healthy relationship with God.

The central message of the Christian faith, however, is a call to reconciled relationship to God and to neighbour for the purpose of being better enabled to love both. It makes sense that

<sup>4</sup> Zeb Bradford Long and others, 26, 39. At a conference in 2010, Dunamis used an eleven year old manual where the table of contents do not line up with the contents, and where the organization of the material appears at times to be more of a compilation of teaching notes that have not been coordinated (c.f. the lists on page 26 and 39 that deal with same concern but identify different categories and use significantly different language).

the healthier one is, the more capable one will be to pursue loving God and others. In this regard, Dunamis gives a clear and consistent message that healing is for the purpose of being “brought to salvation in Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, disciple into maturity, and sent out as witnesses.”<sup>5</sup> However, neither the chapters in the Dunamis project Manual, nor the experience at the retreat, work with how to incorporate healing into this bigger picture. In addition, all the instructions on how to develop a healing ministry in your church are about healing itself, and maintaining healing. The Synod Report points out that spiritual healing which desires God does not have a hierarchy of gifts, nor does it seek the pennies in the hands of the giver more than the giver Himself.<sup>6</sup> Yet this seems to be the tendency in the experience and literature when it comes to the pursuit of spiritual healing as opposed to the written goals of spiritual healing.

### Co-operating with the Holy Spirit

It is significant to note how some of the literature has worked hard to avoid giving impressions of attempting to control or manipulate God. While the strong desire for healing in a person’s life can lead to efforts to find a method or formula for that, there is also awareness in the literature that God is not to be controlled. Therefore the more common understanding is that of ‘co-operating’ with the Holy Spirit.

Dunamis in a lengthy and in-depth discussion of this is clear on recognizing the sovereignty of God and that there needs to be a consistency between praying for God’s intervention in specific circumstances and understanding God’s intervention in the creation in terms of the ‘already’ of the coming of his kingdom. The Manual for the healing ministry of Jesus states:

We may and must prepare to be in healing ministry. Nevertheless, it is not appropriate to demand to be in healing ministry. Jesus’ work of restoration of the image of God and advancing the Kingdom of God is to take place at the leadership and direction of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will be the one to give you opportunities for healing ministry.<sup>7</sup>

This would reflect the general direction and spirit of TPM as well.

MacNutt, while offering a less broad kingdom perspective identifies that it is God who is involved in the healing, and while it is the nature of God to want healing and wholeness (which

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>6</sup>Christian Reformed Church, 355, 358.

<sup>7</sup>Long and others, 109.



His people then must avail).<sup>8</sup> His people need to submit to God. MacNutt points to this when addressing the matter of the place of faith in healing; while recognizing he does not have all the answers, MacNutt states clearly that his faith is not in faith but in God<sup>9</sup> and his role is to connect with God through the ways God has given.

FIC gives a different sense of co-operation. Given Anderson's emphasis on truth encounter versus power encounter when confronting demons, his style reflects more the engagement of truth – and even the legalities of truth – than a sense of working or cooperating with the Holy Spirit. This is sensed through the strong use of specific, formulaic prayers intended as an essential part of the healing process for all, as well as the impersonal and almost hasty speed with which Anderson leads through them. The implicit message here is that one simply has to say the right words and Satan will have to respond accordingly.

### Physical Healing

It is interesting that of the four streams of literature identified for this paper, two (TPM and FIC) deal almost exclusively with inner healing and demonization but not with physical healing. Dunamis, which includes physical healing in its approach, focuses more in their literature and seminars on inner healing while MacNutt is the most consistently holistic. In that regard, MacNutt represents more completely the whole healing ministry of Jesus than merely selective parts of it.

While the purposes of TPM and FIC are clear in terms of the more specific healing they pursue, it is also striking that in the area of non-physical healing there is more divergence in the literature, and therefore also more criticism of the claims made for healing. Dunamis leaders identify a variety of physical healing achieved through their ministry, including the visual lengthening of a leg during a time of prayer. Other authors from Wildeboer to Wagner claim that same possibility with Wagner<sup>10</sup> claiming that gifts of healing can even be differentiated to identify those who are better at lengthening legs as opposed to other kinds of healing.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> MacNutt, 84. Elsewhere, MacNutt states: "In short, Jesus did not heal people to prove that he was God; he healed them because he was God." (MacNutt, 108).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 120 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Wagner writes: "Speaking of gifts, do not be surprised to find that some with the gift of healing have been given specialities in certain areas. Francis MacNutt, for example, has had little success in praying for deafness, but a fairly high degree of success in praying for bone problems and problems in the abdominal or chest area, except cancer. My specialty, as I have mentioned, is for lengthening legs (which in most cases involves pelvic adjustments) and problems relating to the spine." (C. Peter Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry in Any Church* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1988), 215).

<sup>11</sup>It is interesting that the Synod Report also focuses more on inner healing than on physical healing. In an

### Inner and Deep Inner Healing

As identified above, more significant attention in the literature is given to non-physical healing. Although this is identified by different terms, the term ‘inner healing’ is the most commonly used.

Inner healing in short is the healing of something ‘on the inside’ that negatively affects who we are in our soul or spirit or psyche, and hinders who it is God intends us to be. Here already the differences begin to show as there is disagreement in the literature as to whether humans are a duality of body and soul or consist of more parts. Nevertheless, the goal remains the same, and that is to provide healing of deeper wounds that may be hidden from the carrier of the wounds but yet affecting her or his life. The intention is that in co-operation with the Holy Spirit these wounds be identified, brought into the open, exposed for what they are, and then healed by Jesus.

While the four approaches all deal with inner wounds (though their understanding of these wounds and the approach needed for healing differ) Dunamis goes to significantly deeper lengths to address deep inner healing of wounds, wounds it says are found in what it calls the vortex memory. Here is where Dunamis takes its approach beyond the more general healing it describes; it is no longer Jesus simply doing healing, but the prayer ‘counsellor’ digging deep into the inner areas of the mind to bring to the light of the Holy Spirit what needs healing.<sup>12</sup> It is not clear from the Dunamis material or seminar why a different method from the less deep inner healing is needed for ‘vortex memory’ healing, and why Jesus cannot by himself bring these memories to the surface, or heal them without having them brought to the surface. In reading the Manual and experiencing the teaching, it again seems to be an approach that has developed on the move based on experience, but has not fully integrated all of what it teaches and claims in a consistent manner.<sup>13</sup>

interview with one of the authors of the report he identified that the healing he was involved in was “mostly emotional, with ramifications for spiritual” healing. When asked why he didn’t work more with physical healing, he responded by saying he simply “never ventured there... I don’t know why” and identified it as a significant question he hadn’t thought through for himself. While that will be looked at closer in Chapter 3, it suggests that some of what is pursued in healing prayer has to do with a sense of what is important (spiritual) in the perspective of the pray-er, which includes a sense of what actually may be achievable (a question of faith). While this may be understandable on a human level, it does not fit with teaching that God as a compassionate God desires holistic health and healing for all.

<sup>12</sup>Long and others, 246. It is interesting to note that part of this chapter in the *Manual* includes a section entitled “The Problem – When these Principles Do Not Seem To Work”. Given previous arguments about the expected co-operation with a God who desires healing, this section again seems more about theology trying to describe and accommodate experience than vice versa.

<sup>13</sup>In the same interview mentioned above with one of the authors of the Synod Report, he identified that in his

### Letting Jesus (Spirit of Christ) Guide the Healing

Theophostic Prayer Ministry is defined by Smith as a method of:

God illuminating a previously darkened area of one's mind and thoughts with His truth. Theophostic Prayer Ministry is God's true Light, the Spirit of Christ bringing divine truth experientially into one's historical life experiences... [it] is a systematic and intentional cooperation with what God is doing in the trials we face that expose us. TPM is focused and intentional mind renewal at the experiential level...<sup>14</sup> TPM is a process in which the Holy Spirit reveals specific and personalized truth to the wounded mind of the one seeking freedom... In its simplest description, TPM is prayer... It is the Spirit of Christ revealing truth, freeing an individual of the lies that dominate his or her thinking, emotions and behaviour. Jesus can set people free from lifelong fears, shame, false guilt and anxiety, lifting the dark clouds of all emotional pain in a divinely directed moment.<sup>15</sup>

The key to TPM's healing process is inviting Jesus by prayer into the retrieved memory wounds of the person and then asking Jesus to lead by way of indicating what it is the person needs to know or do or receive to find healing. Smith is clear in identifying that this is not to be guided imagery but is to be strictly a matter of allowing Jesus to speak and lead. The prayer facilitator is simply there to guide and help move the process forward but without any direction. Dunamis uses this method as well only doesn't specifically call for visualization of Jesus – it talks more of hearing the Holy Spirit, or receiving a word of knowledge that might direct the prayer. Dunamis as well is open to the prayer facilitator (or group members) sharing what they are hearing the Spirit say as a means of moving forward in prayer. It is understood that the one being prayed for has to determine the validity or 'fit' of any word of knowledge. MacNutt identifies openness to listening both to God and to the one being prayed for<sup>16</sup> but while allowing for this doesn't focus on it as a key to healing.

It is not clear that those who practice this method of healing prayer have wrestled significantly with concerns of projection or subjective manipulation on the part of either the healing practice he would not do more than three 2-3 hour healing sessions and also would not do deeper wound healing. These longer term or deeper needs would be referred to professionals in the medical field or to those with more advanced gifts. Upon being asked why that would be needed if it is Jesus doing the guiding and healing, the answer given was that there are dangers and limitations in what is understood of this healing and so caution is exercised. While that seems to be a valid concern, it raises questions about trust and faith in God as doing the actual healing and to what degree we are imposing our own standards and perceptions on a healing process; if it is Jesus doing the healing and guiding how does one decide when to leave him out of a more 'complex' need?

<sup>14</sup>Smith, 11.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>16</sup>MacNutt, 195.

prayer facilitator or the one prayed for. There is a strong emphasis on working with basic trust in God, that God will not deceive those who sincerely seek His truth, and that therefore one can trust the leading of the Holy Spirit in the visualization process and words of knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

### Lie Based Versus Sin Based

There is a key difference between the methods of FIC and TPM: TPM is lie-based healing and FIC is sin-based. In short the difference comes to this: Smith believes that the heart of any wound we have are lies that we believe about events of the past - not the events themselves, but our perceptions of them are what do the damage. Therefore the process of healing is to bring to the light of God these lies by asking Jesus to help us see them and then follow his leading in prayer for what to do with them. The principle Smith works with is that only when we own the lie and face it can we move on in dealing with it; the value Smith works with is that only Jesus can provide the healing needed for this exposed lie.

On the other hand Anderson claims that freedom in Christ includes knowing the truth about who we are in Christ, and it is sin that gets in the way of our knowing and claiming this truth. Therefore the approach to healing is to bring to light all sin that may get in the way of health, and to find healing by being forgiven of this sin, and by having Christ release us to whatever bondage may have come along with it. This is even more so when our sin or the sins of those before us have led to the involvement of demons.

Although there has been sharp criticism of both approaches,<sup>18</sup> often the criticism has focused on specific aspects of one or the other approach rather than wholesale rejection. Many will recognize that there are indeed lies that need to be healed, and that there is sin from which there needs to be repentance. However, there is a significant difference between TPM and FIC in understanding the role of sin and who is to blame for the lies or sin that have led to the need for healing. This has raised questions not so much about the effect of healing prayer, but the appropriateness or truth of it when done by one or the other method.<sup>19</sup> This is not insignificant

<sup>17</sup>Long and others, 360 ff. Also c.f. Manual, pg 360ff where it is first stated that "all prayer and ministry is basically the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the One Who has given us gifts and he seeks to bring the grace and power into the lives of individuals so they will enter into freedom and glorify God. It is very important to actively trust Him for help."

<sup>18</sup>C.f. for example, articles by Grace Church elders, Miller, Passantino, DeWaay, Ice and Hunt.

<sup>19</sup>DeWaay writes: "I never said that Theophostics doesn't work, I said that it is not Biblical." (Bob DeWaay, "Why Theophostic Prayer Ministry is Neither Prayer Nor Christian Ministry," *Critical Issues Commentary*, 2008: n.p. Online <http://cicministry.org/commentary/worldview0019.htm>. Accessed May 6, 2011.)

as these were also the questions asked of the healing of Jesus by those who wondered in whose name Jesus was healing.

