

Christian Healing and Mysticism

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This is one of a series of three leaflets on God's power to heal. The first is on *Natural Healing Gifts*, the second on *Christian Healing and Theology*. There is no implied ranking in these. They are different ways of looking at the topic and any may be more applicable according to your circumstances.

Healing is God's ceaseless work. Endlessly he desires our wholeness, our perfection in love. God looks upon all 'with pity, not with blame'. The natural sciences show us that there are ages and stages in human growth and development. Dean Inge simplified them into three: the young adult's need for action, the middle-aged person's growing reflection and the elder's concentration on loving. None supercedes another, yet the distinction may be useful. The thought is that age may bring increasing wisdom and broadening horizons of awareness.

The Christian gospel is that God has united himself with us, as shown fully in Jesus of Nazareth, 'for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness or in health', in this life and the next. This is whether we know it or not, like it or not, wish it or not. This is known as God's at-one-ment with us and is the basis of mysticism. His desire is that every breath we take and every step we make should be, as was the case with Jesus, one of growth in love. As God is at one with all of us, there really is no need to nag him to grant our deepest desires. Especially as 'our ways are not his ways and our thoughts are not usually the same as his', to paraphrase the prophet Isaiah. The basis of prayer is offering oneself to the Divine that he may change us more into his likeness. That is more loving, more whole, more Christ-like.

We are so made that we need air for every breath in this life and prayer for every breath in this life and the next. Prayer then, is both the essential action of spiritual growth and the core work of the Churches' ministry of healing. Listening is an essential prerequisite. As the French mystic Simone Weil wrote 'absolute undivided attention is prayer.' The practise of paying attention to our inner responses and the right use of silence bring considerable healing. As Jesus taught, we should pray 'Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'. This is the bottom line on the Churches' ministry of healing.

As none of us live perfectly in and from divine love, also known as God; as we don't always live in harmony with ourselves, our family, our community, environment or Creator, dis-ease is ever a possibility, often a reality.

The ultimate origins of suffering are perhaps not for us to know in this life. And one hesitates to presume on human grief and pain. Even so, tentative points may be made. Much human suffering is because people do damage to one another. This harm will cease as we learn, less to condemn and separate ourselves from our brothers and sisters and more to take care of each other. Human flesh is so frail precisely that we may learn to take great care of our bodies. Folk who are psychically open, whether through natural gifting, damage or suffering, quickly learn that people are porous and that feelings are contagious. Hidden strong feelings are the greatest root cause of bitterness, revenge and some forms of illness.

Sickness may become, for some, a time of inner growth. Being laid aside from the everyday pressures of life gives one time to rethink (i.e. *repent*) one's priorities, preferences and lifestyle. Pain and suffering often herald the means by which one comes to one's senses. There is a clarification of delusions and fears, a veritable harrowing of our hells and we are lead into new and greener pastures of compassion and tolerance. Tears bringing cleansing to the soul.

There really is a pain that heals. Disease becomes a teacher, leading us into greater awareness of the need for illness prevention and social and political education. Humiliation leads to humility, that state wherein we acknowledge, simultaneously, the truth of our frailties and that all God's creatures are held within the ever present arms of Divine and infinite love. So it is that a six-year old child may be both dying and whole. Great sickness, even death, is no barrier to our being made whole and thus holy. We may say that

it is through such dark journeyings that we are brought to a place of greater respect and freedom from those group norms based on fear. In Christian terms this is what the events of Jesus' last week before his execution (Holy Week) show.

Growing maturity brings a simplification of our desires. Hubris is being replaced by prayer and one more deeply desires that agape should prevail regardless of circumstances. As our healing, salvation, redemption slowly progresses - and it is God's will that this happens - we realize that 'our failings never hinder Him loving us' as Julian of Norwich wrote. We discover that 'By love he may be gotten and holden, but by thought never' as the *Cloud of Unknowing* boldly declares. Through renouncing and relinquishing past attitudes of self-centredness, a warm self-acceptance emerges, genuinely open to one's own and to others' inadequacies. We desire to place ourselves increasingly at God's service. Stronger grows our desire to 'play swaps' with God; his loving presence in exchange for what ever it is in us that stands in its way. We learn to rest and trust in the Divine work of loving the hell out of us, just as a child grows in their sleep. Such openness to God within shows itself in outgoing concern for one's neighbour - near or far. One corollary of this is a deepening psychic empathy which enables healing to flow through one to another in need. Life's journey is from selfishness to kindness as we follow Dorothy Kerin's *Little Way of Prayer*:

'Let us by an act of will place ourselves in the presence of our divine Lord and by an act of faith ask that he will empty us of all desire save that His most blessed will be done and that it may illumine our hearts and minds. We can then gather together all those for whom our prayers have been asked and hold them silently up to Him making no special request - neither asking nor beseeching - but just resting with them in Him desiring nothing but that our Lord may be glorified in them.'