



New College
University of Edinburgh

M.Th. in Ministry
Dissertation

Healing Priests

Priesthood as a model of healing

being the thesis for the degree of
Master of Theology in Ministry
University of Edinburgh 1999

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Editor's Notes and Copyright

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I have made a few minor (and cosmetic) adjustments. I have changed the title page to keep it in line with the style of the other academic documents on my website. I corrected a few grammatical errors which were not spotted while I was proof-reading the original (and which my markers kindly pointed out!). And I have also added the marker's comments at the end of the document, which I hope adds some critical balance to this paper.

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Edinburgh, November 2003

Preface

My energies for this paper stem from four sources:

1. at the age of nine years old I felt God calling me to ordained ministry within the Scottish Episcopal Church, and that that call would involve an aspect of working in the broad area of 'healing' - I will explain what I mean by 'healing' in the first chapter;
2. after eighteen years I am to be ordained a Deacon this autumn in Inverness Cathedral, and serve as Assistant Curate there. The term Curate, of course, referring to someone responsible for the 'Cure of Souls'
3. my growing awareness that priesthood is fundamentally about a way of being human, rather than a job or task. That way of being human is Jesus Christ's way of being human. Priesthood, as the Christian life in general, is about becoming more Christlike, more 'whole'. This way of life, is a 'healing' way of life, both in the sense of becoming whole oneself, but also about journeying with others as they move towards wholeness in God
4. my recent reading of the novel *A Question of Integrity* by Susan Howatch, in which the gradual unravelling of the main characters and story, it seemed to me, offer a useful case-study to investigate my premises.

Synopsis

It is my thesis that while some members of the Body of Christ, including some members of the clergy, may be called to a specific ministry of healing which involves the laying-on-of-hands and specific prayer for curing illness and disease, all priests, by the very nature of priesthood are called to be involved in a more broad definition of healing, that is growing into the fullness of Christ, which may or may not involve physical healing. Given that only one person, Jesus of Nazareth, has even attained perfection and total wholeness priests are called to be what Henri Nouwen referred to as wounded healers; in their brokenness they are called to heal the broken.

I believe (and wish to show) that the task of priesthood is very similar to that of the healer: to walk closely with God, to pour oneself out and become more Godly, to walk more closely with God, to gradually be transformed into the likeness of Christ, to wholeness.

In chapter one I examine our understanding of health arguing against the Enlightenment view which has dominated the modern understanding of healthcare, and suggesting a more holistic view which takes into account those aspects of the human being which cannot be measured scientifically: emotion, spirituality, etc.

In the second chapter I examine the ministry of the 'cure of souls'. I argue that it is a calling to work at the most profound level of who we are as human beings, with the aim of bring people to wholeness in Christ, and that this is the basic task to which all ordained clerics are called.

In chapter three I offer a brief examination of the nature and role of the ordained priesthood in an attempt to argue that the Christian priestly community requires an explicit, named priesthood in order to carry out this task of the 'cure of souls'. I wish to show that at the heart of priesthood is an attentiveness to God, formed out of a life of contemplative prayer, and through it the ability to walk with people in their brokenness and accompany them towards wholeness, which can only be found in relationship with the living God.

Chapter four consists of a case study from the novel *A Question of Integrity* by Susan Howatch. In it I present a scene from the novel in which the priest, Revd Nicholas Darrow, is asked by Alice Fletcher to pray for her dying aunt. In my analysis and evaluation I show that the healing takes place because the cleric is attentive to those

present (including God), and he allows Alice and her aunt to be the real 'healers'. I argue that it is in using the tools of the 'cure of souls' which are specifically the gift of the ordained priest, that healing can be enabled, and that indeed all priests are called to be healers.

Chapter 1 - Healing and Wholeness

Outline

In this chapter I will examine our understanding of 'health' and healing, arguing that the definition that we use, which focuses on cure and restoration of function as the criterion of success is incomplete. I want to demonstrate firstly, that the legacy of the Enlightenment which sees the human body as a compartmentalised assembly of anatomical parts, along the lines of Frankenstein's Monster, does not take into account emotional, spiritual and personal factors when dealing with 'ill-health' and dis-ease; secondly, that the pursuit of cure often leads to further illness; and lastly, that the medicalization of life by the medical profession, that turns healthy people into patients, does not aid in our understanding of health and wholeness, but simply erects a screen behind which the painful facts of illness and death can be hidden.

