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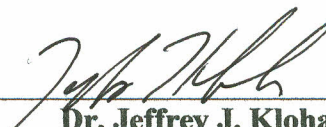
**A Paper Presented in Partial Fulfillment
for the Requirements of the Degree of
Master of Sacred Theology**

by David G. Schoessow

April 24, 2002



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Sin, Sickness, and Salvation from Nazareth to Lake Wobegone

by David G. Schoessow

- A young mother is dying of breast cancer, leaving three bewildered children and an angry, grieving mate.
- A young man battles depression. He has access to a shotgun. He is planning his suicide.
- Your church organist is increasingly incapacitated by severe arthritis. Finally the relentless pain forces her reluctant resignation.

These are the struggles¹ into which the pastor of Lake Wobegone (or Seattle, or Des Moines) is invited to bring help and hope. What tools has the Lord given us to use? What medicine are we given to offer to the sick, the suffering and the dying? Insights from our Lord's ministry as recorded in Luke/Acts remind the Christian pastor that ours is a ministry of Law and Gospel, of diagnosis and treatment -- a life-giving ministry centered in the forgiveness of sins. That medicine has a wholesome and healing effect upon the whole of the human being.

Ours is the ministry of bringing the prayers of the saints to God on behalf of the afflicted. Ours is the ministry of bringing to the afflicted God's healing gifts of absolution and Holy Communion.² Our culture of death has little respect or appreciation for claims that such 'common medicines' bestow wholeness and life. So be it, we could expect little else. Let us not doubt the efficacy of these divine gifts in the lives of His people.

¹ Disease, illness, and suffering are shared by all people alike, regardless of faith. But Christians know that God can work through their suffering to benefit themselves and others (Ps. 119:67f; Jn. 9:3; Rm. 5:3-5; 2 Co. 12:9; Hb. 12:3-13). Indeed the sick play an important role in our world, reminding the healthy not to lose sight of those matters that are of ultimate importance (Job; Hs. 6:1-3; Jn. 9:1-3; 11:4;). We also understand that while disease is the result of living in a fallen world and may be a consequence of our conscious participation in its fallenness (Ps. 107:17; 1 Co. 11:30), it is not to be considered a punishment which God applies because of one's personal sins (Ps. 119:75; Jb. 1-2; Is. 53; Jn. 9:1-3). So we struggle against disease and seek the blessing of good health, so that we may fulfill our vocation in service to Christ and His people.

² "For to the pastor is committed the pulpit, baptism, the sacrament [of the altar], and he is charged with the care of souls" (*Seelsorger*) "Infiltrating and Clandestine Preachers" (1532) in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 40, C. Bergendoff, ed., (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 384. (cf. p. 385).

Definitions

Garth D. Ludwig defines some of the common terms we will use in our discussion from both a behavioral science and Biblical perspective.

Disease—is a disorder within the order of creation. It is that objective reality “characterized by an altered biological functioning of the body due to an attack of pathogens or other malfunctions which result in damage to its tissues or organs.”³ Examples include breast cancer, clinical depression, or arthritis.

Illness—is a subjective, personal experience in which an individual perceives himself as not feeling well. Illness is the corresponding disorder in other dimensions of our being caused by the bodily disorder of a disease. For example, disease affects the mind by producing anxiety, a sense of being out of control, loss of self-esteem and/or peace. It affects the soul by raising questions about God’s love for the individual and God’s control over evil. Guilt arises from unresolved questions about the spiritual nature or cause of the disease: “Did I do something for which God is punishing me by this disease?”

Sickness—is a social condition resulting from disease. The person’s relationships with family, physician, and friends are affected because the person must adopt the role of being sick. A person’s social status changes as others now perceive the person as sick and act accordingly.

Suffering—the physical, mental, spiritual, and/or social pain that often accompanies the disorder of disease, illness and sickness. Theologically, this pain is the personal experience of God’s curse: “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life... I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth (Gn. 3:17, 16), and will ultimately be reversed in paradise (Rv. 21:3f).⁴

Health—When the processes of life are working according to their created order, a state of life characterized by wholeness (shalom), ultimately to be seen only at the day of resurrection (Rv. 21:1-22:5). More than our physical well-being, “health is the wholeness of God’s creative love at work in our lives. It is the expression of what God has created us to be—functionally, mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.”⁵

³ Garth D. Ludwig, *Order Restored, A Biblical Interpretation of Health, Medicine and Healing*, (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1999), p. 31.

⁴ The multi-dimensional aspect of pain (physical, mental, spiritual, social) demonstrates the unity of our persons as human beings. “Each dimension of the person exists in a union with the others” (Ludwig, p. 30). From this we can readily perceive that “healing” must take place in a number of dimensions.

⁵ Cf. Ludwig, pp. 114f, 118.

Wellness—A level of physical and emotional health characterized by an ability to function in human society, illustrated by the crippled man at the temple gate healed by Peter and John when he “jumped to his feet and began to walk” (Ac. 3:8). His ability to function was restored.⁶

Wholeness—A level of health at which a person is able to creatively interact with the environment and with others (including God) in social relationships, illustrated when the same man “went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping and praising God” (Ac. 3:8). At its core, wholeness or shalom includes that new relationship of the sinner with God made possible by God’s forgiveness in Christ.⁷

Wholeness gives our physical and emotional wellness a sense of divine purpose: we are called to serve God and our fellow man.⁸ Without playing word games, it is therefore possible to maintain that even people whose function is impaired by a physical disease or disability can still demonstrate wholeness in the other aspects of life by virtue of the positive impact of God’s healing forgiveness in Christ.

Salvation—The complete reversal of the curse of sin in every aspect of life (physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually) by virtue of God’s gracious intervention in Christ, experienced now by faith as He works through Word and Sacrament (Jn. 5:24) and ultimately by His creative word on the day of resurrection (Jn. 5:25).

Ours is not a Spirit Only Faith, but a Spirit-in-the-Flesh Faith

“...who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and was made man” (Nicene Creed).

We are people of faith and our faith is in the Incarnate One. Spirit assumes flesh and walks among us as a man, from bloodied birth to bloodied death. That journey into our flesh underscores the value which God places on human life.

⁶ Ludwig, pp. 119f.

⁷ Ludwig, pp. 119f.

⁸ “The Christian should be guided by this one thing alone that he may serve and benefit others in all that he does... This is what makes caring for the body a Christian work, that through its health and comfort we may be able to work, to acquire and lay by funds with which to aid those who are in need, that in this way the strong member may serve the weaker... This is a truly Christian life. Here faith is active in love.” Martin Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian Man*, (1520) as quoted by Ludwig, p. 127.

Consider His walk among us, as told by Luke, the physician and Gospel writer. Jesus' first publicly spoken words, as recorded by Luke, were uttered among flesh and blood kin and friends in the Nazareth synagogue (4:16-21). They are the Spirit-breathed words of Isaiah 61:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me
to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release⁹ the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (NIV Luke 4:18-19).

These words outline the Spirit's eternal plan for His visit to our planet (1:68). This Son of God (1:35) and son of Mary (1:31f) is to proclaim/announce (κηρύξαι, εὐαγγελίσασθαι) words of release (ἄφεσιν) that will have the effect of reversing sin's impact among us: weal in place of want, freedom in place of shackles, 20/20 vision in place of blindness, liberty in place of oppression.

