

WCC CONSULTATION: HEALTH FAITH AND HEALING

Response to Dr Grundmann's paper

(2001 "Response to Christopher Grundman". *International Review of Mission*. XC:41-45.)

A. Issues Raised by Grundmann

Grundmann identifies a number of important truths about healing:

1. It is a pan-religious, pan-cultural reality not specifically tied to Christianity nor to the divine.
2. It has become a more urgent issue in our global context where most of the new emerging religions both Christian and non-Christian focus on the promise to heal their adherents.
3. In this way they are responding to "the global socio-cultural situation at the turn of the millennium".
4. Western medicine as healing has played a major role in fighting disease but is not adequate to deal with all "diseases" (I will call them illnesses).
5. Attempts to integrate healing ministries into mainline Christianity have raised a number of problems regarding the interpretation of the healings done and often cause other problems of power struggle, rivalries and authority.
6. Theologically, healing and salvation are linked in the paradigm of creation and salvation as illness is linked to the fall.
7. Healing is linked to issues of "congregation building" (church growth?). Since witnessing of healing is an issue of perception (of both the individual and the community) questions of the discernment of spirits and the role of the Holy Spirit become central.
8. Healing preserves the Church from false spiritualisation by binding it to the concrete incarnate side of life.
9. In its eschatological dimension, healing is not just liturgy, the laying of hands or prayer but the quest for a realised eschaton in all dimensions of life: a sign of salvation. But it is not the fullness of the eschaton as death still comes.
10. Further study is required on the available healing forms within the Church, bibliographies and issues of hermeneutics regarding the nature of healing.

B. My Response to Grundmann

I would like to put together some of these important ideas in a slightly different form to indicate a way of dealing with the question of Health, Faith and healing from a Missiological perspective. I have five points:

1. The cultural nature of sickness and healing (responding to Grundmann 1-5 above).
2. The mission to heal: A fundamental part of the mission of Jesus.
3. Inculturation as Missiological model for healing (Grundmann 6-10 above).
4. The inculturation model in the healing process (Grundmann 6-9 above).
5. Some pressing theological issues (Grundmann 5-7 above).

1. The cultural nature of sickness and healing

Culture can provide us with a key to understand the issue of Christian healing and indeed all healing. The nature of the Christian mission to heal throughout the ages

has responded to cultural factors such as world view, values and beliefs, throughout history. So its expression in the Greco Roman world, the middle ages, the modern period and the postmodern period reflects this truth (Bate 1999a). In fact we can clearly point to the cultural nature of illness and healing since these are psycho cultural states to do with the *perception* of wellness. The construction of illness out of disease is a cultural process (Bate 1995:102; 1999:105)

2. The mission to Heal: A fundamental part of the mission of Jesus and the Church

We cannot deny that healing was a central part of the mission of Jesus and that he mandated this mission to his disciples (Hagner 1993:263ff). Jesus was involved in three principal activities: He preached Good News, he healed the sick and he died on the Cross. All of this is good news though some appears to be good good news and others “bad” good news (Bate 2000: 52-54).

Stevan Davies (1995) has suggested that Jesus was a “spirit healer” in the anthropological sense of this term. We know from scripture that Jesus heals by *dunamis* (power) unfortunately translated “miracle” and that the healing was either *sotso* which is also the word for salvation or *therapeuo* which is not physical healing but a total healing the human being (Beyer 1973).

The Church has no mission of its own but the continuation of the mission of Christ. In Matthew 10, Jesus mandates the disciples to continue his own work: cast out unclean spirits; heal every disease, preach the kingdom of heaven is close, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons (Hagner 1993; see also Bate 2000) Many of these things are seemingly hard in a Modern culture under the enlightenment. So perhaps the culture needs evangelisation. They are “relatively” easy in other cultures.

When healing is done the Church grows and when it is not done the Church declines. So there is an issue of discerning the presence of the Holy Spirit here.

3. Inculturation as Missiological Model for Healing

Inculturation is the best theological model for dealing with the mission to heal since it is concerned with the cultural nature of the Church and its mission (Bate 1995, 1999). Inculturation is often understood as the relationship between a local church and its own culture (Roest Crollius 1986) or the emergence of the local Church (Bate 1995, 1999). In the so called new churches, inculturation has to deal with deconstructing unnecessary western forms of Christianity from the missionary period of plantation and reconstructing local Christianity.

Inculturation is principally the task of Christians of the local church of that place. The dialogue is between a local church and its *own* culture. There are two fundamental criteria that a local church should hold to in the endeavour of inculturation: compatibility with the Gospel and unity with the universal Church.

Inculturation has Christological, pneumatological and ecclesiological dimensions and so can respond to the theological issues raised by Grundmann.

4. The inculturation model in the healing process.

With regard to healing, inculturation must concern itself both with the local cultural healing system and with revisiting the Church’s mission to heal. The goal is how to fulfill the mission to heal in an inculturated way as indeed Jesus and the apostles did. This requires dialogue between the healing praxis in the mission of the

church and the praxis of healing within local community. This latter will be expressed within local cultural categories.

When the local community is a fully inculturated local church these two praxes will be the same. This was often the case in the modern period when the Church's healing ministry was done within the medical model of western culture through the medical mission of the Church (See Wilkinson 1974). Today both in the postmodern West and in non-Western countries this is not the case, hence the need for inculturation.

Christians of the local Church are called to a reappraisal of the Church's mission to heal in terms of their own understanding of the meaning of healing. Clearly such an understanding will also be in terms of their own Christian tradition (Christian culture). This reappraisal is a theological act by the local Church.

In reflecting on the local cultural healing practices and the emergence of a Christian ministry of healing within this culture, the criteria of compatibility with the Gospel and union (unity) of the Church must be respected. Such reflection by the local Church eventually requires a theological judgement. See Bate (1995; 1999) for how this was done in the South African context.

Christians of different local churches must come together to share on these matters. The cultural context is now different as it has global connotations containing values such as human solidarity, interdependence and global Christian unity. In this dialogue the same two criteria of inculturation should be respected. This, I suppose, is the purpose of a meeting like this. Such dialogue should include a search for some commonalities between different approaches and mutual understanding of differences in practices.

5 Some pressing Theological issues

Discernment of spirits (See Grundmann 7 above). Not all "healing" is healing. We need to investigate "coping healing" (Bate 1995;1999) with clear theological and spiritual criteria. We require a theology of healing based in scripture and linked with tradition which will recognise the culturedness of all tradition and promote inculturated theological solutions. Especially important is the re-linking of salvation and healing as *sotso* and *therapeuo*. In some languages they are closely linked or the same and such cultures require a clear healing ministry (eg in Zulu).

We must widen the notion of healing to include, psychological, sociological, cultural, economic dimensions of human well-being. The greatest healer in South Africa at the moment is the minister of water affairs and not spirit healers. We should use the human sciences in our theology to revisit the notion of human life and well being. At present these are too closely tied to the organic scientific culture. We should look for commonalities in the healing process instead of being confused by the plethora of processes and techniques. Some of these include

- a. Curing disease is the organic medical model of sickness and health whereas healing illness as the human psycho-cultural model.
- b. Healing illness involves emotion transfer from unwellness to wellness.
- c. Healing involves ritual process which allow the emotions to be transacted by means of an accepted (believed in) symbol system. The symbols carry the emotions and are transacted by the healer.
- d. Healing often involves trance, altered states of consciousness and dissociative states
- e. The role of faith is central. Healing is always through faith. As Christians we are called to believe in the Christian belief system. This is life.

References

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