

Understanding Christian Health and Healing with Rev Dr Harold Taylor

AFCNA held a helpful one-day workshop at Australian Lutheran College in South Australia on '*Understanding Christian Health and Healing*' with Rev. Dr. Harold Taylor. Around 60 participants attended the seminar, coming from diverse Christian faiths and varied occupations, but all involved in some way in the Church's healing ministry. We began the day looking at some of the contemporary definitions and perspectives on health and healing, which had the common theme of 'harmony' and/or 'right relationship/s'. We then explored what was meant by harmony and what the Latin meaning of the root words were. Harmony is an attitude or agreement that connects two separate things so they can actively work together in cooperation e.g. a bone joint. Today we widely see the ideal of health and healing as a harmony in all dimensions of our lives.

We spent the next session looking at the Christian perspectives of healing today and discussing some contemporary Christian definitions of healing. We all agreed that healing was from God, this includes modern medicine and the natural laws written into the universe, and other complementary healing modalities. Christian healing begins from its place in the ministry of Jesus where the healed became involved 'with Jesus in a victorious encounter of the Kingdom of God with the powers of evil'. In our prayer we are continuing to fight the cosmic battle between good and evil. So what is the Christian church's specific task in healing? We have a duty to support everything that contributes to human welfare. Harold warned that the church cannot surrender its responsibility in the field of healing to other agencies, because we have something to offer this world that only Christians can provide, because healing continues to flow in and flow through the work of Jesus Christ and his incarnation the Christian church. So having Christian health and healing centres, hospitals and agencies is important, as is having Christians working in secular agencies to continue to minister, pray and work with their spiritual gifts acquired knowledge and skills. Harold added that the ministry of healing is not just for those with special knowledge, but for all the congregation who with prayer, love, practical acts of compassion and kindness, ministry of word, sacraments, and prayer can provide healing. The specialised work of FCNs and others has its proper place within that context.

So next we went to scripture to explore the biblical understanding of healing. Our next session discovered the Greek and Hebrew words used in Scripture to describe healing. I personally found this an illuminating session and will endeavor to explain the words we explored so you may gain this same insight! (Thankfully Harold issued us with comprehensive sets of notes, which have helped me to recap my jottings in a more cohesive manner). In the Old Testament three important words describe healing. They are

- a. *Rapa- Rophe*: Exodus 15:26 the Lord is described as '*Jehovah Rophe*' I am the Lord who heals you to what you were meant to be, who restore you... This idea of restoring or repairing is evident in other passages 1 Kings 18:30, 2 Kings 2:21-22, 2 Chronicles 7:14. The water, the land, the altar, disease, all were repaired and/or restored so they could become productive again. They could become what God intended them to be so they could fulfil God's intended purpose.

- b. *Sapo*: Cure of physical illness e.g. 2 Kings 5:3,6,7,11 the story of Naaman who was restored so he could return to his rightful part in his community. The restoration is not an end in itself, but for a larger purpose.
- c. *Shalom*: has three interrelated meanings. Firstly it means general wellbeing. It's not just absence of sickness, but abundant wellness, 'super-overflowing abundance', a rightness, being OK in body and peace of mind as well (see Jeremiah 33:6-9, Psalm 38:3, Genesis 43:27-28, Numbers 6:24-26). The second meaning of shalom is positive social relationships. In 1 Kings 5:12 we see the meaning of right relationships between nations. In Ezekiel 34:23-26 and Isaiah 54:10 God declares a covenant of peace for his people, so shalom also means an 'Okayness' between people and nations. It is more than the absence of war, it is an 'Okayness' among each other! Now there's a thought for our nation's leaders to consider in these troubled times. Are we as Christians in this nation showing God's healing power to other nations, to refugees, to Muslim sisters and brothers? The third meaning of shalom is personal integrity, speaking and living honestly and ethically (see Psalm 34:11-15, 37:37). If all three of these are put together shalom is how things should be for Christ's people. It is God's intended purpose for us, namely, our physical wellbeing, right social relationships, moral living, and positive spiritual relationships all of which contribute to good health. Shalom is being healthy in body, mind and spirit in relation to others, God, the creation and ourselves.

So now how does that fit with the New Testament view of healing? Bearing in mind the Old Testament should always be read through the lense of Jesus' birth, death and resurrection. There are five words to describe healing, which are all purposeful in their intention.

- a. *Sozo* – *soter*: means to rescue, set free, release people so they can fulfil their purpose i.e. saved to serve (Luke 8:48, James 5:15).
- b. *Therapeou*: to cure from sickness disease and restore to healthy function Luke 8:43
- c. *laomai*: (the translation of Rapa/Rophe in the Old Testament) means to be restored and repaired to healthy functioning (Luke 8:47).
- d. *Hugiano*: to be sound, to be complete so you can function in society. Jesus asks 'Do you want to be what I intended you to be?' (John 5:6, 11,14-15).
- e. *Eirene*: is the same as shalom in the O.T. (Luke 8:48, I Thessalonians 5:23)

It is interesting to note that these five meanings are all about being healed so we can serve or function. Healing is not an end in itself, but it's purpose is so we can become what God intended us to be. Harold noted that Luke 8:43-48 uses four of above words to describe the healing experience of the woman who bled for many years. Here we can see the fullness of Christian healing which means the woman was cured physically, restored to her community, repaired so she could function and serve her community and her Lord, and able to live in peaceful right relationships with God, others and herself. How beautiful is that for a definition of healing?

I found this session so helpful. Christian healing is so comprehensive, so purposeful, and so complete. It is bound up in our lives lived within our Christian faith communities. Jesus is at work in us as christians and in our faith communities so we can live abundant lives. Our communities should be safe havens, places of healing, perhaps even pieces of heaven on earth, where people can come to get a touch from the living Lord Jesus and be healed! This can occur in our ministry of the Word, sacraments, prayers, and in our work as FCNs. There are limitless opportunities to extend healing ministry in our churches. We just need to let the Holy Spirit lead us and empower us, and allow the love

of Jesus to flow through us so people can get a touch from the living and loving God. We are all on a journey toward wholeness in Jesus and we will find absolute healing when we are returned to be with him, or he returns to this earth. What an awesome God we have! Again I learnt that my view of healing is too confined and my understanding way too small. I have a great and awesome God! Thank you Harold for opening my eyes again!

Recommended Book References on Christian Healing

Archbishop Council (2000) *A time to heal*. Church house publishing: UK

Brown, M. (1995) *Israel's Divine healer: Old Testament understandings*. Zondervan: USA

Cohen, Marc (2001) *Perspectives in holistic health*. Monash Institute of Public Health: Victoria, Australia

Cowie, Ian (1995) *Prayer and ideas for healing services*. Wild Goose Publications

Cowie, Ian (2000) *Jesus healing works and ours*. Wild Goose Publications

Epperley Bruce (2001) *God's touch: faith wholeness and the healing miracles of Jesus* John Knox: Westminster UK

Fountain, Daniel (1999) *God medicine and miracles* Harold Shaw Publishers: USA

Kelsey, Morton (****) *Psychology medicine and Christian healing*. Harper & Row Publishers

World council of churches (2001) *International Review of Mission*. 90 (356/357) January – April 2001 issue of the journal devoted to faith, health and healing.

Antonia van Loon RN PhD (2004)