Should we not expect such a concrete response from the God who formed man out of the dust of the ground, breathing into his nostrils His own life-giving breath (Gn. 2:7), and then saw that creative effort in clay deformed by evil? Yes, we should expect just this very thing, for Luke goes on to tell us how Jesus' words became enfleshed in the lives of His fellow Galileans. In Capernaum His authoritative teaching is coupled to releasing of men from demons, fevers, and diseases of every description (Lk. 4:31-41).

A Demoniac Released on the Sabbath (Luke 4:31-37)

"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil" (Hb. 2:14). Our culture has largely relegated the world of malignant spiritual forces to grade B horror films. Demon possession seems to most a relic of an unenlightened past. Yet Jesus' first recorded action after Nazareth is to confront and eradicate embodied personal evil. Jesus never questions the negative impact of the demonic in a human being. He knows its reality, just as it knows Him (Lk. 4:34). "With authority and power" (ἐν ἔξουσίᾳ¹⁰ καὶ δυνάμει)

⁹ Used twice in verse 18, (κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν... ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει) ἄφεσιν is used here in reference to Jesus' ministry of releasing God's creation from its bondage to sin. Both the noun ἄφεσιν and its verbal form ἀφίημι often refer specifically to the release or forgiveness of sins (cf. 1:77; 3:3; 24:77).

¹⁰ In 4:32 ἔξουσίᾳ is used of Jesus' teaching. Here (4:36) it refers to His miracle of exorcism.

Jesus sends the demon out of the man with the wholesome result that it has “done him no harm” (Lk. 4:35). Walter Wink comments in his three part work, *Unmasking the Powers*: “Exorcism in its New Testament context is the act of deliverance of a person or institution or society from its bondage to evil, and its restoration to the wholeness intrinsic to its creation. Exorcism is thus intercession for God’s presence and power to liberate those who have become possessed by the powers of death.”¹¹

It was the Evil One whose lying word first spoiled creation by tempting Adam into the realm of God’s curse (Gn. 3; Jn. 8:44; Rm. 5:12). Because Jesus has himself resisted the Evil One’s lies (more positively, who truly believes God’s Word, that is lives by it (cf. Lk. 4:4 & Dt. 8:3)), Jesus can now authoritatively confront the Evil One by speaking God’s Word on our behalf in order to free us and restore us to wholeness and life.¹²

A Fever Rebuked on the Sabbath (Luke 4:38-39)

After this incident with raw evil, Luke tells us that Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law from a raging fever. Like the demon, Jesus “rebuked” (ἐπετίμησεν)¹³ the fever and it left her (ἀφῆκεν). It is significant that both miracles of healing (spiritual and physical) occur on the Sabbath (4:31, 38, 40). As the Sabbath was meant to be a gift of physical and spiritual rest pointing backward to paradise (Ex 20:8-11) and forward to the Christ (Ex. 5:12-15/1 Co. 5:7; Cl. 2:16-17), so now that rest is given tangibly by the Creator/Christ who has come to restore His creation (Mt. 11:28; 12:8; Hb. 4:9-10) to wholeness¹⁴ (cf. Lk 6:1-11).

¹¹ Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Powers that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 59.

¹² Hence the Lord teaches us to pray: “Deliver us from evil.” Luther writes that “you must include in this ‘evil’ everything on earth which is evil, such as sickness, poverty, death, whatever evil there is in the dominion of Satan. “Ten Sermons on the Catechism” (1528), *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 51, J. Doberstein, ed. & tr., (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 180.

¹³ Demons, fever, the creation in chaos (8:24) and later sin (17:3) are linked by this word. Jesus rebukes the wind and waves. The disciples are to rebuke those who sin and upon repentance, forgive (ἄφεσις) them. Luke’s verbal linkage of these events implies that there is no apparent distinction between the effects of sin on creation and man (whether in body or soul). All are brought into bondage by sin and all are released by His authoritative word.

¹⁴ In the sense of the Old Testament’s *shalom*: completeness, harmony, fulfillment. This is the result of God’s gracious action in the covenant that centers in righteousness (Is. 32:17). Hence this wholeness has its source in God. He speaks *shalom* to His people (Ps. 85:8) and has provided *shalom* through His Messiah (Lk. 2:14; Eph 2:14). Cf. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr., and B. K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* Vol. 2 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 931.

Wholeness Extended to Many (Luke 4:40)

“When the sun was setting, all those who had (εἶχον)¹⁵ ones weakened with various kinds of sickness (νόσοις ποικίλαις), brought them to Him. And laying his hands on each one of them, he healed them (ὁ δὲ ἐνὶ ἐκάστῳ αὐτῶν τὰς χεῖρας ἐπιτιθεὶς ἐθεράπευεν αὐτούς).” Luke portrays Jesus offering a one-on-one ministry to the sick by means of the touch of His hands. Luke mentions the laying on of hands in connection with physical healing only one other time in Luke (13:13) and once in Acts (28:8), though it is used frequently in Acts “as part of the baptismal rite, the new healing of the new era of salvation.”¹⁶

Creation Restored at His Word (Luke 5:1-11)

Luke then immediately cites one incident in which Jesus restored the creation to wholeness (5:1-11; cf. Rm. 8:19-21). For Adam, part of the curse upon creation had been that he must wrest his table bread from ground overrun with thorns and thistles (Gn. 3:17-19). The abundance of Eden was replaced with the poverty of Evil. Whereas listening to the Evil One had resulted in physical want, Luke now records that Jesus’ words have a delightfully opposite and fruitful effect. His words reverse the curse and produce abundance.

He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught (ἐδίδασκεν)¹⁷ the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so (ἐπι δὲ τῷ ῥήματι σου),¹⁸ I will let down the nets." When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink (Lk. 5:3-7).

Fishermen who toiled all night and took nothing are given fish in abundance by the Creator’s command. In His presence, creation is restored to benefit and sustain man. Like Adam hiding in the garden, Peter cries out in recognition: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Lk. 5:8). However that spiritual bondage to sin is at the root of the curse that Jesus has come to lift. Peter receives the Lord’s absolution which redirects his life back toward its divine purpose: “Do not be afraid; from now on you will

¹⁵ Imperfect tense implying inclusion of the chronic cases.

¹⁶ A. Just, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996), 198.

¹⁷ Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom of God (4:43) affects Peter as much or more than does the miracle (cf. 5:8, 10).

be catching men alive (ζωγοῦν)¹⁹ (Lk. 5:10). This healing and restorative power of absolution is then dramatically portrayed in the cleansing of a leper, the forgiveness and healing of a paralytic, and in the calling of Levi (Lk. 5:12-32).

Physical and Spiritual Cleansing of a Leper (Luke 5:12-16)

Jesus departs Capernaum for other cities in order to “preach the good news of the kingdom of God” to them too (Lk 4:43). For a certain leper in one of those cities, that good news will include physical and spiritual cleansing.

