

'Healing' Grows in 'Mainline Churches'

By DARRELL TURNER
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Spiritual healing, a phenomenon once restricted largely to hucksters or esoteric religious movements, is now being increasingly experienced in "mainline" Christian Churches.



Fostered in recent years by the growth of the interdenominational charismatic movement, spiritual healing services are being conducted regularly in thousands of churches. The phenomenon has attracted the attention of physicians and researchers, many of whom are proclaiming that they are open to the possibility that there may be a non-physical aspect to healing.

Father John H. Parke of Rochdale, Mass., the Episcopal priest who is warden of the interdenominational Order of St. Luke the Physician, says there is a growing awareness that "medicine can only treat but not get to the root of illness."

Comparing modern spiritual healing with that practiced by Jesus, Father Parke says, "Christ healed the lepers, the blind, the deaf and was instrumental in casting out demons. Today, the demons are obsessions



such as alcoholism, gambling and emotional disorders. We can help deliver people from those obsessions—their fears and other troubles of the spirit."

Dr. Edward Aubert, a British physician who has been in practice for more than 30 years, feels that modern medicine has become "too materialistic" and treats people as if they were mechanical entities instead of living souls. In his view, a doctor's private beliefs affect the therapy used "much more than most people realize."

From personal observation, Dr. Aubert has concluded that patients who receive the religious rite of laying on of hands while undergoing proper medical treatment "do very much better" than others.

Father David Tickerhoof, TOR, director of Steubenville (Ohio) College's Renewal Center and a practitioner of what he calls the "heart healing ministry," predicts that healing teams ministering to the physical as well as the spiritual needs of people will soon be an accepted part of Roman Catholic parish life.

"Jesus is working a whole transformation in society," the Franciscan priest says, suggesting that the ministry of "healing of hearts" will be used to complete the work of psychiatrists, psychologists, and therapists by healing troubled areas of the subconscious.

In a recent survey of books on spiritual healing in Christianity Today magazine, Karin Granberg Michaelson wrote that "a mark of maturity in charismatic literature on healing is its respect of medical science."

Ms. Michaelson's survey found that "the most significant aspect of charismatic literature on healing is the conviction that sickness is evil and inconsistent with the intention of God toward the creation. Sickness is the direct result of the Fall; salvation brings wholeness and health if we but ask through prayer. The healing miracles of Jesus and the disciples (are) a sign of the Kingdom of God."

Dr. Harvey Cox, professor of theology at Harvard University, has also found a "good-vs.-evil" aspect to spiritual healing services. In a review of a book on the subject for the New York Times Book Review in 1976, he wrote that "what happens in the mass healing rally is a primal wrestling match. Its roots go back to a ritual that substantially antedates Christianity: the cosmic battle between the godly hero and the seething forces of chaos."

Both believers and skeptics have suggested that more research on the phenomenon of spiritual healing needs to be done and some criteria established that can be used to determine when a particular instance of a claimed "cure" is genuine. In a 1977 editorial, Christianity Today called for the formation of an independent agency to evaluate reports of such healings.

"The time is ripe for such a move," the magazine commented. "So many stories of healing are being circulated that many people are inclined to disbelieve all of them. They are understandably skeptical if they see a new 'miracle' on television every day. Responsible leaders of the groups that circulate these reports could now show their good faith to the rest of the evangelical community by establishing a certification agency."

Dr. William A. Nolan, the doctor who wrote the best selling book, *The Making of a Surgeon*, studied 26 cases of persons who said they had been healed in 1973 by the late Kathryn Kuhlman and found that none of the cases constituted an authentic healing. He wrote of this study in a 1976 book entitled *Healing: A Doctor in Search of a Miracle*.

Ms. Kuhlman noted at the time that she had never claimed any responsibility for healings, and that she had frequently advised persons who said they were healed at her services to "go back to your doctor and have it verified." But the question remains: If there is such a thing as spiritual healing, why doesn't it occur all the time?

Father Francis MacNutt, OP, a well known practitioner of spiritual healing, gave what he described as 11 reasons why healing may not be occurring in a specific case in his 1974 book entitled, *Healing*. Among these reasons were lack of faith on the part of the healer, lack of specific prayer, faulty diagnosis, and refusal to see medicine as a way God heals.

The last point is one which has hit home with several practitioners of spiritual healing. Evangelist Oral Roberts, who has had a ministry of healing for several decades, is building a \$100 million health center in Tulsa to combine medical expertise with prayer. Plans for his City of Faith Medical and Research Center include a hospital, clinic and diagnostic center, and a research center.

While scientific studies of spiritual healing continue to be conducted, more work needs to be done on the theological aspects of the phenomenon. Among the few denominational documents adopted on the subject are papers approved by the United Presbyterian General Assembly in 1960 and the British Methodist Conference in 1977.

The UPC report described non-medical ministries to the sick as "vital" to meet the spiritual needs of the ill, and scored what it called the "failure of both the church and the medical profession to take adequate account of the inspiration and meaning which faith in God brings to those who suffer from physical and mental illness."

That document also noted that most New Testament references to the salvation which Christ brings "are not to restoration of health in the sense of physical or mental soundness or wholeness," but rather refer to "deliverance from sin and death."

The British Methodist Conference statement declared that "because God is the source of all good and all salvation, the Church expects to work in partnership with all agencies promoting psychological, physical, or spiritual health for individuals or communities."

It added that "there are individuals who possess special insight, knowledge, faith and power which enable them to exercise distinctive healing ministries. Other individuals may receive a particular gift of healing from God for a specific occasion. All these gifts should be carefully examined by the Church to ensure that they do not degenerate into spiritual or emotional manipulation of the sufferer."

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