### Methodology

As indicated above (in “Co-operating with the Holy Spirit”) there has been obvious effort to communicate a desire to not control or manipulate God in the desire for and process of healing prayer. But there is clear tension between the recognition of God’s ‘free will’ in this, and the approaches that appear as attempts to ‘force God’s hand’ by using His methods to gain from Him what the pray-er wants. What one is left with in the end is that the literature does not resolve this tension but rather claims to give God the freedom, identifies that there is no methodology that can force God’s hand (and so that shouldn’t be sought), and then spends a large amount of time identifying all the guidelines and details for healing that spell out the very methodology that has been argued against.

At heart this points to a deeper uncertainty about how the healing experience really works. It picks up what Browning (see below in chapter 3) points to about how we bring our own psychologies (and theologies) to certain situations to shape how we do and don’t understand them. It also points out both how we are trying to understand the reality of what we do experience – experience which seems inconsistent in what it achieves – and how we are in some ways desperate to achieve healing and the goal of health by wanting to honour God’s sovereignty while desperately wanting God to honour what we have understood His sovereignty ought to include.

There are a number of places in which this can be seen, and because it is significant in demonstrating the heart of the desire for healing and pursuing what God offers, and the recognition that while significantly good things happen we are not able to master the process, it is helpful to recognize some of how this is portrayed.

Anderson says less about his method not being fool proof than what the others say about theirs. His method to freedom in Christ involves seven steps but he is clear that these steps are not what bring healing; only Jesus does.

To experience our freedom in Christ and to grow in the grace of God require repentance, which literally means a change of mind... The Steps to Freedom in Christ (the Steps) are designed to help you do that... The Steps cover seven critical issues between ourselves and God. ...the critical issue is your

relationship with God and that is what you are resolving. This is a ministry of reconciliation. Once those issues are resolved Satan has no right to remain.<sup>20</sup>

What is striking is that while Anderson's written perspective on sin and reconciliation is helpful and significant, his method as experienced gives a different sense. Both the DVD seminar and the personal experience of this author (though limited) with an FIC prayer facilitator made the process of the steps feel somewhat rote and intending to accomplish something in a realm other than the heart. The 'demand' to use the words of the provided prayer, to read them out loud,<sup>21</sup> and the speed with which that is done, felt very formulaic.<sup>22</sup>

Dunamis works with what it identifies as a three-phase pattern in Jesus' ministry. The manual states that "These are not rules or a specific method but rather a summary of the way we see the Holy Spirit at work. They are not prescriptive but descriptive."<sup>23</sup> In the seminar (c.f. Manual p. iii) Dunamis clearly identifies that it is not providing a method of counselling or therapy and is making no guarantees or promises – it is simply providing a way of praying for people that seeks to be led and empowered by the Holy Spirit.<sup>24</sup> In the seminar itself, the leaders stressed that there is no formula and that healing is up to Jesus. However, in that context it is noteworthy that significant time was spent in attempting to determine what Jesus did and how he did it so that his followers might be trained to do the same. The teaching that identified a need to go back in memory to deal not just with the past event but the physical senses of the event (e.g. the smells that were part of it) and overtly stating that the healing would not happen if some sense

<sup>20</sup> Neil T. Anderson, *The steps to Freedom in Christ: a step-by-step guide* (Ventura: Gospel Light, 2004), 5.

<sup>21</sup>As you go through these steps to freedom, remember that Satan will be defeated only if you confront him verbally. He is under no obligation to obey our thoughts. Only God has complete knowledge of your mind. As you take each step, it is important that you submit to God inwardly and then resist the devil verbally by reading aloud each prayer and statement (James 4:7)." (Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), 186).

<sup>22</sup> "The steps to freedom are usually completed in one appointment that takes from three to five hours. The process is typically facilitated by a "committed Christian" (in the company of a "prayer partner") who has gone through the steps himself (or herself) and has been trained by Anderson's book *Helping Others Find Freedom in Christ* and/or advanced workshops provided at Freedom in Christ events. The leader walks the Christian seeking freedom through a series of personal inventories and prescribed prayers and declarations in which Satan's lies are *renounced* and God's truth is *announced*. Anderson considers such renunciation and annunciation key to finding freedom." (Elliot Miller, "The Bondage Maker: Examining the Message and Method of Neil T. Anderson (Part 3) – Spiritual Warfare And the Seven 'Steps To Freedom'," *Christian Research Journal*, 21 no. 3 (1998): 2-3. Online: <http://www.equip.org/articles/the-bondage-maker-examining-the-message-and-method-of-neil-t-anderson-part-three-spiritual-warfare-and-the-seven-steps-to-freedom->. Accessed May 6, 2011.)

<sup>23</sup> Brad Long and Cindy Strickler, *Let Jesus Heal Your Hidden Wounds* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2001), 35. Also Long and others, 136ff.

<sup>24</sup>Long and others, iii.

(e.g. smell) was not dealt with, made it very clear that a formula of sorts needs to be followed if not by the pray-er, then by God.

Perhaps the most striking evidence of this tension came in the Dunamis seminar teaching as pointed to in the Manual. There it is stated under the heading “The Problem – When These Principles Do Not Seem To Work”:

From the clear witness of scripture we may be certain that these fundamental principles are sound. Further, from what we know of human nature and the authority of Jesus Christ, when applied by the Holy Spirit, we may be assured that they will work. They must work because they are based on the word of God and the way God has structured reality.<sup>25</sup>

But, the Manual and the teaching go on to say, these principles don’t always seem to work. And so to resolve this, Dunamis suggests that:

To cooperate with the Holy Spirit in situations when these principles do not seem to be readily effective requires us to understand the following: the nature of the human psyche, the anatomy of inner hurts and the complication of evil spirits; the process of our cooperating with the Holy Spirit to bring Jesus’ healing into the hidden recesses of the human heart.<sup>26</sup>

This is to imply – though not intentionally – that there are God-principles that are supposed to work but don’t and so then there need to be alternative principles found, and the solution here is to go to the vortex memory theories developed by Dunamis. While there may be good and even sound suggestions and methodologies in all of this, it also demonstrates the tension between co-operating with the Holy Spirit and forcing God to work with the principles we uncover when somehow the Holy Spirit doesn’t seem to co-operate with us.

More briefly, this is noted in other writers as well. MacNutt identifies two basic principles of 1) not holding to universal methods and 2) not telling God when or how to do it in response to our tendency to want to figure out “the right technique for every task, the right formula of prayer for every need.”<sup>27</sup> But he in turn goes on to describe in detail what kinds of sicknesses there are and how we should pray for each one. Wagner writes “that there is no secret formula, ritual or procedure, which, when used correctly, makes the healing happen. God does

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 246.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid, 247.

<sup>27</sup>MacNutt, 137.

the healing, and we cannot write His script for Him.”<sup>28</sup> But then Wagner goes on immediately to talk of a procedure to use and steps to follow for effective healing.

The Synod Report in addressing the concern of methods quotes Mike Evans, founder of Wholeness Ministries that “there is no universal method or experience that can be applied to all cases... Our faith lies in the obedience of praying for the sick, despite our doubt”<sup>29</sup> and adopts this as part of its conclusion. In reviewing the various approaches, it seems this is indeed true; what is awkward is that the approaches also affirm this but yet follow the difficult-to-resist temptation of finding a method by which to ensure maximum option for healing to happen.

### **The Role of Faith**

When it comes to the role of personal faith in healing prayer, the literature takes some steps away from the neo-Pentecostal claims that the faith of the individual is key to healing and that those who did not find healing were demonstrating a lack of faith. While the FIC method is based on the truths of God’s word which are to be claimed, it is the truth and not faith which is what does the work. MacNutt, as identified above, is clear in stating that his faith is in God and not in his faith. Pearson further expands on this to identify the place of vicarious faith, stating that roughly half of healing in scripture happens based on vicarious faith. In some cases there is no evidence of faith at all.<sup>30</sup> This is confirmed and accepted by others.<sup>31</sup>

However, here again there is a tension between what is believed and how that is worked out in the practice of healing prayer. One discussion in which this tension becomes evident concerns the appropriateness of praying ‘not my will but yours be done.’ Here the tendency of some is to state that faith in God and not in faith is the key and at the same time say that to include this statement as part of the prayer would be inappropriate as it would demonstrate lack of faith or confidence which would then affect the healing ability of the prayer. MacNutt writes that

by experience we find that the phrase “if it be your will” seems to weaken the effect of prayer because our inclusion of that phrase usually indicates that we don’t believe that *ordinarily it is God’s will to heal persons who ask...* “If it be

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<sup>28</sup>Wagner, 224.

<sup>29</sup>Christian Reformed Church, 372.

<sup>30</sup>Pearson, 72.

<sup>31</sup>For e.g. Wildeboer, 21.



your will” is a convenient escape hatch.<sup>32</sup>

While most seem very hesitant to include this phrase in any healing prayer (without explaining how it is that Jesus was able to use this phrase) there is at the same time a clear care to not become presumptuous about God’s will. What seems to underlie the discussion is the tension between having faith as a mustard seed while yet at the same time not infringing on God’s sovereignty. C.S. Lewis has described this as ‘the problem of petitionary prayer.’<sup>33</sup> Pearson identifies with both sides of this problem. He writes that to pray ‘if’ it is your will is to sow seeds of doubt and undermines belief. He then tries to resolve this by suggesting that instead we pray “...heal me *in accordance with Your will*. I affirm Your loving power and powerful love and I leave the details up to you.”<sup>34</sup> While one might appreciate this sincere attempt on Pearson’s part, it seems somewhat simplistic to think that playing with words this way will ‘fool’ God into thinking we don’t have a faith-opinion on the matter for which we are praying. Again, it at least points to an uncertainty of the role of faith and the formula of words when it comes to healing prayer.

### **Demonization**

The subject of demonization is significant, both in terms of what the literature says about it, and the disagreement about it. A brief summary here will have to suffice since wading too far into this area will need more space than warrants a paper this size.

One of the authors of the Synod Report stated in a seminar on “Spiritual Warfare and the Reformed Tradition” that the Christian Reformed Church had, in accepting the recommendations of the Synod Report, officially endorsed exorcism. What is not clear from either the report or the seminar is what this endorsement understands about the ability of Satan/demons that would require deliverance.

At stake is a question of the degree to which someone who belongs to Jesus Christ can be oppressed, possessed, controlled, demonized, influenced, etc by powers outside one’s own flesh or the Holy Spirit. While all four approaches would claim that you cannot belong to both Christ and Satan (possessed) at the same time, FIC and Dunamis clearly teach that through a variety of

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<sup>32</sup>MacNutt, 205.

<sup>33</sup>C.S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,1967), 142-151.

<sup>34</sup>Pearson, 74.

means, demons can attach themselves to something that is part of a Christian (e.g. sin, memories, wounds) and so influence a Christian and shape how she or he thinks and acts and to what degree they are free in Christ or in bondage.

MacNutt reflects the longstanding Roman Catholic tradition that affirms the work of Satan and the demonic, a tradition that led to a desire by Pope Benedict XVI that an exorcist be a part of every parish. But from there the understanding of what demonization is all about becomes very divergent. Anderson has been strongly criticized for the power he attributes to demons.<sup>35</sup> Smith believes in a deliverance ministry, but stresses that demons are not the main problem – getting rid of the demon still leaves the garbage and the garbage is the issue;<sup>36</sup> Dunamis states that casting out demons is not the goal because demons are themselves not the problem, but are blockers of the healing which is the goal.