In its place I want to offer a definition of healing which takes into account an holistic view of humanity, which is ultimately rooted in relationship with God. I want to share Martin Israel's view that the Holy Spirit is the real agent of healing, and that healing is not simply a "plastering over of a defective personality, brought to notice by a physical or mental disorder, but a renewal of the whole person in the light of truth"¹. Healing in this understanding leads to wholeness of person and may not necessarily involve physical cure; wholeness is a process that we journey on towards death. Any 'healer' involved in the healing process therefore needs to be attentive to God, offering themselves as an open channel for the power of the Holy Spirit. I will argue that an experience of the love of God is the only way towards wholeness.

Definition

The *Oxford Paperback Dictionary* offers four definitions for the verb 'heal':

verb **1** (of sore or wounded parts) form healthy flesh again. **2** cause to do this. **3** cure; *healing the sick*. **4** put right (differences etc.)²

The first three meanings focus on restoring to health, fixing something which is broken, repairing a body racked by disease; the fourth definition points to something different. The concern of 'putting things right' is not for physiological repair, but

¹ Martin Israel, *The Quest for Wholeness*, back cover

² *Oxford Paperback Dictionary*, 1994, p.368

justice, salvation and reconciliation. This is about the healing of relationships, and eventually about a journey to wholeness. In a similar exercise, if we were to examine the word 'health' we would also find that its primary focus is on the absence of bodily illness or disease. The words 'healing' and 'health' have come to revolve around the medical practices involved in 'making people better', in curing. I question the comprehensiveness of this definition. It is no surprise that this popular usage has developed. It follows the reductionist Enlightenment example set by the practice and techniques of professional medicine over the last few hundred years.

The Enlightenment Legacy

This worldview has been the underlying basis for modern medical practice. The body is regarded as a well-ordered machine that functions according to predetermined patterns. Illness is the breaking down of functioning. Healing consists in establishing the natural functions or processes and then restoring them through the appropriate intervention. These functions can be isolated to particular parts of the body, with no assumption that there is a connection between all the parts, and between the body and its social and physical environment. Neither is it assumed that emotions, mental functions, values, and spiritual capabilities play a part in the process of disease and healing. The person is regarded as an isolated ego inside the body. Mental work has been given higher status than manual work.³

A person's emotions, mental functions, values and spirituality are often left out of the equation, yet it is very often from these areas that much illness stems, and in which we live and judge the quality of life. Here is a practical example of what I mean:

I recently visited my GP, about a kidney condition I have inherited from my father. When I arrived at the surgery I reported to the receptionist and was asked to take a seat in the waiting room, which was arranged in two rows of concentric arcs around a table, strewn with out-of-date magazines. I had no sooner sat down when the doctor appeared at the waiting room door and announced my name. Acknowledging me with a nod, he lead me to his office, and stood hanging on to the door handle as I walked past, closing the door behind me. He invited me to sit down, sitting himself opposite me, a desk between us. He asked me how he could help me. His was a position of ability, power and authority. He was distanced from me both physically and emotionally. I had three issues I wanted to bring to his attention, but after we had discussed the first, he stood up and seemed keen to usher me out of his office.

³ *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, p.499

When eventually I did leave, I felt bruised and unheard. I did not feel as though he was interested in me or that he cared about me. He had not addressed my emotions, mental functions or spirituality. I left feeling worse than I had when I went in.

John Drane reports that this experience is common:

Faced with the impersonal nature, the expense, the élitism - and, often, the ineffectiveness of modern medical science, is it any wonder that many people feel something is wrong? When clinical efficiency, pay cheques and patient hours seem to be the only things that matter, what has happened to the high ideals of the Hippocratic oath and medical ethics? Not all medics are like this, of course. But the fact that any of them are is a powerful indictment of the educational system that has produced them.⁴

I have already explained that one of the most clear criticisms of medical science is its reductionist approach to the human body, in which anatomy and physiology (the art of de-constructing and re-constructing the human body) play a key role, and the patient is little more than a collection of parts that happens to be breathing, like a proverbial Frankenstein's Monster.

Iatrogenic Medicine

Ivan Illich is even more scathing about the medical profession. In *Limits to Medicine* he argues that not only is the effectiveness of medical science an illusion, but that also it often reduces, rather than promotes, the health of individuals, a phenomenon he calls *iatrogenic disease*⁵.

Impressive medical technology, satirised in the Monty Python sketch with the 'machine that goes <ping!>' has been combined with an 'egalitarian rhetoric'⁶ to develop an impression that medical science is highly effective. But at the outset of his book, he explains that over the last one hundred years doctors have influenced epidemics "no more profoundly than did priests during earlier times"⁷. Examining

⁴ John Drane, *What is the New Age saying to the Church?*, pp.136f.