Leprosy embodied the physical/spiritual impact of sin in the human being. A spiritual and social separation from God and church/community was connected to the obvious affliction of the body. Leviticus 13:45-46 prescribes that a leper must live alone outside the camp and warn others to avoid him by shouting, “Unclean! Unclean!” They were especially forbidden to draw near to the tabernacle or temple, the physical address of God’s earthly presence (2 Ch. 26:21). Despite these prohibitions, Jesus, who is the new locus of God’s incarnational presence (Lk. 1:35; 3:22; 4:1, 18, 34; Jn. 1:14) “stretched out His hand and touched him... And immediately the leprosy left him (ἡ λέπρα ἀπῆλθεν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ)”²⁰ (Lk. 5:13). Touching the leper does not make Jesus unclean. Jesus’ touch brings a state of cleanness to the unclean. To this physical and social release, Jesus immediately adds spiritual release by sending the man back to the temple to hear the priest’s absolution. Jesus tells him he is to go there to “make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded” (Lk. 5:14). Leviticus 14 directs that guilt and sin offerings be made for a cleansed leper, thus suggesting a profound and wholistic understanding of the person as one whose body is intimately and seamlessly connected to the soul. Because sin, whether original or actual, is the ultimate cause of sickness, Jesus treats both dimensions of the man in order to restore him to wholeness.

Since the underlying problem is simply sin in its deepest dimensions, both objective and subjective, both ethical and ritual, the “purification” must ultimately be related again to the covenant, that is to God’s declaratory verdict of “justified.” In this connection we find that verdict reflected in the “declaratory formulae” of the priests, pronouncing one clean.²¹

¹⁸ Jesus’ word sends Peter out to the deep, just as it is His word that sends the fish into Peter’s net.

¹⁹ From ἀγρέω “to catch” and ζῶς “alive.” Peter will capture, so that they may live, those who were captured (ἐξωγορημένοι) in the devil’s snare (cf. 2 Tm. 2:26).

²⁰ The leprosy left this man as earlier a demon left (ἐξῆλθεν) another (4:35). Jesus’ releasing word does not distinguish between spiritual or physical bondage since both result from creation’s fall.

²¹ H. Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 82.

Spiritual and Physical Restoration of a Paralytic (Luke 5:17-26)

As an example of one among the great multitudes who “gathered to hear and be healed (ἀκούειν καὶ θεραπεύεσθαι)” (Lk. 5:15), Luke tells us of one who is bed-ridden. The events again occur in the context of Jesus’ teaching about the good news of the kingdom of God.²² Jesus’ response to the friends’ faith, their intercessory prayer of action as they force their way to Jesus through the roof, is to declare to the paralyzed man, “Man, your sins are forgiven you (ἀφέωνται σοι αἱ ἁμαρτίαι σου)” (Lk. 5:20).²³ Why absolution? Physical and spiritual disabilities are merely two sides of the same coin. Fundamental to wholeness is the forgiveness of sins, “for where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.”²⁴ “As Jesus showed in the cleansing of the leper, he is not a dualist who would deal with body and soul separately; [or imply that one or the other was of less importance] rather he approaches humanity holistically.”²⁵ It is the forgiveness of sins which is the wellspring of all healing. Even with seemingly perfect health, there can be no wholeness for a human being without the personal application of Divine forgiveness.²⁶ In the healing of the paralytic, “Jesus shows that physical healings are signs and consequences of the spiritual healing that comes in the forgiveness of sins.”²⁷

Where else is this forgiveness offered? Next in his narrative, Luke records that Levi was granted forgiveness in the context of fellowship at table with the Lord.

A Sinner’s Restoration to Wholeness and Purpose (Luke 5:27-32)

Levi’s life as a tax collector was antagonistic to the purpose for which God made him. He was governed by love for unrighteous mammon, laying up treasures for himself, but not rich toward God (Lk. 12:21; 16:10-15; cf. 1 Tm. 6:9). His was a sickness of the heart and soul that left him outside of the

²² That teaching was accompanied with δύναμις κυρίου ἦν εἰς τὸ ἰᾶσθαι αὐτόν, a construction that can express purpose or result. God’s power was present in Christ “in order that” or “so that” men’s bodies would be healed along with their souls.

²³ Like his friends, this man also had faith but he was still paralyzed when Jesus forgave his sins.

²⁴ *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 29.

²⁵ Just, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 229.

²⁶ Commenting on Romans 4:7, Luther writes: “This life, then, is a life of being healed from sin, it is not a life of sinlessness, with the cure completed and perfect health attained. The church is the inn and the infirmary for those who are sick and in need of being made well. But heaven is the palace of the healthy and the righteous.” “Lectures on Romans” (1515), *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 25, H. Oswald, ed., (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 262-3.

fellowship of the communion of saints. But Jesus saw him (Lk. 5:27) as one worthy of His attention. Jesus both confronted and absolved Levi with His gracious call: “Follow Me” (Lk. 5:27). Like Simon before him (Lk. 5:10), Jesus’ call to Levi to share in His life and work is the equivalent of a pronouncement of forgiveness. Levi is restored to fellowship with God when Jesus accepts Levi’s invitation to dine with him at his table.²⁸ Levi is restored to fellowship as a sinner who has come to repentance (Lk. 5:32) and as a sick one who has been cured by the Physician (Lk. 5:31).²⁹ Through the forgiveness of his sins, Jesus restores Levi to wholeness so that he can fulfill God’s gracious purpose for him: nothing less than to author our first gospel, Matthew.

The Pharisees and scribes were quick to perceive the significance of Jesus’ table fellowship with sinners. They murmured: “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” (Lk. 5:30). Jesus responds that a doctor cannot help the sick one who thinks himself to be healthy (Lk. 5:31-32). Their assumed ‘healthy righteousness’ ultimately festers into envy and murder (Mt. 27:18; Lk. 19:47). From this point forward, in the Gospel of Luke, we see Jesus (as John the Baptizer before Him, Lk. 7:30) confronting the Pharisees and scribes with a ministry of Law, a diagnosis by their Physician that theirs is a mortal condition of the heart.³⁰ To refuse Divine forgiveness through the mediation of Jesus is to refuse the wholeness which He has come to bring.

The Ultimate Reversal: Death Undone in Nain (Luke 7:11-17)

Thus far, Luke has shown the Lord preaching His Nazareth sermon into the flesh and blood of the broken and oppressed. He has set men and women free from demons, sickness, and sin. But the ultimate impact of paradise lost is the reversal of life: “in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” (Gn. 2:17). As the Lord enters Nain He sees a woman who is experiencing the ultimate consequence of that long-ago day in

²⁷ Just, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 226.

²⁸ “When Luke links that passage on Jesus’ authority to forgive sins (Lk 5:24) with Jesus’ table fellowship with sinners, he illustrates dramatically that *the table* is the place where God’s fellowship with sinners is manifested and *God’s forgiveness of sins is given*” [emphasis Just’s] Just, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 244. For a discussion of the significance of table fellowship in the ministry of Jesus in Luke/Acts see Arthur Just, *The Ongoing Feast Table Fellowship and Eschatology at Emmaus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993) and *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 231-241.

²⁹ Οὐ χρείαν ἔχουσιν οἱ ὑγιαίνοντες ἰατροῦ ἀλλὰ οἱ κακῶς ἔχοντες. “Those who have something wrong” depicts physical illness but it is often a reference to moral evil. Jesus equates sin and sickness (cf. Lk. 5:17-26).

the garden; her dead son is being carried out to the cemetery for burial. He touches the bier, again making the unclean clean.³¹ He reverses the ancient death word (Gn. 2:17) by speaking a life word: “Young man, I say to you arise.” That the boy does so at Jesus’ word is a preview of the ultimate “redemption of our bodies” (Rm. 8:23; cf. Jn. 5:25).