This has not yet addressed the question of truth encounter (FIC) versus power encounter (Dunamis) or the difference of opinion on the role of naming or requesting the names of demons as part of the process of exorcising the demons. Ice and Fisher identify two concerns that remain specifically with Anderson but address any who would lean towards demonization that goes beyond influencing the people of God. Ice writes:

The real potential for problems in the Christian life is blaming things on the demonic and neglecting normal Christian growth and maturity. It is this kind of lack of maturity in the lives of many believers, because they are looking for the quick-fix of a Neil Anderson deliverance, that will prove in the long run to effect the greater damage. I am concerned that believers wake up to the false ways of Dr. Anderson.<sup>37</sup>

Brent Grimsley and Elliot Miller write:

This analogy [i.e. Jack Deere's argument that if Jesus can dwell in a sinful person why couldn't he dwell in a demonized person] between demonic evil and the evil of fallen humanity is flawed. God stands in a different relationship to demons than to believers. He is the *judge* of Satan and demons and the *savior* of believers. Demons are enemies of God; believers, despite their sin natures, are His servants and friends. God will dwell with His people; He will not dwell with His enemies. This argument fails to recognize the essential difference between evil persons (demons) and redeemed persons (believers) who have evil within

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<sup>35</sup>C.f. Miller and Passantino in their series of four articles on "The Bondage Maker."

<sup>36</sup>Smith, 213.

<sup>37</sup>Thomas Ice, "Neil Anderson: Demon Possession and the New Clinical Deliverance," *Biblical Perspectives* 5, no. 3 (May/June 1992): n.p. Online: <http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/exposes/anderson/demon.htm>. Accessed May 6, 2011.

them (the 'flesh'), but also have a new nature (the 'spirit') which causes them to ultimately triumph over evil (1 John 3:9).<sup>38</sup>

Miller in a further critique of FIC writes:

Controversial components in Anderson's message include not only his teaching that Christians can have demons but also his belief that Christians should speak to the devil, that they must specifically identify and renounce past sins in order to be free of them, that they do not possess a sin nature, that correct self-perception is the key to sanctified living, and that satanic ritual abuse and multiple personality disorder are common problems caused by a vast satanic conspiracy. Also subject to criticism are his methods for finding scriptural, historical, and contemporary support for his claims.<sup>39</sup>

Bob and Gretchen Passantino identify a concern regarding positions on spiritual warfare similar to that of FIC, and then link that concern to the prominent place given personal experience in determining a theology of healing prayer (as discussed above). They write:

Finally, many contemporary books on spiritual warfare, including Johnston's, Bubeck's, White's, and Anderson's, promote the controversial, minority view that Christians can be controlled against their wills by demons. Whether this is called demon possession, demonization, demonic oppression, or something else, such a view has never been the majority view of the evangelical Church. All of the contemporary books advocating the minority view rely heavily (in some cases almost entirely) on personal experience rather than comprehensive biblical exegesis.<sup>40</sup>

While these quotes don't settle the debate, they underline to some degree the depth of disagreement. Outside of these disagreements, however, it is clear that the work of Satan is real even if its scope is not clear. John Calvin in his Institutes writes:

We have been forewarned that an enemy relentlessly threatens us, and enemy who is the very embodiment of rash boldness, of military prowess, of crafty wiles, of untiring zeal and haste, of every conceivable weapon and of skill in the science of warfare. We must, then, bend our every effort to this goal: that we should not let ourselves be overwhelmed by carelessness or faintheartedness, but on the contrary, with courage rekindled stand our ground in combat.<sup>41</sup>

The Synod Report does not really answer how it understands the extent of the power of

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<sup>38</sup>Brent Grimsley and Elliot Miller, "Can a Christian Be "Demonized?" *Christian Research Journal*: n.p. Online: <http://www.equip.org/articles/can-a-christian-be-demonized->. Accessed May 6, 2011.

<sup>39</sup>Elliot Miller, "Neil Anderson and Freedom In Christ Ministries: A General Critique," *Christian Research Journal*, 21 no 1 (1998): n.p. Online: <http://www.equip.org/articles/neil-anderson-and-freedom-in-christ-ministries-a-general-critique->. Accessed May 6, 2011.

<sup>40</sup>Bob and Gretchen Passantino, "Spiritual Warfare: Designer Weapons for Contemporary Christians." Online: [http://www.answers.org/bookreviews/spiritual\\_warfare\\_lit\\_rev.html](http://www.answers.org/bookreviews/spiritual_warfare_lit_rev.html). Accessed May 6, 2011.

<sup>41</sup>As quoted in Synod Report, 377.

Satan/demons over those who belong to Jesus. This is an area that needs further clarification. In view of what Calvin and others have said, however, it seems that perhaps the prior question in the reformed tradition is not so much how to critique what others are doing, but to consider what has and hasn't been done in light of its own belief that has been clear for so many years.

### **Conclusion**

While the above review of the literature also identifies some of the concerns and critique of the approaches that the literature represents, the following chapter will look at the psychological and theological perspectives that both help to understand some of the dynamics of the healing prayer movement, as well as raise some questions and offer some critique in addition to what is found above.

### Chapter 3 – Behavioural-Psychological Perspective

#### A Question of Orientation (of the culture of healing prayer)

A helpful psychological perspective used for this paper is one that is more general in approach, but also one that invites more discerning assessment of healing prayer beyond what this paper can do. This perspective came through Don Browning's book: Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies.<sup>1</sup> Browning points out early in his book that "... traditional religion and modern psychology stand in a special relation to one another because both of them provide concepts and technologies for the ordering of the interior life."<sup>2</sup> The question he wants to address in his book he identifies as

...a cultural problematic of great general significance. Will our culture be oriented and directed by our inherited religious traditions or will it increasingly gain its orientation, especially with regard to the inner life, from the modern psychologies? Or is there a way to state the appropriate relationship between these two perspectives thereby giving each its proper space?<sup>3</sup>

Browning goes on to state that:

It is my thesis that significant portions of the modern psychologies, and especially the clinical psychologies, are actually instances of religio-ethical thinking. They are, in fact, mixed disciplines which contain examples of religious, ethical, and scientific language... when many of these psychologies are submitted to careful analysis one discovers that they have religious and moral horizons about which both they and the general public are unclear.<sup>4</sup>

What Browning is identifying is what he sees as a human tendency to project certain expectations and understanding on how one sees and understand an experience. While Browning applies this specifically to modern psychologies, this is a more commonly taught concept in counselling and Clinical Pastoral Education. The intention of this teaching is to increase the self awareness of counsellors in order to enable them to factor out their own biases and projections and so more objectively help the client. Browning's well reasoned identification of this in looking at the modern psychologies begs the question of whether this human tendency may also play a role in healing prayer and account for both the different approaches but also the different results.

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<sup>1</sup>Don S. Browning, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies: A Critical Conversation in the Theology of Culture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 8.

In short, what Browning's study suggests is that even with careful attention to theological and biblical study, and perhaps especially because of the experiential basis of much of the foundation of healing prayer, those who are involved in its shaping and practice come to it with certain expectations and understanding that may shape how they understand what they have experienced. They come with a certain accepted 'moral/spiritual' system in place that is applied in order to make sense of what is being experienced. As Browning writes "The revised critical co-relational approach to the theology of culture admits that cultural expressions not only ask questions about existence, they often project answers as well."<sup>5</sup>

It is significant to note the claims of a study that supports significant differences in healing experiences for those who applied the seven steps of FIC as opposed to those who did not. The study states that the "study results have demonstrated that clients receiving Steps to Freedom counselling had significant decreases in all symptom/behaviour categories at 3 to 4 months along with improvement in function areas."<sup>6</sup> It is of equal interest to read Bruce Flamm in "Inherent dangers of Faith-healing Studies" and note his move in the opposite direction, arguing passionately against faith-healing studies not because they don't proclaim truth, but because they undermine what he values in understanding and proclaiming healing.<sup>7</sup> Browning says:

If there is apparent agreement between the Christian claim and cultural expression, that does not necessarily make either of them true. The conversation must be critical; the inner testimony of faith counts in the discussion, but additional reasons must be given in support of faith's claims. Similarly, nonagreement between the Christian view and a cultural expression does not necessarily make the cultural expression wrong or inadequate; additional reasons must be given to support the claims of both.<sup>8</sup>

He further clarifies this when he writes that this has to do with

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...one of the primary points of this book; that is, it is not only in theology but,

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>6</sup>George A. Hurst and others, eds., "Faith-Based Intervention in Depression, Anxiety, and Other Mental Disturbances," *Southern Medical Journal* 101 (April 2008): 390.

<sup>7</sup>The Abstract of Flamm's articles states: "Although faith healing has been advocated by religious groups for millennia, the issue here is the propriety of making supernatural claims in medical journals. It is one thing to tell an audience at a religious revival that prayers yield miracle cures, but it is quite another thing to make the same such claims in a scientific journal." (Bruce L. Flamm, "Inherent Dangers of Faith-Healing Studies," *The Scientific Review of Alternative Medicine*, 8 (Fall/Winter 2004-5): n.p. Online: <http://www.sram.org/0802/faith-healing.html>. Accessed May 6, 2011.)

<sup>8</sup>Browning, 16.

to a surprising extent, in the modern psychologies as well that the way we metaphorically represent the world in its most durable and ultimate respects influences (although not necessarily determines in all respects) what we think we are obligated to do.<sup>9</sup>

Although the above commentary includes significant quotes from Browning, its weight is in the way it begs an assessment of how objective one can be in any attempt to understand what is going on in the healing ministry of Jesus and how that speaks to the subjective experience of pain and suffering today. This becomes further complicated when one considers the human desire to validate and repeat the healing Jesus did. There needs to be an awareness of the metaphors (to use Browning's term) one brings into an understanding and practice of healing prayer in order to distil how that might colour what is real when it comes to healing and how it is to be understood.

This is especially important when one considers the inconsistencies, differences and questions that remain within and between the approaches to healing prayer. Browning's perspective invites a better and more critical dialogue between 'nature and spirit' (the scientific and the spiritual) to understand what is going on in the experience of healing prayer in order not to reduce healing to either simple biology or conversely to simple supernaturalism. A reformed world and life view will especially want to consider both aspects as both are included in God's gifts to the people.

In Browning's final chapter entitled "Psychology and Society: Toward a critical psychological theory" he suggests that our desire for healing, health, and freedom may be less about a strict biblical theology than in some way serving "the ideological functions of reflecting, perpetuating, and legitimating" the modern psychology of our society/culture.<sup>10</sup> Further, he writes: "What are at issue are the needs of self-reproduction of a particular arm of society into which these disciplines have been unwittingly pressed, and their concepts, whether psychological, ethical, or metaphorical, are simply tools to that end."<sup>11</sup> To the degree that this can be true for modern psychologies, it can be true for modern theologies that include a theology of healing prayer. Further objective study is needed to help discern to what degree Browning's observations may be applicable to the practice and understanding of healing prayer. The discussion between

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 240.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 241.

Miller and Smith<sup>12</sup> is a good example of the kind of dialogue between ‘nature and spirit’ perspectives that would promote this discernment.

### A Question of Definition

A second psychological perspective with regard to healing prayer has to do with an understanding of, and hope for, healing. This indirectly ties into what Browning says as well. A definition of healing and the desire for what one believes it ought to be will colour an understanding of how to pursue it and how to understand a God who is understood as desiring what is good for His people. If I believe that God wants my good, and I define that good as a pain/suffering free life, then I will need to work out an understanding of how God works that would fit this. By the same token, if I accept these premises but am then unable to achieve healing I will need to examine whether I am incorrect in procedure, whether there are other obstacles (demons, sin) or whether there is something else wrong (sin, lies, memories) in order to resolve any resulting cognitive dissonance.

A part of how this can be framed is to look at the difference between healing and cure. *Cure* is what happens when the wound is no longer problematic and the sickness is gone. *Healing* is what happens when the wound or sickness may still be there but one learns to live life and embrace what is good in spite of that wound and even within the experience of it. The challenge is that many who look to healing prayer often seem to be looking more for a cure than they are for healing (c.f. above discussion, Chapter 2 “Spiritual Healing”).<sup>13</sup> But in a holistic, kingdom approach that seeks authentic cooperation with the Holy Spirit and a greater good than just ‘me’ or my immediate (perceived) needs, seeking a cure can become an obstacle to seeking healing. The question then becomes which God has in mind and how we determine and then pursue that.