⁵ Illich takes his definition from *Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary*, 25th ed. (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1974): "Iatrogenic (*iatro* - Gr. physician, *gennan* - Gr. to produce). Resulting from the activity of physicians. Originally applied to disorders induced in the patient by autosuggestion based on the physician's examination, manner, or discussion, the term is now applied to any adverse condition in a patient occurring as the result of treatment by a physician or surgeon." Ivan Illich, *Limits To Medicine*, p.14

⁶ Ivan Illich, *Ibid.*, p.22

⁷ Ivan Illich, *Ibid.*, p.15

various infections such as tuberculosis, cholera, dysentery and typhoid he points out that even before the use of antibiotics became routine each of these infections "peaked and dwindled outside the physician's control" (Illich, p.16). His explanation of this lies in part in the introduction of better housing, and more significantly in better auto-immune systems brought about by improved nutrition amongst the population:

For more than a century, analysis of disease trends has shown that the environment is the primary determinant of the state of general health of any population. Medical geography, the history of diseases, medical anthropology, and the social history of attitudes towards illness have shown that food, water, and air, in correlation with the level of socio-political equality and the cultural mechanisms that make it possible to keep the population stable, play the decisive role in determining how healthy grown-ups feel and at what age adults tend to die."⁸

Certainly there are conditions which have been influenced by medical intervention. In the case of infectious diseases the use of antibiotic drugs has been significant in the treatment and control of pneumonia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, malaria and typhoid. However this level of success is not experienced in every aspect of modern medicine:

The pain, dysfunction, disability, and anguish resulting from technical medical intervention now rival the morbidity due to traffic and industrial accidents and even war-related activities, and make the impact of medicine one of the most rapidly spreading epidemics of our time. Among murderous institutional torts, only modern malnutrition injures more people than iatrogenic disease in its various manifestations. In the most narrow sense, iatrogenic disease includes only those illnesses that would not have come about if sound and professionally recommended treatment had *not* been applied... In a more general and widely accepted sense, clinical iatrogenic disease comprises all clinical conditions for which remedies, physicians, or hospitals are the pathogens, or "sickening" agents.⁹

The Medicalization of Life

Besides clinical iatrogenic disease is what Illich refers to as *social iatrogenesis*. Again, I shall let him explain this:

Social iatrogenesis is at work when health care is turned into a standardized item,

⁸ Ivan Illich, *Ibid.*, pp.17-20

⁹ Ivan Illich, *Ibid.*, pp.26f.

a staple; when all suffering is "hospitalized" and homes become inhospitable to birth, sickness, and death; when the language in which people could experience their bodies is turned into bureaucratic gobbledegook; or when suffering, mourning, and healing outside the patient role are labelled a form of deviance.¹⁰

Pain, sickness and suffering affect us all. They often leave us with an uncomfortable silence in which we are left to struggle to find an explanation for our experiences. Historically, more 'primitive' cultures dealt with these questions on a social level, the illness of one person affected the lives and health of the community. We have already seen that the human body has been privatised, labelled and compartmentalised, health care has also been privatised on a social level. All sickness and disease is hidden away, contained behind closed doors by practitioners who speak a foreign language. While modern medicine may often become a noisy way of trying to hide those silences, they are still there.¹¹

But it does not end with people living with illness. Regular medical 'check-ups' ensure that the whole of life has been medicalized; perfectly healthy people are called patients. This medicalization extends beyond the G.P.'s clinic. It is viewed as a deviance, for example, if a perfectly healthy woman requests to have her baby at home rather than in the clinical setting of an hospital. Pregnancy is not a medical condition, it is a natural part of human life. Even death outwith a clinical setting is seen as abnormal, perhaps because death is regarded as a failure by the medical profession - something to be fought against, every attempt made to reverse its effects. And yet death is part of life, and a good death is a healthy death, and may well be the concluding act that a person has control of and exercises on their way to wholeness.

The reductionist approach of modern medicine leaves many people feeling lost and powerless. Health is defined in a negative way: as the absence of disease. It is no wonder that John Drane writes: "Today more than ever before, people are taking it for granted that if they want to be truly healthy, then the last place to go for assistance will be the doctor's office"¹² As a result more and more people are turning to so-called alternative therapies and medicines to treat their ills; they are also being turned on to the so-called New Age movement. An attraction is that these therapies

¹⁰ Ivan Illich, *Ibid.*, p.41

¹¹ cf. Stanley Hauerwas *Naming the Silences: God, Medicine, and the Problem of Suffering* (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1993) ISBN 0 567 29234 7

¹² John Drane, *What is the New Age saying to the Church?*, p. 137

are, on the whole, both holistic and preventative, that is they treat the person as a whole and aim to encourage a positive state of health. Rather than focusing exclusively on symptoms, alternative therapists understand the human body to be an organic whole in which the well-being of one part (whether it is physical, emotional or mental) affects the well-being of the rest of the body. They are also more aware of the environment and the interconnection between humanity and nature. This is more in keeping with a Christian understanding of God's creation and the way that He engages with us. We need to look at finding a working redefinition of health.