In this incident, no mention is made of anyone’s faith. Luke makes no explicit mention of faith in a number of healing miracles (cf. Lk. 4:31-36; 38-39; 5:1-6; 12-13; 27-28; etc.), for Jesus’ miracles are ultimately dependent not on the faith of the person being helped, but on His own authority and power. On the other hand, Luke also records that a person’s encounter with Jesus does create faith in His power to save (cf. 5:20; 7:9, 50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42), indeed, Luke wants the reader to understand, faith is the only possible response to that word.³²

The crowd reacts with awe. They acclaim Jesus to be a great prophet (Lk 7:16). But if “Jesus is only a prophet and miracle worker, the result is a theology of glory that imagines that Jesus has come for the sole purpose of alleviating human suffering. Only when they understand that Jesus must also suffer rejection to the point of crucifixion will they be able to voice the full messianic confession, the theology of the cross”³³ (cf. Ac. 3).

³⁰ Cf. Lk. 6:1-11; 7:36ff; 10:25ff; 11:37ff; 13:1ff; 31ff; 14:1ff; 15:1ff; 16:14ff; 18:9ff; 20:1ff.

³¹ Of course, touching the funeral bier, and earlier the leper (Lk. 5:13) did in fact make Jesus unclean according to the letter of the Law (Lv. 5:3; Nm. 5:2-4). Jesus shoulders both our condemnation under the Law and our suffering (“He felt compassion (ἐσπλαγγνίσθη) for her [the Nain widow] (Lk. 7:13). This points to another dimension of Jesus’ healing ministry. Commenting on an earlier incident when Jesus healed large numbers of people (Lk. 4:40-41), Matthew adds that He did this “in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, ‘He himself took our infirmities and bore (ἐβάστασεν) our diseases’” (Mt. 8:17). In one sense Jesus bore *away* our sicknesses along with our sin at Golgotha (Cf. BAG, p. 136f). However Matthew may literally mean that Jesus actually bore our sicknesses in His person just as He bore the burden of our sin. Ludwig refers to the concept of Jesus as a “wounded healer” who has nothing in common with the circus show triumphalism of some modern “healers.” “The way of the Healer [Jesus] is to share the pain of others by entering into their world of shame and degradation. This is the theology of the cross!” (p. 95).

³² In those instances where, after the fact, Jesus ascribes a person’s healing to their faith “ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε” (in 8:48 to a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years; in 17:19 to a Samaritan leper who returned to give thanks for his healing; and in 18:42 to a blind man who received his sight), the phrase is identical to His previous word to the sinful woman in 7:50 who was not healed of any physical condition. Luke wants the reader to understand that their “salvation” included more than physical healing alone. Disenfranchised from Israel by their respective conditions (Lev. 21:8), their healings restored each to a relationship with both God and His people, characterized by Jesus’ benediction, “go in peace” [προεύου εἰς εἰρήνην] (Lk. 7:50; 8:48).

³³ Just, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, p. 309.

Jesus Extends His Ministry through the Church

Later Jesus multiplies and extends His ministry by commissioning apostles (Lk. 9:1-6) and disciples (Lk. 10:1-9) to do what He Himself has been doing. "When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick (ἀπέστειλεν αὐτοὺς κηρύσσειν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἰᾶσθαι [τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς])... So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere" (Lk. 9:1-2, 6).

Notice how Jesus intentionally connected the preaching of the kingdom of God to healing the sick (Lk 9:2, 12; 10:9; 11:20) indicating that such divine intervention belongs to the redemptive work of God. The kingdom of God "is an expression that signifies all the bother that God went to in order to undo the consequences of the Fall, including the presence of disease, with a view to re-creating the conditions of Paradise."³⁴

The ancient church did not think of Christ, therefore, as an "improver" of man's life, but as its "Redeemer." This is of great significance for an understanding of the full dimensions of the healing ministry: Christ is at work throughout the universe healing and restoring what has gone wrong. Every healing miracle recorded in the Scripture is a testimony to the presence of this redemptive power; and every instance of people being and becoming well testifies to His gracious intent.³⁵

The disciples' mission is an extension of Jesus' own. As Jesus' word was one of "authority and power" (Lk. 4:36), so now He bestows such authority and power to the disciples (Lk. 9:1; 10:2, 9). As Jesus was sent to "preach the good news of the kingdom of God" (Lk. 4:18, 43; 8:1), so now He sends out the disciples to do the same. As Jesus cast out demons and cured diseases, so now He sends out the disciples to multiply His work (Lk. 9:2; 10:9). "The direct, visible results that accompanied Jesus' healing ministry continued in the ministry of the disciples. Persons continued to experience restoration to wholeness in spirit, mind, body, and relationships. Healing, exorcism, declaration of forgiveness, receiving new life in the Holy Spirit, and overcoming of social barriers continued to mark the ministry of the disciples."³⁶

³⁴ Martin Scharlemann, *Healing and Redemption* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965), p. 83.

³⁵ Scharlemann, pp. 37f.

³⁶ R. Beckman, S. Nerheim, *Toward a Healing Ministry* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), p. 30.

By so sending out the twelve and later the seventy, Jesus clearly foreshadows the future ministry of the church following His ascension to heaven.³⁷ In Acts, Luke deliberately makes the point that Jesus' ministry continues unabated through His Spirit in the church. The church is Christ's Body, the flesh and blood in which the Spirit dwells and works among men. To those who question where we find miracles today, we confess that the Lord in fact continues to work His miracles in the context of the liturgy of the church where His Word is proclaimed and the Sacraments are administered.³⁸

Through His Church, Jesus continues to announce the Good news of the Kingdom, the inbreaking of God's reign. In this Church, His continues to be a true ministry of the Divine Word.³⁹ As such, His words have equal impact in both the material and spiritual worlds because they carry divine authority (Lk. 4:32-36). He uses His word to rebuke (ἐπετίμησεν) with equal effect demons (Lk. 4:35, 41), raging fevers (Lk. 4:39), and nature in turmoil (Lk. 8:24), and His disciples are to rebuke sin and forgive the repentant (Lk. 17:3). "Demon possession, sickness, sin, and death are all manifestations of creation's bondage in its fallenness. Jesus frees those in bondage by rebuking that which binds them."⁴⁰ Both in His own ministry and through His church Jesus uses His word to reverse the ancient curse on creation (Lk. 5:1ff/ Ac. 2:45; 4:32-35; 11:27-30; Rm. 8:19-21), to drive out demons and cure disease (Lk. 5:13/Ac. 3:1-10; 5:15-16; 8:4-8), to call sinners to repentance (Lk. 5:32; 15:1ff/Ac. 3:11-26; 4:1-12; 7:51-53; 8:9-24) and to absolve repentant sinners (Lk. 5:10, 14, 20/Ac. 2:38-39; 3:19f). In His Church, His is still the ministry of the authoritative and prophetic Word.

So we have come full circle in the Spirit's eternal plan for His visit to our planet as outlined in Luke 4.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me

³⁷ The longer ending of Mark, though not part of Mark's original text, gives indirect witness to this activity in at least one segment of the early church prior to the middle of the second century (16:17-18).