Considering this from a psychological perspective, it is possible that those who seek cures will look for the kinds of things that then may lead to cures (or their perception of what that would be) and in the pursuit miss a deeper process of healing beyond the ‘sickness.’ As some of the critics of healing prayer have pointed out, the danger of blaming other people or circumstances and of serving self - which some associate with at least some of approaches

<sup>12</sup>C.f. (especially the opening synopsis) of Elliot Miller, “An Evaluation of Theophostic Prayer Ministry,” *Christian Research Institute Publications* (2005):n.p. Online: <http://www.theophostic.com/resources/1/pdf/PST001.pdf>. Accessed May 6, 2011.

<sup>13</sup>The story of the ten who had leprosy in Luke 17:10-19 is a striking picture of 10 who were cured but only one stepped back to reconnect with the healer, perhaps a picture of the concerned discussed here.



of healing prayer - can block the way of maturing in the deeper issues of what it means to be human.<sup>14</sup> In the small book *The Awakening* the author identifies the pastor's approach as one of understanding that sometimes the healing people need and find begins with a freedom from the need for a cure so that they can live more mature and holistic life;<sup>15</sup> a culture that is more narcissistic, self-centered, and accustomed to immediate gratification will miss that.

### **A Question of Formula Seeking**

A third area of critique or assessment comes with observing the paradox of how anti-formula the proponents of healing prayer claim to be and how formula-driven their teaching and literature seem to be. While attempts to discern methodologies for healing prayer may identify some helpful actions, the paradox itself says something about how the human mind works, at least in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Western society, and again seems to reflect what Browning has pointed out. Our penchant to solve, systemize and package our relationship with God and what that means may speak more to our need for control and understanding than to a genuine attempt to co-operate with the Holy Spirit. It is somewhat awkward to see this paradox so strongly at work and so seemingly unrecognized in the zeal to provide healing.

### **A Question of Facilitation Versus Counselling**

A fourth area of interest and concern from a psychological/behavioural perspective is the boundary or lack of boundary between the role of a prayer facilitator and the role of a therapist or counsellor. These boundaries are not clearly identified or discussed in the literature which leads to some questions of concern not only by general observers, but also by professionals. Smith (TPM) has become sensitive to these concerns as they have grown; TPM was initially named Theophostic Counselling but concerns about the appropriateness and liability of calling the TPM approach 'counselling' when it was not qualified as such led to the name change.<sup>16</sup> However, changing the name does not necessarily change the reality, and so some still question the role of

<sup>14</sup>C.f. for example articles by Grace Church elders, DeWaay, Serowa and Ice.

<sup>15</sup>Zuendel writes: "If the fight and the movement of repentance it sparked were of significance for the kingdom of God, as Blumhardt felt certain, then the miracles that followed held equally rich promise. Blumhardt saw each of these events as an organic outgrowth of the one before – and heard God speaking through them with an unmistakable certainty." The next line describes what happened to those who were pursuing repentance: "Already in the winter of 1844, when the people of Mottlingen came weeping to the rectory, some of them experienced the unexpected healing of their physical ailments, as well as inner peace." (Zuendel, 83.)

<sup>16</sup>Linda A. Hunter and Mark A. Yarhouse, "Theophostic Prayer Ministry in Clinical Practice: Issues and Concerns," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, (Summer 2009): 2. Online: [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_7623/is\\_200907/ai\\_n42042537/?tag=content;col1](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_7623/is_200907/ai_n42042537/?tag=content;col1). Accessed May 6, 2011.

those who facilitate TPM and to what degree TPM practitioners actually practice counselling but merely call it something different.<sup>17</sup>

In a similar vein, Dunamis tries to integrate various facets of psychology and in-depth counselling into its prayer ministry. Given the perspective of Browning it is commendable that Dunamis attempts to be holistic in its approach, recognizing God's gift in medicine and counselling. What is of concern, however, is how the integration seems to be almost entirely determined by the faith perspective, and the counselling/facilitation done by those who have received training only through Dunamis. The process of psychotherapy, regardless of whether one approves its use by Christians, has a certain power and can be dangerous in the hands of untrained facilitators. This approach of Dunamis also minimizes to some degree the need for trained therapists to bring a psychological perspective and as such stands in opposition to the holistic approach Dunamis claims.

Fernando Garzon, associate professor in the School of Psychology and Counseling at Regent University, identifies that in a survey of TMP practitioners (about 10% of which were licensed clinicians) there is a high opinion of TPM's efficacy.

Clients of TMP from the survey also give TPM high marks. While these are encouraging results, the limited medical and psychological training of many practitioners concerns most Christian therapists. Such therapists especially wonder about the quality of care being given to the people suffering from complex conditions.<sup>18</sup>

David Entwistle, Associate Professor of Psychology at Malone University, referenced in the article "Theophostic Prayer Ministry in Clinical Practice: Issues and Concerns," raises strong concerns about this with regard to TPM. The article states:

While TPM may not offer advice or assist with problem solving strategies, Entwistle believes that when TPM is viewed through the lens of psychotherapy one will find that it 'adopts techniques similar to those of cognitive restructuring, exposure and desensitization therapies [and] identifying psychodynamic defence mechanisms.' Lehman, a 'licensed physician and board certified psychiatrist' sympathetic to TPM (CAPS International Conference, Panel discussion, April 7, 2005) appears to agree somewhat with Entwistle stating that TPM shares commonality with several empirically validated psychotherapeutic interventions

<sup>17</sup>Entwistle specifically states about TPM: "Merely avoiding the title "counsellor" may not be sufficient to avoid the legal entanglements of practicing without a license." (David N. Entwistle, "Shedding light on Theophostic Ministry 2: ethical and legal issues," *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, (Spring 2004): 6. Online: [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_hb6566/is\\_1\\_32/ai\\_n29090066/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb6566/is_1_32/ai_n29090066/)). Accessed May 6, 2011.

<sup>18</sup>Fernando Garzon, "Theophostic Ministry: What Is It? Who Is Using It? What Does the Research Show?" *Reformation and Revival Journal*, 13 no. 2 (2004): 106.

[namely Cognitive therapy, Exposure Therapy, and EMDR].<sup>19</sup>

Dunamis further attempts to construct a theory of how the unconscious mind functions (Manual pages 246ff) and how to understand and deal with pre-natal hurts (Manual page 261). One has to question whether the attempt to integrate faith and psychological approaches is a real integration of nature and spirit a la Browning, or a one sided attempt to exercise therapy (and justify or even spiritually sanitize psychotherapy) by fitting it into a religious framework, and using trust in Jesus to blame or credit whatever results come of it.

### A Question of Self-fulfilling Prophecy

A fifth behavioural area of question would need to consider to what degree the attempt of healing – and especially inner healing – works as a self fulfilling prophecy (placebo effect, inner energy, self-therapy). While a reformed perspective might embrace any such effect as a part of how God’s created order works, a sense of integrity would want to know when healing is a self-fulfilled prophecy et al, and when it is the direct intervention of God that would serve as a sign of His presence among and a display of His power in His people. A placebo effect that leads to untrue belief about God or the actions of God may still allow room for thanksgiving, but it would not honour the truth. This is in part what seems to drive some of the concern of Flamm in his critique of the publication of Faith-Healing studies, noting specifically the study of Cha et al (2001).<sup>20</sup>

While there are a number of ways in which such self-fulfilling prophecy might happen (for e.g. note the explanation and claims by Dunamis for ‘kairos moments’ of the Holy Spirit, Manual page 134ff) the healing prayer experience lends itself to that as well. When one is led in

<sup>19</sup>Hunter and Yarhouse, n.p. To this, one can add the assessment of the Passantinos: “Anderson’s paradigm incorporates widely disputed theories of dissociative disorders, repression and recovery of memories (e.g., of childhood abuse), and satanic ritual abuse (SRA). Anderson at times appears to divorce his views of repression and revelation from the MPD/repression/therapeutic recovery paradigm. This seemingly protects him from having to defend theories that are disputed by a wealth of evidence and professional opinion, although it doesn’t exempt him from criticism by biblical and theological authorities.” (Bob and Gretchen Passantino, “The Bondage Maker: Examining the Message and Method of Neil T. Anderson (Part 4) – Spiritual Warfare and the Myth of Satanic Conspiracies and Ritual Abuse,” *Christian Research Journal*, 21 no. 4 (1999): 1. Online: <http://www.equip.org/articles/the-bondage-maker-examining-the-message-and-method-of-neil-t-anderson-part-four-spiritual-warfare-and-the-myth-of-satanic-conspiracies-and-ritual-abuse/>. Accessed May 6, 2011).

<sup>20</sup>Flamm, n.p. In the same article Flamm writes that “some readers [of the study] might believe that God or some other deity was at work, while other readers might assume that some type of paranormal, psychic, or otherwise magical power worked without the need for a deity. In any case, something beyond the laws of physics is presumed to have occurred in this study. If the editors and reviewers of the journal [that published the study] believed that the results were supported by valid evidence, then it was appropriate to publish the study – but odd not to offer editorial comment. On the other hand, if the editors did not find the evidence convincing, then it is odd that they would choose to publish the study.”

prayer by an ‘authority’ who acts in some capacity as a priest(ess) and the intent of the prayer is to invite Jesus into the prayer moment in order for the pray-ee to see and hear him, and when the pray-ee knows of the success of others in having seen Jesus through such efforts, there is a strong emotional demand on the pray-ee to make sure that she or he sees Jesus in the prayer. To fail to see Jesus, or worse, to have Jesus not deem you worthy of his *appearance* might be harder to bear psychologically than the wound to be healed.<sup>21</sup>

Grimsley and Miller point to this concern when they ask about demon possession:

If we do not accept the claims of Christian possession, what are we to make of the many dramatic experiences reported by Dickason, the late theologian Merrill Unger, John Wimber (leader of the vineyard churches), and numerous others? We don’t doubt the reality of many such experiences, but the interpretation these teachers give them is not called for... Many of these occurrences could be attributed to psychological sources — not only mental illness (which is no doubt a factor in some cases) but also the power of suggestion. In our long-term research of religious movements and phenomena, time and again we have run into a curious fact: intelligent people can become persuaded of improbable beliefs when striking manifestations issue from their own psyches or the psyches of others, or are experienced as external events...In many of these and other cases a common denominator is a contagious anticipation — often set into motion by the leaders of the event — that such manifestations very well may occur. It can be observed that phenomena will be cited in support of almost any belief, no matter how unbiblical. There is much that we have yet to learn about the dynamics of our own minds, and some of these little -understood factors demonstrate a powerful capacity to lead people into psychological self -deception.<sup>22</sup>

Again, this concern fits the observations of Browning since human nature will more likely tend to vision (imagine) Jesus in these circumstances than to deal with the uncertain negativity of Jesus not showing up. This does not mean that a vision of Jesus is not real or that people are fabricating a report of seeing Jesus in prayer. It is to say that this factor, combined with the perceived authority of the one facilitating the prayer (who is understood to have some connection to God in order to be a representative of a particular approach), makes it harder to determine the actual reality of Jesus’ presence. The whole process of healing prayer, even if entirely biblically and theologically correct in what it sees of Jesus and hears him say, when viewed in the light of

<sup>21</sup>Reflecting on my TPM experience it was significant to recognize afterwards the significant pressure in my own mind that Jesus appear in my prayer. My already present fears of not being acceptable at some level (after all, why could I not achieve my own inner healing) was heightened when I didn’t see Jesus right away (what if Jesus doesn’t even want to show up in prayer). While again I do not want to diminish any gift that God has given, at the same time from a human perspective I wonder how exactly Jesus appeared in my prayer given the pressure I felt. If he was a projection of my need in any way, then what he spoke could be a projection of that as well. As indicated earlier in this paper, that may not diminish the value of what was said, but my projection is not equal to the real presence of the Lord.

<sup>22</sup>Grimsley and Miller, 5.

psychology can also be explained as a projection of the Jesus we think we know and at a deeper level believe we need to see.

To suggest to pray-ees that their perception of Jesus' presence in their prayer is a projection of their own imagination would be very difficult for them to accept, especially since those who experience such perception likely have longed for a connection with the divine.<sup>23</sup> However, truth (and the place God gives truth) would demand that more work be done to examine the claims of healing prayer and the actual presence of Jesus in light of Scripture and what is known of how the human mind works. For creatures prone to self deception, with a history of creating gods that can be seen when there is a perceived sense of loss of connection with the divine,<sup>24</sup> and a pattern of doing what is right in their own eyes, more careful attention needs to be paid to these concerns. This is where psychology and theology intersect and need to work together to better understand the experiences of those who do claim healing and who firmly believe they have encountered God in the process.