Towards A Christian Definition of Healing

Both Bishop Morris Maddocks and Martin Israel agree that health is more than simply a state of being devoid of illness and disease, and healing the process of alleviating such illness, as essential as that may be in the short term. Healing is a process, which is most often attained over time. Israel goes as far as to say that we should not demand physical results from a healing session, but rather be attentive to spiritual renewal. It is only in the wake of spiritual renewal (and sometimes before) that there may be physical healing.

A Christian understanding of 'healing' cannot be comprehended apart from an understanding of salvation. In the New Testament the words 'salvation' and 'wholeness' are practically interchangeable, the Greek word *sózw* (*sodzo*) is used to mean both 'save' and 'heal'. In respect of this the ministry of healing must not be separated from the rest of the work of the Church. This is a position advocated by Mike Botting who argues that to do so would be to lift it out of perspective. He goes as far as saying that there should be no healing missions or separate services of intercessions for the sick,¹³ rather, such prayers should be incorporated into the body of worship whenever the Body of Christ meets for prayer, whether for public Sunday worship, a prayer meeting on Church premises or house group. It follows that if the life of the Church is to be one of healing and salvation, and the Church is the gathered Body of Christ, then each Christian individual who is called to be Christ to one another is also called to be a healer.

Martin Israel in *Healing as Sacrament* believes that indeed all Christians *are* called to be ministers of healing, regardless of their chosen profession. He points to Jesus' commandment that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all

¹³ Mike Botting, *Christian Healing in the Parish*, p.15

our soul and with all our mind, and love our neighbour as ourself¹⁴ as being a summary of the Christian life, and therefore the basic requirement of the healing ministry. This can be translated into an openness and attentiveness to God in the present moment, and an attitude of love towards the person to whom we are ministering, with the understanding that we love ourselves to. Indeed it stands to reason that one should not enter the ministry of healing unless one has reached a certain degree of integration, so that one is not driven by the need for success or identity. The way of healing will only be opened up when we have aligned ourselves with God and His will for our life. Israel informs us that "no one can enter the field of healing, either as practitioner or as patient, without his inner nature being remorselessly laid bare"¹⁵. This requires stillness before God, so that we might be attentive to God in the moment, so that He might engage with us at such a profound level that we may be changed. While we may be looking for an alleviation of pain, God requires a total change of life, a *metanoia*, so that we might be transformed into the likeness of Christ. Jesus is both the model of wholeness and the destination.

In Kahlil Gibran's *Jesus the Son of Man* he presents an encounter with Jesus as told by Mary Magdalene, which for me encapsulates what healing is about. In the text Mary has already seen Jesus once, at a distance. The story takes up again a few months later with Jesus sitting, waiting for Mary outside her house. Mary describes how Jesus looked at her, in a way reminiscent of Eve's confrontation with God walking in the Garden of Eden; she realises that she is no longer living to her full potential in the image of God.

"And he looked at me, and His night-eyes saw me as no man had seen me. And suddenly I was as if naked, and I was shy."¹⁶

In Jesus she saw her own reflection, she was able to see herself as she really was, as God sees her: her inner nature was remorselessly laid bare. Mary confesses to the reader that she regarded herself as dead, confronted by life. "I was a woman who had divorced her soul. I was living apart from this self which you now see. I belonged to all men and to none."¹⁷ Her healing was beginning, as she was able to see herself fully for the first time, and recognise how far from full-life she had fallen.

¹⁴ St. Matthew 22:³⁷⁻⁴⁰

¹⁵ Martin Israel, *The Quest for Wholeness*, p.14

¹⁶ Kahlil Gibran, *Jesus the Son of Man*, p.14

¹⁷ Kahlil Gibran, *Ibid.*, p.16

Jesus then leads her on further onto the road to wholeness.

Then He looked at me, and the noontide of His eyes was upon me, and He said, 'You have many lovers, and yet I alone love you. Other men love themselves in your nearness. I love you in your self. Other men see a beauty in you that shall fade away sooner than their own years. But I see in you a beauty that shall not fade away, and in the autumn of your days that beauty shall not be afraid to gaze at itself in the mirror, and it shall not be offended.'¹⁸