³⁸ "Thus Article V of the Augustana speaks against the churchless mysticism of *Schwärmertum*. "Through the Word and Sacraments God gives the Holy Ghost where and when he will to them that hear the Gospel" [AC V 2]. In the Word and Sacrament Christ the Lord truly comes to us. In them he is actually present; they are not mere symbols which remind us of a faraway Christ of the past." Hermann Sasse "Church and Churches" (1930) in *The Lonely Way Selected Essays and Letters by Hermann Sasse*, Vol. 1., M. C. Harrison, tr., (St. Louis: Concordia, 2001), 83.

³⁹ Three of the four infinitives in Luke 4:18-19 refer to creative vocalization: preaching (κηρύξαι) and proclaiming good news (εὐαγγελίσασθαι) Jesus' ministry is characterized by prophetic preaching and teaching (4:15ff; 31-32; 43; 5:1; 5:33-6:10, etc.).

⁴⁰ Just, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, p. 201.

to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me
to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:18-21).

After Jesus preached this sermon, the listeners responded with praise tempered by the scandal of familiarity: "'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked" (Lk. 4:22). Jesus responds by prompting their memory of the proverb, "'Physician, heal yourself!' Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum."

"I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown ... there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."

What of those leprous Israelites who never received healing or what of that man going from Jerusalem to Jericho (Lk. 10:30) who fell into the hands of robbers? Unlike suffering that stems from persecution for the faith (cf. Lk. 6:22f; Ac. 14:22), acute injuries and accidents or chronic suffering such as that of those afflicted by leprosy or cancer or arthritis appear to have no discernable Divine purpose. Caught in the wreckage and disorder that is our world broken by sin, we suffer, groaning like the rest of creation (Rm. 8:22), and God does not always intervene, either mediately by medicine or immediately by miracle.⁴¹ At that point, we dare not invent plausible reasons for suffering as did Job's counselors. Instead we would do better to imitate the Good Samaritan who felt compassion, knelt beside his neighbor to bind up his wounds and took care of him (Lk. 10:33-34).

The Care of the Sick in Christian History

The early Christian church continued an active ministry of healing for some 300 years. That ministry appears to fade somewhat around the time of St. Augustine, when there began to prevail a platonic view of the person which divided soul and body and spoke of the soul as the only salvage part of a human.

⁴¹ Precisely because the Kingdom of God (with its full restoration of creation) is *not* "going to appear at once" we must imitate the example of the faithful servant entrusted by the master with his mina, not only in regards to our earthly treasure, but especially in the case of our ministry to those human "treasures" whom God has entrusted to our care (cf. Lk. 19:11 ff).

It was the Book of Pastoral Rule, one of the west's most influential books on pastoral care written by Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome from 590-604 A.D., that set the view of later Western thinking about care for the sick. Sickness was no longer understood as the result of sin and evil at work in God's world. Instead Gregory spoke of it as a mark of God's discipline designed to bring moral renewal. Still, the church continued an active ministry to the sick through Word and Sacrament, prayer and physical care.⁴² Here follows a brief of survey of that ministry.

James 5:14-15 takes us into the sickroom of the early church. The practice may have been in imitation of the apostles' use of oil to heal the sick (Mk. 6:13). It may well relate an early liturgical form reflecting the early church's practice of using prayer and anointing with oil along with confession and absolution to care for the sick. The word "anoint" (ἀλείψαντες) is used in the general sense of outward oiling the body, probably in a medicinal sense as oil was used as a curative by the ancients (cf. Is. 1:6; Lk. 10:34). The aorist participle could be translated as "after anointing pray" (antecedent time) or "while anointing pray" (contemporaneous time) or "anoint and pray" (imperative). However, it is the prayer that raises up the sick, not the oil (v. 15). What then is the purpose of the oil?⁴³ Following the lead of Peter Lombard (c. 1100-60), the Roman Catholic church named this the fifth of seven sacraments, the Council of Trent (1545-63) declaring its divine institution: "this anointing is to be given to the sick, especially those who are in such a serious condition as to appear to have reached the end of their life. For this reason it is also called the sacrament of the dying."⁴⁴ Others see the oil as being purely medicinal with no spiritual significance. But the phrase "anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" would indicate that more is involved. "... it may be viewed as an activity of Jesus, the exalted Lord, in the congregation. Since Jesus is

⁴² Cf. Evelyn Frost, *Christian Healing: A Consideration of the Place of Spiritual Healing in the Church of Today in the Light of the Doctrine and Practice of the Ante-Nicene Church* (1940) and Morton T. Kelsey, *Healing and Christianity in Ancient Thought and Modern Times*, New York: Harper and Row (1976).

⁴³ The Roman Catholic church distinguishes between three oils, traditionally marked with Latin abbreviations: OI (*oleum infirmorum*), the oil for the anointing of the sick, which is olive oil; OC (*oleum catechumenorum*) the oil of catechumens, which is olive oil; and CH, the chrism of baptism, which is olive oil to which is added balsam or perfume.

⁴⁴ The Council of Florence (1438-45) described the essential elements of the anointing of the sick. The Second Vatican Council restored anointing to its earlier role as a rite for anyone who is seriously ill. *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, Vol. 1, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), p. 772.

the One who is primarily acting in His church, it is in this sense a sacramental act, a continuation of His earthly ministry of healing.”⁴⁵

Hippolytus (c. 170-c. 236) provides insight into the early church’s ministry to the sick when he records in the *Apostolic Tradition* the oldest known form for blessing oil for the sick:

Sanctify this oil, O God, with which you anointed kings, priests, and prophets, you that would grant health to those who use it and partake of it, so that it may bestow comfort on all who taste it and health to all who use it.⁴⁶

There is also the prayer for healing oil in the euchologion of the Serapion of Thmuis (d. after 360):

“... a means to drive away this sickness and weakness, to act as an antidote to the demon, to expel the unclean spirit, to exclude every evil spirit, to drive away the heat and cold of fever and all weakness, to mediate grace and remission of sins, to be a means of life and redemption, to be the health and portion of body, soul, and spirit, to bring full strengthening...”⁴⁷

In the fifth century, the local bishop blessed the oil, praying that by its use the Holy Spirit would bring healing of body and soul. The actual anointing would be done by clergy or lay people. In some cases the sick took the oil home and anointed themselves along with their prayers.⁴⁸

Among early Christian thinkers, Justin Martyr, who taught philosophy in Rome until his martyrdom in 165 A.D., spoke of numerous healings and exorcisms being carried out in the name of Jesus among those who could not be cured by other means.⁴⁹ Cyprian, bishop of Carthage until his death in 258 A.D. and known for his sober judgment and pastoral instincts, relates how at times baptism itself was the means by which the seriously ill received healing.⁵⁰ Origen (c. 185-c. 254), Alexandrian exegete and theologian, in his treatise *Against Celsus*, speaks several times of how Christians “expel evil spirits and perform many cures” and again how “the name of Jesus can still remove distractions from the minds of men, and expel demons, and also take away diseases.”⁵¹ Origen comments:

⁴⁵ D. Scaer, *James the Apostle of Faith*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1983), p. 132.

⁴⁶ M. Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), p. 463.