### **Conclusion**

In the end, what this chapter does not do is deny any reality of healing. What it wants to do is invite better and more integrated research between psychology and theology to determine what is really happening in healing prayer, especially in light of known theory of human psychology.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup>During a time of prayer at a Dunamis seminar, someone had a vision of God's deep love for me coming down on me. I noted in my reaction to that vision that there was a significant desire on my part that the vision be real while at the same time wanting to fight any acceptance of it simply because I wanted it to be real. When in a second unrelated situation, several months later with different people from a different country, different background and different denomination, an intercessor in prayer for me saw a similar vision, I am wondering what that means. Is this a message from God to me, is it some need I exude that leads sensitive people to fill the 'void' with a loving answer, is it coincidental and safe (after all, telling someone God loves them when they already confess belonging to Him is not likely to be wrong)? At the same time, the message of that vision struck a nerve that was real.

<sup>24</sup>The story of Exodus 32 is a striking revelation of what a people can do when there is a sense of desperate need to 'see' God; it is also a striking story of inherent danger of doing that if God is real.

<sup>25</sup>In his initial review of TPM Miller stated the following: "To demonstrate that TPM gets results superior to all or most other varieties of inner healing/therapy and is not simply reaping the common benefits of counselling (e.g., the placebo effect and the therapeutic value of catharsis in a caring environment), rigorous scientific testing is needed." (Elliot Miller, "An Evaluation of Theophostic Prayer Ministry," *Christian Research Institute Publications* (2005): 7. Online: <http://www.theophostic.com/resources/1/pdf/PST001.pdf>, Accessed May 6, 2011.)

After further dialogue with Smith and study of TPM, Miller states the following: "It remains to be established scientifically whether, and to what extent, emotional healing is possible through TPM... What seems much less possible scientifically, and much less supported even anecdotally, are the claims that Smith has made for TPM's ability to cure chronic disorders that possibly have a mind-body connection (e.g., fibromyalgia). Smith's past claims that TPM can provide maintenance-free healing of complex sexual and addictive disorders such as homosexuality and alcoholism are equally unsubstantiated. There has been no scientific research to support such claims and even the anecdotal evidence Smith cited usually did not encompass a sufficient period of time to mean anything." (Elliot Miller, "Teachings in Transition: Recent Changes and Remaining Concerns with Theophostic Prayer Ministry," *Christian Research Journal*, 29 no. 3 (2006): 5. Online: <http://www.equip.org/PDF/JAT206-2.pdf>, Accessed May 6, 2011.)

While being grateful for all healing that happens, and recognizing that healing does not mean cure, and that genuine healing can be reported as truth in medical journals, at the same time there needs to be an effort to speak honestly and with integrity based on a thorough evaluation within the Christian community under the lens of all the gifts of creation, including a rigorous psychological perspective.

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## Chapter 4 – Behavioural-Theological Perspective

While not all matters of interest or concern in the behavioural/theological perspective can be addressed, five are of interest in helping shape next steps of understanding and participation in healing prayer.

### The Definition of Healing and the Desire of God

A first area of concern is the often automatic assumption that God desires health and wholeness and therefore healing/cure is always within His will – some who argue this perspective are already identified in Chapter 1 of this paper. Perhaps because of the human tendency that Browning identifies, namely the projection onto someone or something of the truth we already believe, there is a tendency in Western culture to equate health and wholeness with healing/cure, specifically for the individual. Even with disclaimers that in the end God will do what He wants, that formulas shouldn't be looked for, and that holistic healing should be the goal, there is still a strong tendency in the practice of healing prayer to look for God's presence and blessing primarily by way of the evidence of cure.

One needs to recognize as some of the literature does, that inner healing is of a different sort than physical healing; some would suggest that assuming physical cure as God's will may be less appropriate than assuming God's desire to free His children from lies that thwart their person and mission.<sup>1</sup> But again, the clear sense is that God can be 'encouraged' into healing someone through the presence of faith, the use of formulas, dependence on and trust in God, specific prayers, power and truth encounters... but always healing/cure for the benefit of the individual.

This is not to suggest that those who allow God 'free will' in healing while at the same time try to find the key to secure healing from God lack integrity. It is to say that deep down in the (Western) human mind/heart is a sense that cure - as defined from a human perspective - is understood as something better to have than not have, and a good God – if all the conditions are right – would be willing to provide it.

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<sup>1</sup>Miller writes that "it seems that a case can be made that TPM's trust that Jesus responds to participants' in-session prayers is biblically warranted. Theophostic prayer is predicated on the assumptions that... whereas God may have a positive purpose for leaving us in physical or circumstantial afflictions, He has no positive reason to leave us languishing in Satan's lies, and so if we are willing to face the truth about such beliefs, He is willing to reveal it to us. This seems to be a fact that is both intuitively true, based on the character of God revealed in Scripture, and that can be inferred from the combined teaching of the following Scriptures: Psalm 25:5, 8-14; 84:11; Hebrews 6:18; 1 Timothy 2:3-4; John 3:19-21; 7:17; 1 John 1:5-7; 3:8 (cf. John 8:43-47, etc.)." (Elliot Miller, "An Evaluation of Theophostic Prayer Ministry," *Christian Research Institute Publications*, (2005):12. Online: <http://www.theophostic.com/resources/1/pdf/PST001.pdf>. Accessed May 6, 2011.)

However, from a biblical perspective it is also fair to consider something different, namely that God may be using suffering to help bring maturity to an individual, or that suffering is a chastising for personal or communal sin, or even that God has a higher purpose in mind that curing would hinder (c.f. discussion in Chapter 2 – “Methodology”). This would mean that an accompanying doctrine of providence would lead the one seeking healing to not only accept when God says ‘no’ to cure, but would embrace that answer as part of God’s plan for a broader kingdom perspective.<sup>2</sup> This perspective, then, would suggest that God might not desire healing in all cases. However, if healing is the individual’s goal, this perspective is not readily included in a theology of how to understand God’s will with healing because it would not ‘fit’. One discussion in which this becomes apparent is whether or not to pray ‘not my will but yours be done’ as identified in Chapter 2 above. There is a fear among many proponents of healing prayer that adding this phrase to the prayer would erode the opportunity for healing; this only fits, however, if one has already set healing as the highest and only priority. As such, the implication is that trust and acceptance of God’s will is a lesser priority than achieving the (perceived) will of God for healing.

Gordon Fee adds a helpful perspective in Paul, the Spirit and the People of God. He asks the question of how it is some of God’s people don’t receive healing. In partial answer, Fee points out how Paul speaks of life *in the flesh* (which humanity still has) as opposed to life *according to the flesh* (which is dead when one is in Christ). Because of human tendency to see uncured suffering as connected to living *according to the flesh*, Fee writes, “there is a strong tendency to leave God’s people to slug it out in the trenches more or less on their own, with some lip service paid to the Spirit but with little of Paul’s experience of the ‘Spirit as the empowering presence of God’.”<sup>3</sup> This results in an under realized eschatological perspective, with so much emphasis on the not-yet that there is little emphasis on the already. In this way Fee strongly encourages the pursuit of the Holy Spirit’s power for healing since God’s people no longer live according to the flesh.

But Fee goes on to say: “That suffering and pain stem from evil is not to be doubted; that

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<sup>2</sup>“While freedom from physical and emotional pain is what God ultimately desires for us we recognize that suffering is part of our present life, and we also must emphasize that it is often used by God to strengthen and build up our faith. Suffering has a place in the Christian life, and, therefore, we ought not be hasty about seeking release from our pain or look for quick fixes in promises of God’s power.” (Christian Reformed Church, 377).

<sup>3</sup>Fee, 142.



they are the direct result of our own evil – or lack of faith, as some would have it – is not only to be doubted but to be vigorously rejected as completely foreign to Paul.”<sup>4</sup>

God’s people still live life in the flesh, and this is part of the not-yet that will not be fully removed until the return of Christ. Sickness et al is therefore not necessarily part of the tension of faith and sin; it may simply be part of living in a world that is not yet fully redeemed. This more comprehensive understanding of what healing is, how that is distinguished from cure, and how these fit in a more holistic understanding of what it means to be human as God intended, will help to clarify some of the methodology and expectations, as well as help to better understand God and His providence.

### **The Purpose of Healing**

This ties into a second area needing clarification, namely understanding the purpose of healing, (with natural connection to the purpose of suffering). On the one hand the simple purpose of healing is to resolve a problem, and for the one with the problem, that may be the highest priority she or he works with: ‘Healing will free me from that which hinders the me I want to be.’ However, as insinuated above, that purpose tends to be individualistic, very western and not entirely biblical. God’s intentions for healing may have something more significant in mind, such as serving for further healing elsewhere or maturation or growth for the community of which the healed is a part.

John Algera points to this when he identifies areas that ought to be affected increasingly as we experience health and healing. He identifies that health through the work of signs and wonders will have an impact on worship, witness, fellowship and discipleship.<sup>5</sup> What is important about Algera’s comments is his identification that healing has to do with far more than just the individual or a specific problem; the purpose of healing and health in summary would be to better live out what it means to be *the body of Christ* in growing relationship with God.

While this is not exclusive to Algera,<sup>6</sup> what is significant is the implication for those who desire healing, and the implication for any methodology of introduction to, pursuit of and

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 142.

<sup>5</sup>John A. Algera, *Signs and Wonders: A Reformed Look at the Spirit’s Ongoing Work* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2006), 168-187.

<sup>6</sup>C.f. *Manual* pg 45 which identifies 4 purposes: 1. Brought to salvation in Jesus Christ; 2. Empowered by the Holy Spirit; 3. Disciple into maturity; 4. Sent out as witnesses. C.f. also Pearson, pg 44, where he discusses how blessing or healing of God needs to lead to ministry and picking up one’s cross.

follow up of healing. If I am seeking God's healing in life, but do not consider that His goal in any healing is far beyond me, then I am in danger of using God for my ends, rather than asking God to heal me for His ends. While God may still provide healing in spite of an inadequate perspective, to be amiss in this matter is to miss the central thrust of what the kingdom of God is about. Human tendency to only desire God or His gifts or His kingdom when one personally has a problem misses the central intention of wholeness, shalom, that God is building.

Hans Urs von Balthasar points to the root of this in identifying that in the end, the result of both suffering and healing is to drive us closer to God.

It is essential that, for human beings, both reasons for the tribulation – their own guilt, which leads them the brink of being abandoned, and their exposure to God's storm-waves – are indistinguishable to those in the midst of tribulation and anxiety. What matters and what God wants to hear is the anxious cry sent up to him, which, the moment it is sounded, even from the farthest coast, also reaches the center of God's heart. It is in "hanging by a thread" – provided the thread is God – that the covenant relationship is tested anew and restored.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Place of Community**

A third area that follows naturally from this has to do with the place and role of community in healing prayer. It is clear in the literature that community (as in faith community) plays a significant role in the exercise of healing prayer, and to a lesser degree in the benefit of healing prayer. Some have identified (as noted earlier) that at times healing in Jesus' ministry happened not because of the faith of the individual but because of the faith of the community, the lack of which could also get in the way of healing.<sup>8</sup> Ray Matheson, a leader in healing prayer ministry in his home church, Chartwell Baptist in Oakville, Ontario, identified in a seminar that healing is for communities, not individuals. This underlines, he suggests, that wholeness for the community is God's goal and so the purpose of the community is not simply to seek healing when crisis occurs, but to pursue the walk with God and empowerment of the Holy Spirit that would avoid the events and lifestyle that lead to crisis.<sup>9</sup>

Proponents and critics of the various approaches also affirm that the end goal of healing is

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<sup>7</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian and Anxiety* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 63.

<sup>8</sup>C.f. Matthew 13:58. The passage suggests in context that the faith lacking was not so much a faith in miracles as it was a faith in the Christ.