This story highlights the importance of both the need for a change of heart about one's lifestyle, and the need for love. God is love; His will is love, and so anyone who practices the ministry of healing in an attitude of love is at least heading the right direction. Key is the healing minister's purity of heart. This must be aligned with God so that the Holy Spirit, who is the real minister of healing, can work in the person before Him. The minister's will must be God's will. As long as the person wants to work a personal miracle, as long as he is imposing his will on the person before him there will not be a move forward towards healing. As in many aspects of the spiritual life, the harder you try the longer you delay the work of the Holy Spirit. God requires obedience and pureness of spirit so that we might be channels of His power. This level of attentiveness and sensitivity to God can only be fostered through a discipline of contemplative prayer. In contemplation we are able to place ourselves unconditionally into the service of God and practice his presence in absolute stillness.¹⁹ It is clear from the Gospel accounts that it was this level of closeness with God that Jesus enjoyed, and to which we must also eventually arrive. This is why Israel writes:

God's end is a perfect humanity based on the image of Christ, and true healing cannot end until this goal has been attained.²⁰

Summary

I hope to have shown in this chapter that health and healing cannot be understood simply as an amelioration of suffering, but is something which must be understood in the context of God's will for the whole of His creation, which is made most explicit in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The healing ministry, I have

¹⁸ Kahlil Gibran, *Ibid.*, p.16

¹⁹ Martin Israel, *Healing as Sacrament*, p.92

²⁰ Martin Israel, *The Quest for Wholeness*, p.44

shown is something to which all Christians are called as a response to God's love. This will not always be a specific, official ministry of healing but part of our everyday walk with Christ, to be Christ to another and in some way journey with him or her towards God, and fullness in Christ. I have focused more on the qualities of the 'healer' and recognised that at the core needs to be a purity of heart, which is attained through a disciplined attentiveness to God in contemplative prayer, and demonstrated in love; while recognising that all power and gifts are a free gift from the Holy Spirit, who is the real agent of healing. This ministry, while the property of all the baptised, I want to show is specifically the calling of the ordained cleric. All ordained clergy I want to argue are called to be ministers of healing, this I will argue can be done most effectively in the ministry to which they are commissioned which is traditionally known as the 'Cure of Souls'. A ministry to which I now turn.

Chapter 2 - The Cure of Souls

Outline

In this chapter I will examine the term 'cure of souls' (*cura animarum*). I wish to show that this is a calling to work at the most profound level of who we are as human beings, with the aim of bringing people to wholeness in Christ, and that this is the basic task to which all ordained clerics are called. I draw on Eugene Peterson's understanding of the 'cure of souls' in which he draws attention to three central activities involved in the task: the importance of being attentive to God; the necessity of using personal, rather than descriptive language; and lastly, that the 'cure of souls' is not about solving problems, but journeying with people as they explore the mysteries of life.

The Cure of Souls

The modern, common usage of the word 'curate' to designate an assistant (or even, junior) priest, I believe is a misleading one. The original meaning of 'curate' in the Roman and Anglican Church is one who is responsible for the 'cure of souls', and thus refers to the priest in charge of a parish, rather than his²¹ assistant (the person to whom we *now* refer as the 'curate'). In fact, the modern curate in the Scottish Episcopal Church still has to sign a "Form of Nomination of an *Assistant Curate*"; the formal understanding still being that the Rector of the church is the *Principal Curate*.

How we address our ordained clergy affects the expectations we place on them. The titles of Rector, Priest, Father, Chaplain, Padre, Holy Man, Cleric, Man of Prayer and Curate all demand different tasks of the same person. I would like to propose the rediscovery of the term 'curate' to denote someone who is involved in the pastoral work of the 'cure of souls'. Eugene Peterson believes that this is already beginning to happen. He argues that while the Sunday work of the minister has changed little through time (preaching, teaching and celebrating the sacraments), the work between Sundays has had a radical, detrimental shift. He believes that while the context of the congregation has changed, from one large assembly to smaller gatherings, and the manner has moved from proclamatory to conversational, the work must remain the same, that is "discovering the meaning of Scripture, developing a life of prayer,

²¹ In those days it was a 'he'.

guiding growth into maturity²². This, he claims, is the pastoral work which has historically been called the 'cure of souls' (*cura animarum*). Although the phrase is ancient, it is not out-of-date; indeed, Frederic Greeves believes that "the description of pastoral care as the 'cure of souls' is one for which no alternative is readily available."²³ It may now be helpful to briefly examine the term.

A Definition

Cura

The word 'cure' has a range of meanings something akin to the Latin word *cura*, from which it comes. Its primary meaning is 'care', and can be applied to either the task involved in the care of an object or person, or the attitude of carefulness about the object. It also has undertones of 'cure'. John McNeill, quoted in *Theology and the Cure of Souls*, is more explicit:

Occasionally the former direction of meaning [that is 'care'] is further specialized to signify 'healing', or the means by which healing is effected.²⁴

Greeves compares the Latin word *cura* to the German word *Seelsorge* which offers a similar broadness of meaning, incorporating elements of 'care', 'cure' and 'healing'. While we may need to be clear about our meaning of 'cure', we need to be even more specific about our use of the word 'soul'.