⁴⁷ Schlier, “Ἄλειφω” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol., G. Kittel, ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 231.

⁴⁸ P. Pfatteicher, *Commentary on the Occasional Services*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 94.

⁴⁹ Justin Martyr, *Second Apology: to the Roman Senate*, 6 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, Roberts, A. and Donaldson, J., eds, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1979), p. 190.

⁵⁰ Cyprian, *To Magnus, On Baptizing the Novatians* Epistle 75:16 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5 Roberts, A. and Donaldson, J., eds, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1978), p. 402.

⁵¹ Origen, “Against Celsus” I, 46, 67 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Vol. 4*, Roberts, A. and Donaldson, J., eds, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1979), pp. 415, 427.

“But in seeking recovery from disease, a man must either follow the inure ordinary and simple method, and have recourse to medical art; or if he would go beyond the common methods adopted by men, he must rise to the higher and better way of seeking the blessing of Him who is God over all, through piety and prayers.”⁵²

But the church’s ministry to the sick was not limited to oil and prayer. St. Fabiola (d. 399) distributed her great wealth to the poor and devoted her life to tending the sick. She is credited with founding Rome’s first general, public hospital in 390 A.D. and is the first to speak of nursing as a vocation.

St. Radegunde (518-87) founded a monastery of nuns outside Poitiers, devoting her life to care for the sick.

The Knights Hospitaller was headquartered in a hospital at Jerusalem at the end of the eleventh century. Originally founded to provide hospitality and security for pilgrims and Crusaders, it added the care of the sick to its list of duties in the twelfth century. All members of the order were divided into two classes, the ‘military brothers’ and the ‘brothers infirmarians.’ To the latter were added the ‘brothers chaplains,’ responsible for worship and the spiritual needs of the community.⁵³

Christian hospitals were founded throughout eastern Christendom by the fourth century. In western Europe hospitals became numerous in the early middle ages and were often associated with a monastic order. These were often organized to meet a specific need, e.g. that of orphans, the aged, the sick, the destitute. An example is the Order of the Brothers Hospitallers whose members are for the most part laymen. It established hospitals in Granada, Madrid, Cordova, and elsewhere in Spain. In addition to the three usual vows, a fourth was taken to serve for life the sick in hospitals.⁵⁴ By the seventeenth century, large numbers of hospitals had been founded by Christian societies as well as by rulers and municipalities under the influence of the Christian faith.⁵⁵

St. Hildegarde (1098-1179), the Abbess of Rupertsberg, near Bingen played a tremendous role in the history of nursing. Her *Physicæ Elementorum, Fluminum aliquot Germaniae, Metallorum, Leguminum, Fructuum et Herbarum, Arborum et Arbustorum, Piscium denique Volatilium et Animantium Terræ Natura*

⁵² *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Vol. 4*, “Origen Against Celsus” VIII, 60, p. 662.

⁵³ F. Cross & E. Livingstone, eds., ‘Hospitallers’ in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 669.

⁵⁴ ‘Brothers Hospitallers’ in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 203.

⁵⁵ A.B. McPadden, ‘Hospitals, History of’ in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1967), Vol. 7, pp. 159-166.

et Operationes and *Liber Compositae Medicinae* reflect a degree of scientific observation that was unusual in medieval times.⁵⁶

St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), founder of the Franciscan Order, devoted himself to ministering to lepers and established a system of treatment and hospitalization. He also influenced St. Clara (1194-1253), foundress of the Poor Clares, who left her mark on nursing for centuries.

The Beguines were members of certain Christian sisterhoods, founded in the Netherlands in the twelfth century. Their male counterparts were the Beghards. Their main aim was philanthropic, especially the care of the sick. The hospitals they built were models of order and cleanliness.

Other notables include Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231) (also known as Elizabeth of Thuringia), the daughter of King Andrew II of Hungary, and patron saint of nursing, who spent all her energies in visiting and caring for the sick and the poor; and St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) who died at age 34 after devoting herself to service to the sick, including plague victims, and the conversion of sinners.

Of special note is St. Camillus of Lellis (1550-1614), founder of the 'Ministers of the Sick', an order devoted to the care of the sick, especially those stricken with plague. He made striking reforms in health care, including the separation of those afflicted with contagious diseases, well aired rooms, special diet, and particularly, an effective spiritual assistance to the dying, whence his order is also called 'Fathers of a Good Death' or 'Agonizantes'.⁵⁷ The Daughters of St. Camillus, founded about 1600 A.D., were dedicated to fighting the plague and were known for their quiet lifestyle. Their motto: "Quietly we will come. Quietly we will serve. Quietly we will return."

Luther saw health care to be the Christian responsibility of the family. Families were to care for their sick themselves instead of handing them over to an institution. However he also reminded the bishops that care for the sick is a genuine task of the church because Christ assigned it to the church (cf. WA 6, 434; Phil. Ed. II, 110).⁵⁸

For two hundred years following the Reformation the Christian family was seen to be the primary locus for health care. The two chief aids were the pastor and the family physician. However, with the advent

⁵⁶ 'Hildegard' in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 600.

⁵⁷ 'Camillus of Lellis' in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 226.

of the industrial revolution, weakened family structures, and new medical technologies, health care gravitated toward medical institutions, often with the church leading the way.

The Lutheran Johann Hinrich Wichern (1808-81) in his institution, *Das Rauhe Haus*, provided excellent training for deacons to work in hospitals. William A. Passavant (1821-94) was an influential American Lutheran who established hospitals, homes for the disabled and afflicted and the deaconess motherhouse movement.⁵⁹

The first Missouri Synod hospital was established in 1858 by J. F. Buenger, the practical-minded pastor of a St. Louis church. It consisted of three rooms—one for men, one for women and one for staff. The fledgling institution received support from suggested Sunday door offerings of five cents per contributor. “From this humble beginning, the institution developed into a 500-bed hospital only to disappear into a for-profit hospital corporation late in the century. Many hospital-based healing ministries were lost in this way.”⁶⁰

So we see, that to some extent, a wholistic healing ministry, providing both spiritual and physical care, has been present in the church from the beginning. However, the trend in health care has been to transfer responsibility for care and treatment of the sick away from home, family and church to medical professionals in hospitals and institutions. Christians themselves built hospitals to better utilize God’s gifts of healing through advances in medical knowledge. This was done, we trust, with an underlying agreement with Luther’s observation:

In sicknesses doctors observe only the natural causes and want to counteract them with their remedies; and they do well. But they do not consider that in sickness Satan provokes the natural causes and can in a moment change causes and sicknesses, turning hot into cold and good into evil. There must, then, be a higher remedy, to wit, faith and prayer, just as Ps. 31:6 says: ‘My times are in Thy hands.’⁶¹

Ministry in Lake Wobegone and Beyond

How then is that “higher remedy” of “faith and prayer” employed in the ministry of healing in the parish at Lake Wobegone? What is the character of our ministry with the young family whose wife and

⁵⁸ C. Reuss, ‘Health Services’ in *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, Vol. 2, J. Bodensieck, ed., (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1965), p. 992, citing Martin Luther, “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate,” (1520).

⁵⁹ Reuss, p. 992.