<sup>9</sup>Roy Matheson, Seminar on "Supernatural Healing" (Chartwell Baptist): Guelph, ON, February, 2004.

to create community with God and others.<sup>10</sup> Pearson goes so far as to say that part of the reason for the decline in healing is that the task was taken out of the hands of local congregations and given to specialized ministers (saints). He believes every congregation needs to have a healing ministry.<sup>11</sup> The Synod Report identifies that this is a characteristic understanding of the third wave, namely that healing ministry takes place within a body of believers and further states that “any inner healing ministry ought to operate under the spiritual authority of church leaders and include clear accountability.”<sup>12</sup>

Fee adds a deeper perspective. He clarifies that “the gathered church is the place of God’s own personal presence, by the Spirit”<sup>13</sup> as opposed to individual Christians being that place. The community is the lived out presence of God and is the place where God’s presence is received and the kingdom perspective maintained. People who seek/find healing in front of a television or at a special event may receive something, Fee suggests, but outside of community it will ‘die’ in terms of God’s intention.<sup>14</sup>

Further he writes:

[Paul’s] focus and concern are always on the people as a whole. Though entered individually, salvation is seldom if ever thought of simply as a one-on-one relationship with God. While such a relationship is included, to be sure, “to be saved” means especially to be joined to the people of God. In this sense, the third-century church father Cyprian had it right: there is no salvation outside the church, because God is saving a people for his name, not a miscellaneous, unconnected set of individuals. Thus our present concern is with the primary goal of salvation: an eschatological people, who together live the life of the future in the present age as they await the final consummation.<sup>15</sup>

Fee concludes that the phenomena of the charismata, pneumatic or ‘manifestations of the spirit’ “are especially the activity of the Spirit *in the gathered community*, as 1 Corinthians 14

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<sup>10</sup>C.f. Christian Reformed Church, 340; Anderson, 160; Pearson, 72.

Ray Vanderkooij, a CRC pastor and member of the Synod Report committee, in describing his leadership in healing ministry, and echoing what all 4 strands of healing prayer point to, identified that healing prayer is specifically intended not to be a clergy project but a ‘body of Christ’ project.

<sup>11</sup>Pearson, 35-36.

<sup>12</sup>Christian Reformed Church, 375.

<sup>13</sup>Fee, 19.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 46, 158.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 64.

makes abundantly clear.”<sup>16</sup>

A concern in the practice of healing prayer is that while most people who practice such prayer understand and agree to the importance of community, it is easy to lose sight of this in the business and busyness of the pursuit of healing. But the more divided the process of healing and community become, the less it can achieve what God intends through it. This in turn may affect the ‘desire’ of God to provide healing when asked and so become an obstacle to the process of healing, if indeed there is such a process.

### **The Role of Sin and Repentance**

A fourth area that is addressed to some degree by FIC and Dunamis has to do with confronting and dealing with sin/repentance as an integral part of the healing process. The four approaches each acknowledge that sin can stand in the way of healing and therefore needs to be addressed. James 5 is identified as addressing this truth specifically (though some would understand this to be the theme of the whole Scripture).<sup>17</sup> Although each of the four approaches addresses this in their own way, all recognize that if an individual seeks healing, he or she needs to face sin and engage in repentance. However, it is less clear within the practice of these four strands as to how exactly this works or is understood to apply to the process of healing.

Biblically, the problem with sin is not just that God is against it, or that its presence presents a legal problem, or even that God will not give healing if unresolved sin is present - though all of this may be true. The heart of the problem of sin is that it separates people from God (Is 59:1,2) and erodes their relationship with Him. The converse of this is that God’s people must try to avoid sin and get rid of its consequences in order to be in good relationship or fellowship with God.<sup>18</sup> In the same way, the concern with regard to lies in the TPM approach is not just a matter of pursuing truth for truth’s sake, it is about pursuing life in connection with God as best can be achieved. Recognizing the nature of sin means recognizing this would then be true not only for individual sin but also corporate sin.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 164.

<sup>17</sup>It is interesting how 2 Chronicles 7:14 connects healing prayer and repentance early on in the life of God’s people.

<sup>18</sup>Long and Strickler, 45.

<sup>19</sup>The story of Achan and his demise together with his family in Joshua 7 speaks powerfully to a biblical understanding of community and corporate responsibility.

Given who God is, given God's intent for community means that talking steps to come to this God ought to include a desire for relationship with Him, and for the community that He is seeking to establish. Dealing with sin, then, is not simply a means to an end (healing/cure) but a means to a being (God). To seek God's healing without dealing with sin or working in community would be to show an insensitivity to the very things God intended to build in the gift of healing (consider for e.g. Dunamis' understanding of healing as a part of Christ's ministry of death turning back.<sup>20</sup> This perspective gives a better picture of James 5 where the healing pursued has to do with much more than the cure, and where the sin is not just an obstacle to cure but to the fellowship of God with people.

DeMoss in her significant book Brokenness indirectly identifies that the brokenness of any part of life points to a brokenness with the creator of life and His intentions for life. That starting point needs to be at the heart of any move for healing or health – it's a move toward wholeness. DeMoss writes:

[God] wants to restore our "first love" for Jesus, rekindle the fire of devotion that once burned brightly in our hearts, reconcile broken relationships, and rebuild the part of our lives that are in a state of disrepair. In short, He wants to revive our hearts. And it all begins with brokenness and humility. No exceptions. No shortcuts. No substitutes.<sup>21</sup>

She goes further: "You and I will never meet God in revival until we first meet Him in brokenness... James 4:8-10."<sup>22</sup> "In a sense, revival is really nothing more than the release of God's Spirit flowing through broken lives."<sup>23</sup>

Wildeboer points to both aspects of repentance and community. Looking at James 5 he calls for integrity in restoring community. Sin breaks community and unity; "it's phony to pray together when relationships are tattered."<sup>24</sup> In The Awakening it is striking how healing seemed to happen as something incidental to confession and repentance, and yet as long as repentance remained the focus, people found healing both physically and internally as well: healing was

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<sup>20</sup>Long and others, 38ff.

<sup>21</sup>Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *Brokenness: The Heart God Revives* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002), 21.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>24</sup>Wildeboer, 79.

part of a bigger picture of reconciliation with God.<sup>25</sup> Fee also notes that, in the experiencing of the presence of the Holy Spirit, the first response to God's presence was often weeping and repentance, but repentance was followed by joy, identifying that reconciliation again is the context.<sup>26</sup>

In a kingdom perspective where fellowship with a divine Father and seeking to become more like His child is the goal, repentance is a key to the relationship that can lead to gifts. To simply look for the gifts outside of that context is to miss not simply the point, but the person of God himself. This then needs to be a significant part of not only the understanding of healing prayer, but the place of such prayer in the broader Christian walk.

### Visualizing Jesus in Prayer

A fifth area for discussion is the matter of visualizing Jesus in prayer (TPM's approach) or using words of knowledge or simply a 'sense' of the Holy Spirit's direction (Dunamis' approach). In short, literature and experiential claims of divine intervention and direction raise the question of whether there is an actual presence of and interaction with Jesus (or the Spirit of Jesus) in times of healing prayer, and if so, asking further what the ways are in which we may perceive that and interact with that.

The concern identified is less about whether God is able to interact with those who pray (it is simply assumed that option is His) but whether that interaction can be expected, and if the actual perceived experiences are authentic. Part of the concern comes from biblical warnings of blasphemy – the sin of suggesting something as the voice or presence of God when it is a projection of human thoughts or perspective - which is a weighty matter. In the Old Testament blasphemy was punishable by death (Leviticus 24:13-16) However, if the experience is of the actual 'voice' of God the recipient of such a revelation is in a danger of some sort if they do not obey it and acknowledge the origin of that voice as 'my Lord and my God.'

While the Synod Report is cautiously open to the visualization of Jesus in healing prayer (Synod Report, p 375; c.f. pp 425-426 for further discussion on the danger of blasphemy and the projection based on expectation) it also recognizes the dangers inherent to this openness. On the one hand it is odd that this concern of the actual presence of God in healing prayer ministry is

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 83.

<sup>26</sup>Fee, 153.

so unclear – one wonders why God does not make it more obvious or why somehow his people can't figure out together whether their God is actually present or not. Yet the fact remains that especially in matters of inner healing, many have benefitted by healing prayer that uses and works with the perceived presence of God as part of the healing experience.<sup>27</sup>

Entwistle among others is not quite as ready to be open. Hunter and Yarhouse identify this and provide a quote from Entwistle.

Entwistle (CAPS International Conference, Panel discussion, April 7, 2005) rather suspects that some individuals emerging from TPM may have been exposed to something other than an “authentic encounter with the presence of Christ” (Smith, 2005b, p. 7) and repeatedly suggested at the CAPS Conference that for him this is the watershed issue on which the entire viability of TPM is predicated.

I think the key issue in evaluating TPM is whether or not it is a method in which Jesus or the Holy Spirit is directly and divinely revealing things in people's memory and perhaps appearing in those memories . . . what I would like to suggest is the possibility that it might not be actually Jesus appearing; the possibility that what we might be seeing is actually someone's God representation that is their understanding of what Jesus or God might say to them. If that is the case, then there are a number of possibilities that I think we need to take seriously. One of which is the possibility that someone could have false ideas of what God would say. A second thing is that when a memory is 'revealed' it might actually not be a legitimate memory. And that we would have to look at the possibility of iatrogenetically created false memories. (CAPS International Conference, Panel discussion, April 7, 2005)<sup>28</sup>

John Weldon and John Ankerberg in their article “Visualization: God-Given Power or New Age Danger? (Part Two)” deal more specifically with visualization (as opposed to imaging) as it is used in the New Age movement and occult practices. While they understand that many Christians have used some form of visualization, they offer a strong caution.

...if the church is going to accept some aspects of the practice of visualization, it will need to sort out the godly uses of the imagination from occult varieties. Otherwise, how does a Christian therapist using an “inner Jesus” as a guide,

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<sup>27</sup>Garzon identifies that while testing is slow there are some reports out. “Several TPM case studies with psychological testing have been reported to the professional Christian psychological community and currently sixteen cases have been completed with depression, anxiety, anger issues, and sexual abuse conditions. Thus far, clinically significant reductions in symptoms levels have been observed in a high number of these cases (14 out of 16). In fact, ten of these would be classified as recovered by a general psychological symptom inventory used (the Symptom Checklist 90R). Thirteen of these individuals maintained their gains at a three-month follow-up testing.” (Fernando Garzon, “Theophostic Ministry: What Is It? Who Is Using It? What Does the Research Show?” *Reformation and Revival Journal*, (13 (2): 2004), 107).

<sup>28</sup>Hunter and Yarhouse, n.p.

friend, and advisor ensure his or her client against spiritism? What safeguards can be provided to ensure that imagination will not lead to unanticipated reality and that a spiritistic Jesus will not appear? Spiritistic Jesuses appear all over the place in the occult, from dictating occult texts such as *A Course in Miracles* to direct appearances in the temples of the Mormon Church and to various occultists.<sup>29</sup>

Although all approaches agree that guided imagery is wrong in healing prayer, the somewhat inconsistent confidence of those who use this visualization suggests a better understanding is needed beyond the experience. Part of the uncertainty comes through in how the perceived presence of Jesus is not used. For example, if I believe the image in my prayer is in fact Jesus, and if I believe that I may ask him questions and interact with him, I might also consider asking him other questions, such as if this method of prayer honours him, or if he could authenticate his reality to help me avoid blasphemy (like asking for information the pray-ee would not naturally know).

It also is odd that if a pray-ee trusts that the visualized person is Jesus, then she or he does not need to only give Jesus minor issues, Jesus should be able to heal, advise, or refer on the big issues as well. If that kind of confidence in the presence of Jesus is not there, then there needs to be further questioning as to what is going on not only in the actually imaging, but in the understanding of the pray-ee, the pray-er and the methodology itself. Likewise, if a theology of the compassion of God, including an understanding that God ‘always wants to heal,’ cannot apply to bigger issues or concerns, there needs to be some questions asked as to what is really believed and the criteria by which it is applied. Even as the practice of healing prayer using visualization is achieving positive results for those who receive such prayer, there are many questions and inconsistencies that raise concern over the degree to which visualization of Jesus and words of knowledge have more human (even sanctified human) influence than direct connection with God himself. Entwistle identifies with David Seamonds in distinguishing the work of the Holy Spirit in imagining from the actual visualization of His presence.