Animarum

The word *anima* is the most common Latin translation of the Hebrew word נֶפֶשׁ *nephesh* ("breath") and the Greek ψυχή *psyche* ("soul"). While the West has inherited from Greek philosophy a two-fold division of the person into soul (or spirit) and body, this is inconsistent with both the Old and New Testament perspectives. A wish to avoid such confusion may tempt us to drop the word 'soul' in favour of 'persons', but Greeves argues that we need to retain the word 'soul'. The word has a complexity of meaning in Scripture, though in the New Testament it is most commonly used to refer to the essence of human personality²⁵, in other words, the *wholeness* of man; what Ian Cowie refers to as "the total ME, from the cradle to

²² Eugene Peterson, *The Gift*, p.57

²³ Frederic Greeves, *Theology and the Cure of Souls*, p.4

²⁴ John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls*, quoted in Greeves, *Ibid.*, p.4

²⁵ Eugene Peterson, *The Gift*, p.57

the grave, that which 'the resurrection body' will express"²⁶. Furthermore, their interest is in man as he is created and redeemed by God. Greeves argues that "we need the word 'soul'... in order that we may be reminded of man's relationship to God and of his need for God"²⁷. It is because of this holistic view of the human being that the ministry of the 'cure of souls' has a specific place alongside physical and psychiatric healing, which narrow in on bodily and mental attributes of the human person.

To summarize then, the 'cure of souls' is

the Scripture-directed, prayer-shaped care that is devoted to persons singly or in groups, in settings sacred and profane. It is a determination to work at the centre, to concentrate on the essential.²⁸

It is a calling to work at the most profound level of who we are as human beings, in relationship with God, with the aim of bringing people to wholeness in Christ. It is a healing ministry.

The Ministry of Priests

According to the *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling* [sic] the term has been used in three ways, two as synonyms for pastoral care. The broadest definition it reports encompasses the work of the office of presbyter, that is, it says, preaching, leading worship, visiting and organizing parish life. In this sense, the term

acknowledges that all acts of ministry have as their ultimate aim the salvation and perfection of persons under God.²⁹

This is affirmed in the words spoken by the Bishop at the ordination of priests, in the Scottish Episcopal Church. The Bishop says to the Deacons being admitted to the Order of Presbyter:

A presbyter shares in the priestly ministry of his bishop. With his fellow presbyters he serves and sustains the community of the faithful that they may

²⁶ Ian Cowie, *Across the Spectrum*, 1993, p.17

²⁷ Frederic Greeves, *Theology and the Cure of Souls*, p.6

²⁸ Eugene Peterson, *The Gift*, 1989, p.57

²⁹ Care of Souls A.L. Meiburg, *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, p.122

grow into the fullness of Christ and be a living sacrifice acceptable to God.

He prays and cares for those committed to his charge, enabling them to respond freely to God's call.

He proclaims the coming of the Kingdom, calling sinners to repentance and absolving them in God's name.

He presides at the eucharist and draws together in worship those who come to the Lord's table, so that fed by the Body and Blood of Christ they may go out in mission to serve God in the unity of the Spirit.

So great a task can be carried out only in the power of the Holy Spirit to whom we now pray.³⁰

It should be becoming quite clear that we in the 'cure of souls' we are not talking about a specialized type of ministry here, such as a hospital chaplain, or chaplain to a healing centre, but an everyday ministry of the ordinary parish priest. Peterson agrees; it is according to him,

a way of life that uses weekday tasks, encounters, and situations as the raw material for teaching prayer, developing faith, and preparing for a good death.³¹

Initiative, Problems and Prayer

The ordinal is right to emphasize that this task can be done only in the power of the Holy Spirit. God must be the focus. Greeves also stresses this:

We are constantly in danger of thinking that pastoral care, whether by individuals or by the Church as a whole, can itself heal men and women.... [but] the believer attributes all health and all life to God. In the distinctive work of the cure of souls it is of especial importance that this should never be forgotten, yet it is both obvious and mysterious that God, who alone is the source and sustainer of life, has given to human beings very great (but not unlimited) responsibility for the welfare, and for the very existence, of themselves and of each other. It is only as we fully appreciate this fact that the urgency of pastoral care is fully appreciated; it is only if we are confident that all life and health depend upon God that we can believe in the human ministry of a cure of souls.³²

Peterson addresses this question in terms of 'initiative'. The 'cure of souls', he writes, is