⁶⁰ LCMS Health Ministries, *Cross and Caduceus*, Vol. 46:3, (Fall 2000), p. 1.

mother is dying of breast cancer, with the young man struggling with depression, or with the organist whose arthritic hands threaten the loss of her musical avocation? Rejecting the notion that the church's concern is only for the soul, we affirm the Bible's wholistic understanding of the human being. Along side the healing art of medicine offered by the medical community,⁶² the church⁶³ offers the ministry of the Great Physician who is the Lord and Giver of life. That ministry is especially important when medical science cannot offer a cure and when, despite our prayers, suffering persists or death prevails.

As the Church cares for the sick and dying, it is following the example of the Lord who Himself showed great concern for the spiritual and physical welfare of the sick. Jesus "went about doing good and healing all" (Ac. 10:38), and indeed we minister to Him as we care for the sick (Mt. 25:36) and are following His bidding (Mk. 16:18).

It is the common responsibility of all Christians to show mercy to the sick by visiting them ["I was sick and you visited Me" (Mt. 25:36)], remembering them in intercessory prayer ["Lord, he whom You love is ill" (Jn. 11:3)], participating in Holy Communion with them if they are of the same household of faith, and offering words of encouragement that focus the hope of the afflicted on Christ (Ps. 42:5). Christians can share the Word of God proclaimed in the congregation from which their sickness has separated them. They should also help the sick to pray using the psalms or other prayers of the church. Through their congregation they might also employ the skills of parish nurses to reach out on their behalf to the sick in the name of Christ.⁶⁴

As ambassadors of Christ, the church's pastors bear a special responsibility to the sick. As the Savior entered our world to counteract and redeem us from the forces of sin, death and the devil, so now He sends His ministers into the sickroom to bring release from sin, death and the devil through the forgiveness of sins. The pastor also brings consolation to the sick in time of anxiety. He offers encouragement to fight

⁶¹ E. Plass, ed., *What Luther Says*, Vol. 3, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), p. 1286-7.

⁶² Please note that I am not in this paper in any way denigrating the role of modern medicine. We receive and use modern medical care as a gift from God. I write to advocate a balanced approach to wholeness which includes all the gifts of healing which God provides, both mediately through medicine and immediately through His gracious intervention in word and Sacrament and in response to prayer.

⁶³ This is a ministry of the Christian congregation, not of individual wonderworkers. While Jesus healed in a variety of situations, in the later church gifts of healing were the work of His Spirit in local congregations of believers (Cf. 1 Co. 12-14; Jm. 5).

against illness He offers prayer, perhaps with anointing, on behalf of the sick that will overcome the illness if it is God's will. Or finally, he helps to prepare the faithful for a good death.⁶⁵

The traditional medicines with which the pastor enters the sickroom include absolution upon confession; a ministry of the Word, spoken and sung; prayer and anointing; and Holy Communion.

Confession and Absolution

Here the church personally applies the gospel of the forgiveness of sins to the suffering individual. In confession we expose our hearts to the penetrating light of God's Word. We acknowledge ourselves to be in a condition of poverty and misery because of our own sinful condition. We confess both what we have done and what we have left undone, so that we might be exposed to the full healing effect of what He does for us in His Son. Speaking the liberating and recreating word of reconciliation, God restores our broken relationship with Himself, returning us to its beginning in Baptism. Through this use of the office of the keys (Mt. 16:19; 18:18; Jn. 20:22-23), the pastor speaks a "sure and firm consolation" for the troubled conscience.⁶⁶

Ministry of the Word

Through His ministers, Jesus continues to announce the good news of the Kingdom, especially to the sick and afflicted. The various agendas of the Lutheran church provide pastors with psalms, lessons and prayers for this purpose. For example, the undated *Pastor's Companion authorized by the Synods constituting the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America* has categories of lessons and sentences that reflect the *Common Service Book*. These along with hymn stanzas without music include: Afflictions and Their Uses, Repentance and Assurance of Forgiveness, Patience Under Suffering and Trust

⁶⁴ Cf. LCMS Health Ministries, 1333 S. Kirkwood, St. Louis, MO 63122 or the International Parish Nurse Resource Center, 205 W. Touhy, Park Ridge, IL 60068.

⁶⁵ To the realistic question, "Why seek to heal if in the end we suffer and die anyway?" Martin Scharlemann answers that we seek to heal "because life and healing are the very province of God, and men are privileged to share in this power." *Healing and Redemption* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965), p. 94. We act as His instruments, as Christ's ambassadors, living tokens of His good will toward the sick and dying, knowing that in the end it is only God Himself who restores to health or who will in the end "transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body" (Pl. 3:21).

⁶⁶ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article X, *The Book of Concord*, tr. & ed. T. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), p. 180. See also F. Precht, "Confession and Absolution: Sin and

in God's Help, Preparation for Death, and When the End Is at Hand, Gratitude for Recovery, At the Sickbed of Children.

Occasional Services A Companion to Lutheran Book of Worship, published by Augsburg Publishing House in 1982 offers these under the following, more psychologically based, categories: Sickness; Gratitude; Before Childbirth; Following Childbirth; Stillbirth or Death Shortly After Birth; Addiction; Anxiety, Apprehension, Fear; Guilt; Loneliness; Impatience or Boredom; Impending Death or Irreversible Illness; Anger, Bitterness, Self-Pity, Turmoil; Acceptance of Inevitable Death; Before Surgery; Following Surgery.⁶⁷

It is evident that the Church intends her ministers to vigorously apply the Law and Gospel to human hearts in any and every situation and especially as death draws near.⁶⁸ That Word certainly is spoken and in many situations may be sung by employing the psalms or hymns of the church. Perhaps it could even be proclaimed through art. John Doberstein, Professor at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, advises his classes when ministering to the dying to "Put a crucifix in their hands and preach the resurrection."⁶⁹

Prayer and Anointing

All of the Lord's gifts move us ultimately in the direction of the "redemption of our bodies" (Rm. 8:23). Where it is the Lord's gracious will to heal the sick, we see in their healing signs of that ultimate redemption which we shall enjoy in the new creation.

As we have seen above, the church has a long history of participation in our Lord's ministry to the sick. The Church's long tradition of incorporating laying on of hands and anointing with oil finds expression in the Roman Catholic Church in its *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and*

Forgiveness" in *Lutheran Worship History and Practice*, F. Precht, ed., (St. Louis: Concordia, 1993), pp. 322-386.

⁶⁷ Cf. Pfatteicher, pp. 69-91 for a comparison of various rites from the Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Orthodox churches.

⁶⁸ An example might be Luther's comments on John 6:54: "You must not judge by external appearance; you must be guided by the Word, which promises and gives you eternal life. Even though your senses tell you otherwise, this does not matter. . . sickness, death, perils, and sin ... will not devour or finish you. They will have to leave you in peace. . . But you will retort: "The fact remains that I must die." Oh, this makes no difference! Just go ahead and die in God's name. . . You are still assured of eternal life; it will surely be yours... For here you have My promise: "I will raise you up." "Sermons on the Gospel of St. John" (1530), *Luther's Works*, Vol. 23, J. Pelican, ed., (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), p. 131.