Guided imagery involving memory and visualization of Christ is a common element of Inner Healing techniques, however, most Inner Healing adherents part company with Smith’s view of literal revelation. Seamonds (1985), for instance, was clear in distinguishing the ministry of the Holy Spirit from human visualization of His presence.

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<sup>29</sup>John Weldon and John Ankerberg, “Visualization: God-Given Power or New Age Danger? (Part Two)” *Christian Research Journal*. N.p. Online: <http://www.equip.org/PDF/DN388-2.pdf>. Accessed May 6, 2011.



While [visualizations of Jesus] are pictures based on biblical symbols, the form of the mental images by which we visualize His presence is the product of our imaginations. But the fact of His presence pictured by these images is guaranteed by the promises of Scripture. [David Seamonds *Healing of Memories*, p. 68].<sup>30</sup>

### Conclusion

Other theological reflections also deserve attention. Questions about the possibility of actually changing God's mind/plan through prayer,<sup>31</sup> to the actual control believers can have either to stymie God's will<sup>32</sup> or invoke it, to uncertainty between Smith who talks of maintenance free healing<sup>33</sup> and Anderson who calls for the ongoing regular use of his steps to 'keep clean.'<sup>34</sup> There also remain important questions about how to understand why healing often doesn't happen when a theology of expectation follows the same processes.

Yet in all this the fact remains that healing of some sort has been received by some who have received healing prayer; that is also the awareness that becomes the hope that keeps others searching. While for some it is mostly 'cure' for which they are looking, others are genuinely and deeply wanting to know that God is alive and that God is accessible. To the degree that healing prayer is a human answer to a human desire to make God accessible; it can become the golden calf of Aaron. There are many unanswered questions, and it seems almost too obvious that the most God honouring way of addressing the need for answers is for the four approaches to work together, giving some unified leadership for the cause of the God they serve who has said that the heart of belonging to Him is evidenced in unity.<sup>35</sup> Certainly for the claims that each makes, part of how this is done would be to ask God to heal and work beyond whatever rifts divide the four approaches.

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<sup>30</sup>David N. Entwistle, "Shedding light on Theophostic Ministry 2: ethical and legal issues." *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, (Spring 2004): 2. Online: [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_hb6566/is\\_1\\_32/ai\\_n29090066/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb6566/is_1_32/ai_n29090066/). Accessed May 6, 2011.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Cooper in "Can Prayer Really Change Things?" where he suggests prayer does not change God's mind. John W. Cooper, "Can Prayer Really Change Things?" *Calvin Theological Seminary Forum* (Spring 2009): 3-4.

<sup>32</sup>Long and Strickler, 78.

<sup>33</sup>Smith, 52ff.

<sup>34</sup>Anderson, *Guide*, pg 21ff.

<sup>35</sup>John 17:20-23 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

Perhaps the area that needs the most attention is less concerned about all the theological specifics of healing and more concerned about God's design for wholeness. As Pearson writes:

For this reason, a ministry of healing is better entitled a ministry for . We want for ourselves and others not just to look at the specific physical, emotional or spiritual problems, but at whole lives in light of what God wants for us. Whether healing comes through medicine, a "miracle" at a healing service or help through pastoral counselling, we are doing a disservice if we do not bring our entire lives before God – and help others do the same.<sup>36</sup>

While this holistic vision may not guarantee cures, or fit nicely into a formula approach, it will be a way in which the Body grows in Christ-likeness and connection to God.

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<sup>36</sup>Pearson, 25.

## Chapter 5 – Implications for Ministry

### Perspective

Although some implications and suggestions for next steps are suggested in the preceding chapters, this chapter will identify some broader implications before giving a brief list of suggestions – including some of what the literature has encouraged churches to do in pursuing a ministry of healing. This will be done specifically with Christian Reformed Churches (CRC) in mind.

### Needed: A Coordinated, Integrated and In-depth Study

For a church such as the CRC where there has been hesitancy to practically accept and implement what it now affirms about miracles, healing, and the demonic, further investigation and answers become important. Without this, there will likely be ongoing hesitation to endorse specific methodologies/practices or to identify a better understanding of how healing prayer might or might not work from a reformed perspective. Churches that are currently engaged in deliverance and healing ministries of one sort or another will simply continue to do this ‘below the radar’ or by affiliating in some form with one of the four approaches identified in this paper.<sup>1</sup> Therefore it seems that a first implication for ministry is that the Christian community investigate more deeply and discuss more collegially the experience and literature (including critique) of healing prayer in order to have more formal dialogue and increase understanding.

However, the need for this as evidenced in both the disparity of the approaches and the significant critique of the approaches means that such investigation and discussion is not simply about the questions of a particular denomination (which already will come with certain expectations a la Browning). The claims made by the CRC through its Synod Report, claims that echo what parts of the four approaches have pointed to, identify significant beliefs about God, about providence, about powers and about opportunity. In essence the CRC has answered the question with which this paper began: this is not as good as it gets. But part of that answer includes saying that it is not clear how good it could get, or what exactly needs to be done to get it better.

Yet given the experience, the writing and the increasing dialogue with regards to healing and healing prayer, and the psychological and theological questions it raises, it seems that

<sup>1</sup>John W. Dykhuis, “The Healing Ministry of Jesus for Fellowship CRC Today” (Final Project for Independent Study, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2001).

the fruitful approach of the Miller – Smith dialogue<sup>2</sup> can serve as a model for a coordinated, integrated and in-depth study of healing prayer. It does not seem too strong to suggest to all those involved that if the Spirit (of Jesus) is taking time to enter prayers to provide individual counsel and healing, then surely he would offer some guidance in fulfilling a desire to become the united ‘one body’ of Jesus by pursuing this.

### **Needed: A Definition of Healing and its Place in Holistic Kingdom Perspective**

In addition to pursuing an integrated understanding of the observations and beliefs of the four approaches, another area that needs attention is one which the four largely already recognize but apply weakly. There is a strong need to consider as part of the healing process the holistic kingdom intent that Scripture points to – this would mean that healing is not considered complete in a broader sense, whether physical, inner or other, unless it is preceded and followed up with clear teaching, expectation and planned action on how a person would use the opportunity of God’s healing presence to pursue brokenness/repentance, wholeness, and community. The story of The Awakening is a striking illustration of the genuine struggle of faith that came in all these regards and the broader kingdom fruit that was reaped.

Ice, in a stronger critique of FIC, couches his criticism in a concern for the more general biblical call to growth and maturity.

The real potential for problems in the Christian life is blaming things on the demonic and neglecting normal Christian growth and maturity. It is this kind of lack of maturity in the lives of many believers, because they are looking for the quick-fix of a Neil Anderson deliverance, that will prove in the long run to effect the greater damage. I am concerned that believers wake up to the false ways of Dr. Anderson.<sup>3</sup>

As the Synod Report points out with regards to being filled with the Spirit (but applies to the specific area of healing prayer as well), a

holistic and integrated creational perspective... guards against a one-sided and distorted way of speaking about being Spirit-filled or about being interested in

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<sup>2</sup>Miller writes: “Over the past three years CRI has engaged in far-reaching dialogue with Smith about the concerns raised below. He consistently maintains that he will change his stance on a subject if he becomes convinced that it is flawed, and his follow-up on this promise has been exceptionally good. At his request we critiqued a draft of the revised *Theophostic Prayer Ministry Basic Seminar Manual* that Smith published in 2005. It contains extensive changes from the previous edition, some of which Smith made before we established contact with him and others of which he made as a result of our input. It should be understood, then, that Smith’s theology is ‘in transition.’” (Elliot Miller, “Teachings in Transition: Recent Changes and Remaining Concerns with Theophostic Prayer Ministry,” *Christian Research Journal*, 29 no. 3 (2006): 1. Online: <http://www.equip.org/PDF/JAT206-2.pdf>. Accessed May 6, 2011.)

<sup>3</sup>Ice, n.p.

the things of the Spirit as though these and similar expressions do not properly refer to Christians who have never spoken in tongues or are sceptical about the gift of prophecy but who have devoted their lives to Christian education or diaconal ministry. To be filled with the Spirit, biblically speaking, implies nothing about which gifts the Holy Spirit may have given to the individual in question, and the things of the Spirit include leadership, institution-building, and skilful craftsmanship as much as prophecy and the casting out of demons.<sup>4</sup>

This understanding of wholeness from a reformed perspective is also helpfully and importantly picked up in the Synod Report in its discussion of power and praying in the Spirit. The Synod Report suggests that the power which God gives is not limited to extraordinary blessings or works; it is “also evident in the more ordinary ways of His providential care or in veiled ways through suffering.”<sup>5</sup>

One of the ways in which the Christian community can be helped in this is by a clearer distinction between ‘healing’ and ‘cure’ where cure is the removal of the physical or emotional ailment, and healing is coming to the place where a person is well with God and within self regardless of whether cure has happened. This distinction (picking up biblical passages such as Mark 6:1-13 where healing comes in the context of and follows the call to repentance, and James 5:13-20 where healing comes in the context of confession of sin and is followed by the clear priority of ‘healed relationship with God’ in verse 20). Pursuing God and not simply the gifts of God is the priority of the Kingdom of God and enables a better understanding of how suffering is then not simply an ‘enemy’ to be cured but at times a means to the end of healing.

Discussion, including testimonies, studies, follow up, sermons and seminars will help a community grow together in the bigger picture of which healing (which may or may not include cure) may be one among many gifts and many blessings.

### **Reviewing a Culture of Minimal Action**

There is some dissonance within the CRC church at large when it comes to behaviour (action or non action) over against belief as identified in the Synod Reports of 2009 and 1973. This dissonance includes action and belief re: the CRC’s understanding of the need for and efficacy of healing prayer. A brief consideration of what the CRC *believes* about Satan and demons and what the CRC *does* to ensure for example an adequate response of protection, **training in defence**, and process for finding freedom from any form of demonization (especially

<sup>4</sup>Christian Reformed Church, 355.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 368.

for its most vulnerable, the youth) points to this dissonance.

C.S. Lewis pointed out many years ago the equal dangers of either ignoring demons or becoming fascinated by them. He wrote: “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.”<sup>6</sup>

The CRC has never suggested that Satan, demons or the power of evil is not real, nor has it ever questioned the teaching of Ephesians 6 concerning powers and principalities and the consequent clear call to armour and battle.

The CRC is, of course, not isolated or unique in this dissonance that needs addressing. Pope Paul VI, quoted by MacNutt, said:

What are the greatest needs of the Church today? Do not let our answer surprise you as being over simple or even superstitious and unreal: one of the greatest needs is defence from that evil which is called the Devil... Evil is not just a lack of something, but an effective agent, a living, spiritual being, perverted and perverting. A terrible reality...<sup>7</sup>

Brad Long, working from a reformed perspective<sup>8</sup> talks at length about the ways in which demons work and attempt to oppress God’s people. The Awakening tells a clear story of demonization and of healing that followed the battle. John Calvin, as quoted above (Chapter 2, “Demonization) clearly points to the realities of Satan, spiritual warfare and the believer’s need to be vigilant. Further, the Synod Report in quoting and affirming Calvin states:

According to John Calvin, “The tendency of all the Scripture teaches concerning the devils [evil spirits] is to put us on our guard against their wiles and machinations...” (Institutes, 1.1.4.13). Calvin goes on to warn us that Satan is not only powerful, but also crafty. Scripture identifies Satan as the “father of lies” (John 8:44), the one who “leads the world astray” (Rev. 12:9) and who “masquerades as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). Jesus warns Peter that Satan has sought permission to “sift [the disciples] like wheat” (Luke 22:31). No doubt he still does that today.<sup>9</sup>

The realities of Satan and the demonic (powers) are readily understood and accepted. Equally understood are the intentions of the powers to lead astray and destroy and the need for protection and defence.

<sup>6</sup>C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: MacMillan, 1961, rev. 1982), 3.