³⁰ Scottish Ordinal 1984, pp. 9 - 10

³¹ Eugene Peterson, *The Gift*, 1989, p.59

³² Frederic Greeves, *Theology and the Cure of Souls*, pp.6-7

a cultivated awareness that God has already seized the initiative.. there is a disciplined, determined conviction that everything (and I mean, precisely, everything) we do is a response to God's first work, his initiating act. We learn to be attentive to the divine action already in process so that the previously unheard word of God is heard, the previously unattended act of God is noticed.³³

This involves entering a situation with the question at the forefront of one's mind: What is God already doing here that I can get involved in? rather than, What can I begin here? The 'cure of souls' is not, then, about problem-solving, it is not about being a miracle-worker. Rather, if it is about engaging with life at it's most profound level, then it is about engaging with God, the root of all being, and allowing Him to gradually transform you into His likeness. Life is a gift, not something we build ourselves. 'Curates' who are problem-solvers do not encounter mystery. Peterson reminds us that

we are immersed in mysteries: incredible love, confounding evil, the creation, the cross, grace, God.

The secularized mind is terrorized by mysteries. Thus it makes lists, labels people, assigns roles and solves problems. But a solved life is a reduced life. These tightly buttoned-up people never take great faith risks or make convincing love talk. They deny or ignore the mysteries and diminish human existence to what can be managed, controlled and fixed. We live in a cult of experts who explain and solve.³⁴

Peterson's second point is 'language'. Language in the task of the 'cure of souls' is *personal* rather than descriptive or motivational. It is not concerned with what people know or what they are doing, but who they are. Personal language is used to express oneself, to be in conversation, to build relationships. This is the language which children, lovers and poets speak. If the cure of souls is being involved at the heart of things, where things really matter, where we are most fully ourselves, then it is this kind of language which is required if we are to develop relationships in faith and intimacy, with both God and one another: "The primary language of the cure of souls, therefore, is conversation and prayer."³⁵

Within this calling, and commissioning, I believe that all priests are called to be

³³ Eugene Peterson, *The Gift*, 1989, p.60 - 61

³⁴ Eugene Peterson, *The Gift*, 1989, p.64

³⁵ Eugene Peterson, *The Gift*, 1989, p.63

'healers', if we are to hold together Martin Israel's understanding of 'healing' and wholeness with the commission that priests 'sustain the community of the faithful that they may grow into the fullness of Christ'. At the priest's disposal are ministries of spiritual direction, prayer, intercession, etc., the traditional tools for the 'cure of souls' (*cura animarum*).

It is my thesis that while some members of the Body of Christ, including some members of the clergy, may be called to a specific ministry of healing which involves the laying-on-of-hands and specific prayer for curing illness and disease, all priests, by the very nature of priesthood are called to be involved in a more broad definition of healing, that is growing into the fullness of Christ. This is a ministry of representation and example, at the heart of which is contemplative prayer. In their brokenness they are called to heal the broken, and in fact their own healing can only come about as a result of their openness and vulnerability to both God and others. They are in a very real sense *Wounded Healers*³⁶.

I believe that the task of priesthood is very similar to that of the 'healer'³⁷: to walk closely with God, to pour oneself out and become more Godly, to walk more closely with God, to gradually be transformed into the likeness of Christ, to wholeness.

Summary

In this chapter I have aimed to show that all priests are called to be 'curates', that is persons involved in the 'cure of souls'. This task, we have seen, is about engaging at the deepest levels of life, which essentially means living in relationship with God. In short it means living a fully human life, in all its wholeness, as demonstrated by Christ. I would like to propose that, as I have said above, in their brokenness priests are called to heal the broken, and that in fact their own healing can only come about as a result of their openness to God and others. It is necessary now to examine the nature and role of an ordained priesthood.

³⁶ cf. Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd. 1994

³⁷ considering the characteristics and nature of healing outlined in chapter one.

Chapter 3 - Priesthood

Outline

In this chapter I offer a brief examination into the nature and role of the ordained priesthood in an attempt to argue that the Christian priestly community requires an explicit, named priesthood in order to carry out this task of the 'cure of souls'. I wish to show that at the heart of priesthood is an attentiveness to God, formed out of a life of contemplative prayer, and through it the ability to walk with people in their brokenness and accompany them towards wholeness, which can only be found in relationship with the living God.

Criticism of Priesthood

In the subtitle of Herbert Haag's recent book entitled *Clergy and Laity*, he poses the question, "Did Jesus want a two-tier church?". He argues that the priesthood which developed in the Roman Catholic Church, as a distinctive class of the People of God from the laity, does not correspond with what Jesus did and taught, and as such has had a detrimental impact on the life of the Church.