Viaticum.⁷⁰ The Episcopal Church uses “Ministration to the Sick, Part II, Laying on of Hands and Anointing.”⁷¹ The rite in the Orthodox church is known as “The Office of Holy Unction.”⁷² The Presbyterian Church USA offers anointing with oil as an option in its office for ministry with the sick.⁷³

Among Missouri Synod Lutherans, in addition to a rite for the “Communion of the Sick,” *Lutheran Worship Agenda* offers rites for “Ministry to the Sick and Homebound” and a “Commendation of the Dying.” These are usually used in the context of a home or hospital visit. In addition to these rites, the LCMS’s Commission on Health recently published “A Service of Anointing and Prayer for the Sick” designed to be used as a corporate service in the parish. The editor comments,

A service of prayer for the sick has high meaning for them. They perceive their church as a true caring community. Sickness is a strongly isolating experience; a service of prayer mainstreams the sick and bonds them to their church in a way that will never be forgotten. In their prayers together for one another the sick become contributing members to the life of the congregation, not just recipients of its concerns.⁷⁴

Rubrics for the service suggest that because of the isolating nature of illness, “touch is a significant adjunct to ministry for many sick. As prayer for an individual is offered, the pastor may place his hands on the worshiper’s head.”⁷⁵

The Missouri Synod has been slow to incorporate the laying on of hands and/or anointing with oil in its ministry to the sick. After its adoption of *Lutheran Worship* the LCMS’s Commission on Worship in 1982 published a study document of a proposed *Lutheran Worship, Agenda*. This draft included a section entitled “Ministry to the Sick and Infirm” that included, after prayers for healing, a reading from James 5:14-16 followed by a rubric for anointing:

⁶⁹ Pfatteicher, p. 86.

⁷⁰ Prepared by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy A Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops Conferences (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1983).

⁷¹ *Book of Common Prayer*, (New York: Church Publishing, Inc., 1979) pp. 453-57.

⁷² *The Priest’s Service Book with a Translation from the Original Greek* by Evagoras Constantinides, 3rd Ed., (Thessaloniki, Greece: Melissa Printing Co., 1989), pp. 155-179.

⁷³ *Book of Common Worship* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 994.

⁷⁴ Cf. LCMS Health Ministries The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, “Cross and Caduceus”, Vol. 44:3 (Sept. 1998). This service is available on the LCMS web site at <http://humancare.lcms.org/hm/hm.htm>. According to a conversation with the editor, Howard Mueller, this service was drawn from two rites from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s *Occasional Services: a Companion to Lutheran Book of Worship*, the “Service of the Word for Healing” (pp. 89ff) and the “Laying on of Hands and Anointing of the Sick” (pp. 99ff).

⁷⁵ LCMS Health Ministries The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, “Cross and Caduceus”, Vol. 44:3 (Sept. 1998).

The pastor dips his thumb in the [olive] oil and, while making the sign of the cross on the sick person's forehead, says:

P: I anoint you in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Blessed by God, the Father Almighty, who for our redemption sent his Son into the world. Blessed by God, the only-begotten Son, who took upon himself our human nature, having compassion on us in all our afflictions. Blessed by God the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who strengthens us in our weakness.

C: Amen

This section was not included in the final *Lutheran Worship, Agenda*. In contrast, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in the same year published both a "Service of the Word for Healing" and a rite for "Laying on of Hands and Anointing the Sick" in its *Occasional Services*. The first is a corporate Service of the Word which includes laying on of hands with the option of anointing with oil. The second is for use in a hospital or home with those who cannot attend a corporate service for healing.

The Service of the Word for Healing includes opportunity for the singing of hymns, responsive reading of Scripture, confession of the Apostles' Creed, collect of the day and readings from Scripture, a sermon, offering, and prayers for the sick, the afflicted, those who serve in the health professions, for family and friends, and for those deciding treatment options. The prayers conclude with a doxology to each person of the Holy Trinity and the prayer:

Holy and blessed Trinity, sustain your servants, _____, with your presence; drive away their sickness of body and spirit; and give them that victory of life and peace which will enable them to serve you now and evermore.⁷⁶

The sick who are present may then come to the altar where the minister lays both hands on each person's head and prays:

Father in heaven, for Jesus' sake, send your Holy Spirit upon your servant, _____, drive away all sickness of body and spirit; make whole that which is broken; deliver him/her from the power of evil; and preserve him/her in the true faith, to share in the power of Christ's resurrection and to serve you with all the saints now and evermore.⁷⁷

The minister may then anoint each person's head in silence, dipping the thumb in oil and making the sign of the cross on the person's forehead, saying:

O God, the giver of health and salvation: As the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, as his command, anointed many that were sick and healed them, send now your Holy Spirit, that _____, anointed with this oil, may in repentance and faith be made whole; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ *Occasional Services: a Companion to Lutheran Book of Worship*, (Philadelphia: Board of Publications, 1982), p. 93.

⁷⁷ *Occasional Services*, p. 94.

⁷⁸ *Occasional Services*, p. 94.

Holy Communion

Because serious illness separates the sick from the community of the faithful, the pastor's visitation in which he brings the Sacrament is of highest benefit. In bringing the Sacrament, the pastor represents Christ Who comes into the sickroom with His compassion and grace. In receiving the Lord's Body and Blood, the sick are sacramentally united to their Lord and His Church as St. Paul explains, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Co. 10:17). For the sick, the opportunity to receive the Sacrament is not only a privilege, but is a sign of support and concern shown by the pastor and the congregation for its ill members. Where possible it is good to arrange for the Sacrament to be celebrated at the home of the sick with their families and friends gathered around them.

Along with His Body and Blood the Lord conveys to the sick His greatest gift, the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. This is "the very gift he has provided for me against my sins, death, and all evils. Therefore it is appropriately called the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new man... the Lord's Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may refresh and strengthen itself and not weaken in the struggle."⁷⁹ Hence we ought to teach our people to expectantly receive this sacrament, especially in sickness, "as a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also."⁸⁰

This is especially the case for the dying. Before our Lord left this world to return to the Father, He left us the Sacrament of His Body and Blood. He will strengthen us with this heavenly food when the hour comes for us to join Him. Therefore, the Sacrament is to be highly regarded as *viaticum*, a sacred food which strengthens the Christian for the journey through death to eternal life in sure hope of the resurrection. With it, the pastor goes to the death bed bringing hope through the vivifying body of the Lord, for where medicine ends, there stands our Lord who "will change our lowly body to be like His glorious body" (Pl. 3:21).⁸¹

In ways such as these the church shows herself to be a healing fellowship, surrounding beds of sickness with the Word and with the prayers of many righteous persons. Here we see the vocation of the Christian congregation as its members, serving as what the apostle Peter calls "a craft of

⁷⁹ Large Catechism, Part V, *The Book of Concord*, tr. & ed. T. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), p. 449.

⁸⁰ Large Catechism, Part V, p. 454.

⁸¹ Cf. For a fuller treatment of the vivifying effect of the Lord's Supper and its implications for pastoral care of the sick and dying see my "Medicine of Immortality," *Logia* Vol. 4, 1 (January, 1995): 37-47.

priests" (1 Peter 2:5), bear the burdens of men to God's throne of grace and bring from it, in their turn, healing and new life. It is to those who identify themselves in this way with the hungry, the thirsty, the cold, the sick, the homeless, and the imprisoned, that the Son of Man will say at the Last Day: "Come, O blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34).⁸²

⁸² Scharlemann, p. 106.

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