<sup>7</sup>MacNutt, 212.

<sup>8</sup>C.f. Long and Strickler, ch 18.

<sup>9</sup>Christian Reformed Church, 387.

The questions that then need to be asked include:

- why, given this understanding, has so little been taught about it within the church;
- why are the youth not more clearly informed about the reality and concern of these powers as they enter adulthood;
- why is more not being done to protect the vulnerable and equip those who are able to fight;
- much teaching within the church addresses the concerns that believers are still in the flesh and have to fight the flesh. However, if the battle is not against flesh and blood (and the believer no longer lives according to the flesh as per Fee) why is the significance of the powers not dealt with more by the Faith Formation Committee of the CRC? It seems somewhat awkward to have a system in place to help form significant spiritual growth while at the same time little is said about that which can impede or destroy not only that growth, or damage the one in whom that growth happens.
- what theological belief/value is at work for a church to have believed for so long the danger of the evil one and yet have so little in place to discern the work and wounds of the evil one and provide healing and invitation to healing for those who have been wounded (often treating the wounds as having been incurred because of weakness of being in the flesh)

In attempting to understand the dynamics of this, one might consider to what degree this minimal action of the CRC is because her believers simply don't accept 'this stuff,' or because of some embarrassment that outside church walls or doctrines, this kind of 'stuff' looks odd in the eyes of the world. If the reality and potential damage caused by the evil powers is real, there will be a price to pay for inaction, and if is not real, there are large questions about the decisions made re: the Synod Report and the claims of all the four approaches. Part of the way to move forward and wrestle with how serious the church is about living this theology is to honestly examine some of these questions.

### **Building a Community of Compassion**

It should be recognized that these are not just issues for or about church leaders, theologians and study committees. Over years of ministry it has been striking to see how a

family, when faced with a crisis, will gather family members to go to a hospital waiting room to pray, arrange for friends to be there as well, organize 24 hour prayer, mass email people for prayer and help, and ask the church to engage in prayer for healing. The understanding of the family by way of its actions is clearly that this method of garnering prayer is important and potentially significant in terms of the crisis with which they are dealing.

However, a ‘lived theology’ that can be discerned from this may say more about community than about faith in healing through prayer. It seems awkward that these same believers who demonstrate a strong faith in the power of prayer and the efficacy of coordinated prayer do relatively little, if anything, when it comes to the needs and crises of others. When the trust in and practice of prayer are evoked in such real ways for ‘my’ needs, how is it that ‘I’ would not use this tool of prayer I so strongly believe in to minister to others beyond my own immediate needs? What does that say about community and wholeness and kingdom? What does it say about a possible self-centeredness in faith that sees healing as primarily a cure for personal gain? In the context of the priorities that Jesus taught his followers to pray (the Lord’s Prayer), why would these same believers not give prayer the same place when it came to praying for the salvation of specific people known to a family within a congregation?

As identified above, part of the work the church needs to pursue is developing a holistic perspective and a better sense of community outside of simply addressing individual crises when they arise.<sup>10</sup> A church ought to at least honestly wonder about its belief in prayer by examining its practice. To use the analogy of one author, a church can have the greatest fireplace of theology for the Holy Spirit and healing and power, but if there is no fire in the fireplace, some questions need to be asked about the reality and values that make up the fireplace.

### **Some Modest Steps Forward**

Smith, as reported by Miller, clarifies that in TPM he

“merely took what God does on a regular basis with His children and put it in a systematic format.” [Smith] compares the role of the TPM practitioner to the men who brought the paralytic to Jesus for healing in Mark 2:1-12. He admits,

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<sup>10</sup>Matheson, a leader in the healing ministry of Chartwell Baptist, Mississauga, ON, strongly emphasizes both the God centered need for any approach to healing ministry (as opposed to sickness centered, including the need to pray ‘your will be done’. He teaches that all healing prayer has to go through Gethsemane – “your will be done” - even when we pray aggressively, recognizing there may be other factors that we simply are not aware of or thinking about. At that point we then need to leave it in God’s hands. This fits his holistic approach to healing, namely that for healing to fit at all, it needs to be part of a consistent pursuit of the spiritual disciplines in pursuing God. We ought not wait for a crisis to begin that journey. (Roy Matheson, “Supernatural Healing” (Chartwell Baptist): Guelph, ON, February, 2004).



nonetheless, that “the truth is, Christians who faithfully submit to the work of God in their lives will mature spiritually whether or not they receive Theophostic ministry.”<sup>11</sup>

In saying this, Smith identifies a broader ‘world and life’ perspective that recognizes the work of the Spirit in a variety of ways, not all of which are able to be mapped and predicted. The pursuit of discipleship of Jesus Christ includes far more than a specific methodology for healing prayer. But if healing prayer is a way in which community can be built and the kingdom advanced, then believers ought to pursue their understanding and application of it.

Building on what has been discussed above regarding the place of repentance, community and wholeness, there are some ways in which a church can take some steps forward not simply to pursue cures, but to build a community of healing in which healing prayer can play a role. The following suggestions include a compilation of those made in the literature.

**Education:** a key way to furthering discernment about healing prayer ministry is to pursue ways to help the community learn, discuss, debate and hear testimonies about such prayer. This education can include the reading and studying of some of the basic material identified in this paper.

**Elder training:** if healing prayer is to be holistic and for community, including the call to repentance, it needs to be led and understood by the elders. Given both the responsibility of and opportunity for spiritual leadership, elders need to be challenged to consider their spiritual authority and calling in light of what the bible/church says about power and powers and healing (e.g. James 5).

**Services of Prayer for the sick:** while some churches conduct healing services, the danger of such a practice is that it presumes something about healing and can have a narrow focus on an individual or an individual need. Matheson suggests instead that a church have services of prayer for the sick in order to build awareness of what has been discussed above, and to invite pursuit of wholeness in community. Part of the answer of prayer already achieved in such a service is the support and encouragement of the community for its sick.

**Worship:** in an effort to be careful not to sacrifice the praise of and focus on God Himself

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for the sake of introspection as Fee warns against<sup>12</sup> developing a sense of and

<sup>11</sup>Miller, Evaluation, 12.

<sup>12</sup>Fee, ch 14, pg 163-178.

opportunity for worship in the midst of need is important for the community of God's people. As Beth Moore suggests, believers can shape the mind with praise;<sup>13</sup> worship can provide healing of a different sort in line with what Smith says above about non healing-prayer growth. As DeMoss brings to the forefront, worship becomes an opportunity to foster repentance for the sake of wholeness, including reconciliation; this too can lead to healing of inner wounds and the rebuilding of relationship.

**Prayer:** wholeness is about all God's gifts which are to be used for community; self-seekers don't fit. If the faith community is not just about 'me,' or just about God but about God and His people in partnership, then the gift of prayer needs to become a more corporate function for ministry, as well as need. Churches need to understand and practice prayer that seeks the whole kingdom, and corporate as well as individual gifts for the building up of the body.

**Community:** building a healing community can be fostered by small steps along the way: taking prayer requests as part of corporate worship; having prayer teams that minister to people; coordinating services of prayer for the sick (or for youth or seniors); having a 'gift coordinator' to help each member to 'own' a piece of ministry in conjunction with the gifts that God has given; making family and marriage counselling accessible (and expected) for all who are experiencing challenges in these areas are ways in which healing in a community can be built and promoted beyond individual needs for cure.

**Confession:** although confession as a sacrament was discontinued at the time of the reformation, a church can consider ways in which to put James 5 into practice, not to focus on sin and its judgment (though that would need to be part of the process) but on recognizing sin as the enemy that destroys relationship and communion, and so a community together encourages and facilitates reconciliation, truth, forgiveness and freedom.

**Clear cautions:** given the common perception that God's power and healing only come in unique and supernatural ways, a reformed world and life view will issue cautions

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<sup>13</sup>Beth Moore, *When Godly People do Ungodly Things* (Nashville: LifeWay Church Resources, 2003), 191.

against this kind of mindset. God has given many resources for healing that are already available to many, including natural, technical and medical. Focusing on thanksgiving for these gifts helps to keep need - and an understanding of how God addresses need - in perspective.

Sharing: given the above caution, churches that are 'rich' in the eyes of the world can consider ways in which they do not simply find more healing for themselves but consider how they can be channels of God's healing and answers to the prayers of those who have much less. A communal focus on God's concern for the poor and vulnerable, and reflection on His clear call for justice may help turn a community from seeking for itself to becoming an agent of healing (and in the process discover as other communities in the Bible have that God's blessings resides there).

Protection: after evaluating if it really believes that Satan et al is real, a church needs to consider how to plan steps of discipleship, especially for youth, that helps followers of Jesus see and understand the nature and danger of the power of Satan, and how that is countered by the power of God.

Leadership: a church can consider creating a volunteer or staff position to lead the way in building a community of healing, pursuing some of the above suggestions and guiding the church in growing in them.

### **Conclusion**

The above does not constitute a clear plan of action, but suggests a context and some ways to begin working further on the foundations of what a community of the Holy Spirit needs to be about. While not all suggestions will work in every church (c.f. Wildeboer, Algera, Pearson, Dunamis, FIC, TPM for suggestions on building healing ministry as per their approach) it is important to note that unless a church starts somewhere, its current ministry will in the end be 'as good as it gets'. However it seems to this author that the church, and specifically the CRC, is on a road that now demands addressing the concerns that this paper has pointed to as well, for given what she believes, for the church to do nothing would be to abdicate responsibility and opportunity.

## Conclusion

In the end it is easier to critique the healing methodologies of others, and keep the debates theological, than it is to actually become agents of healing in a world of need. At the same time, it can be dangerous to simply move forward based only on some experience and trust that somehow our human nature in combination with God's Spirit will not lead to anything (self) deceptive or dangerous. The CRC has made some very specific and weighty judgments about the concepts of power and the place of healing and prayer that at the same time have raised some significant flags of concern that cannot be ignored. While the critique of this paper raises questions and concerns that need to be addressed, it remains significant – as has been identified earlier – that even in the absence of answers, life changing healing has happened through healing prayer. The acknowledgement of such leads those with a heart for healing to think through what the faith community can do to make things 'better' than what they are. But this should be done with deep care for holistic healing that includes all the means for healing – including justice – that can be availed in the 'already' while acknowledging the 'not yet' of Christ's return and the promise of a new creation.

While there are concerns associated with the methodologies reviewed, it is also clear in reading the literature and talking to those involved, that a deep desire to know "God with us" and to know the presence of God in more than simply biblical confessions is a part of what drives the pursuit of healing prayer. There is a desire not just to testify to the power of a healing Christ of the past, or hear testimonies of healing in other cultures or denominations, but to find and exercise the power of God's Holy Spirit to participate in a kingdom that has come and of which 'I' am a part. There is a desire to be an extension of Jesus to others in a world of pain and existential angst. There is much for which to be thankful for in the honest intent to honour and serve God.

However at the same time, good motives and love of God and neighbour cannot allow for sloppy or inconsistent theology and simple acceptance of practices that happen to have had some effect. God has called His people to be discerning and to test the spirits precisely because there are spirits and not all healing spirits are of God. Healing and the miraculous, especially to the degree it invites those dealing with pain to further focus on themselves, can for these and additional reasons identified earlier inadvertently take away from an understanding of and participation in the very kingdom God's people are intended to build.

The research of this paper has been many years in process through books, seminars, interviews, prayer, articles, group discussion and study. It is not entirely satisfying to come to a "Conclusion" that is not conclusive. At the same time, there is some consolation in recognizing that this is not dissimilar to where others have ended in their search, including the Synod Report. It at least underlines that the work of understanding and the pursuit of a biblical practice of healing prayer needs to go on, and especially needs to go on in community and for community. Above all it needs to be a search that is not simply about God or God's gifts, but in desire for partnership with God and the building of his kingdom, a search that perhaps needs to focus less on current narrow understanding of healing prayer in consideration for the broader healing of the Lord's Prayer.

It would be appropriate to end with words that speak to these matters of belonging, community, humbling, prayer, seeking God's face, repentance, connection with God, forgiveness and healing, all in one verse, where God many years ago said:

... if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

This is the call of God.

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