Haag's underlying thesis is that "all ministries are the creation of the Church."³⁸

None can be traced back to Jesus, least of all priest. He indicates that until the fourth century "priestly ordination was not necessary for the enactment of the eucharist [so] why should it be obligatory today?"³⁹ He demands "full ministry of the Church"⁴⁰ for both men and women, whether married or unmarried, which automatically includes authorization to preside at the eucharist. Exactly how this could be practically implemented he does not reveal, other than that "the condition for presiding at the eucharist should ... be not a form of consecration or ordination but a commission."⁴¹

The purpose of his book is clear: to demonstrate by a brief, but thorough, examination of scripture, the writings of the patristics and early church history that Jesus rejected the model of Jewish priesthood, and that the hierarchical structures we have inherited today were a third century reaction to certain heresies, and as a means of survival in the face of Roman state oppression. He devotes an entire chapter (chapter 2), with the forcefully worded title "Jesus did not want any Priests", to

³⁸ Herbert Haag, *Clergy and Laity*, p.108

³⁹ Herbert Haag, *Ibid.*, p.108

⁴⁰ Herbert Haag, *Ibid.*, p.110

⁴¹ Herbert Haag, *Ibid.*, p.110

examine the evidence for Jesus's opposition to the Jewish priestly structure, and outlines early examples of Eucharistic meals. In the final chapter he examines why the Eucharist should not be regarded as a sacrificial meal and therefore does not require the intervention of a priest, but explains that the Church made a sharp turn in the third-century, with Tertullian and Cyprian, when a two-tier structure became the norm. In his conclusion he writes, "For four hundred years it was what we today would call lay people who presided at the eucharist. This shows that a sacramentally ordained priesthood is not necessary and can be justified neither biblically nor dogmatically"⁴². But is this really the case? Is it true that ordained priesthood is unnecessary? Neither Kenneths Mason nor Leech think so.

An Understanding of Priesthood

In *The Sky Is Red* Kenneth Leech makes a number of astute observations. Firstly he acknowledges that the ordained priesthood cannot be understood outwith a balanced understanding of the whole Body of Christ. Secondly, he perceives that a failing in our modern understanding is that "much of the language we now use about priesthood is functional and instrumental rather than sacred"⁴³, but he believes that "it is in the rite, in the sacramental celebration, if you like, in the cult, that the character, the real meaning, of priesthood is most deeply and most dramatically revealed"⁴⁴. His response to Haag would then perhaps be an acceptance that while Jesus may not have advocated a sacrificial priesthood *viz.* in the form found in the Jewish Temple, the nature of priesthood is more than simply functional, it has a deeper, more sacred (rather than sacrificial) nature. A clue to what he means can be found in his recommendation that the future of priesthood

lies in the recovery and development of some very traditional themes - the spirit of sacrifice, the theme of priesthood as an interior life rather than a job, the emphasis on ascetical discipline and on the practice of the Christian life, and, most importantly, on the place of the priest within the larger priestly body"⁴⁵

These 'rudiments of priesthood' are explored by Kenneth Mason in *Priesthood and Society*.

⁴² Herbert Haag, *Ibid.*, p.110

⁴³ Kenneth Leech, *Priesthood and Society*, p.241

⁴⁴ Kenneth Leech, *Ibid.*, p.241

⁴⁵ Kenneth Leech, *Ibid.*, p.242

Leech's latter point is picked up by Mason when he shows that "there is .. a widely shared, general experience of priesthood that has to be recognised before official priesthood can be fully explained"⁴⁶. For Mason this 'general experience of priesthood' is wider than just the Christian community, it is a common sociological trait found amongst the general population, irrespective of creed. He points to the daily rituals and practices in which lovers, families and societies give an interpretation of life "to show that diverse occasions have their meaning, and that strange events are not wholly strange"⁴⁷. Specifically, the constituent parts of priesthood which he identifies as being scattered throughout daily social life include rehearsing promises by word or sign, bringing assurance to those in need of healing, bringing reconciliation to those who are apart, affirming ways that we belong to one another, interpreting coincidences as part of a rational order and meeting emergencies with hope⁴⁸. All of these things, he says, belong to priesthood. Official, ordained priesthood he argues makes explicit what is general to all, and it is this definition of something shared rather than something which is uniquely theirs which gives the official priesthood its character. So, within the Christian tradition while it is still asserted that all members of the Church are priestly, a special place is given to those who are called to have, what Mason calls, "a special proficiency in handling what is common to all, a special guardianship over shared tradition."⁴⁹. Priests operate at those points of intersection between the Christian tradition and the profoundly diverse experiences of human life, where they offer interpretation, expressing the relevance of one to the other and a new perspective on both. Yet these are skills which are not common to everybody; these skills use disciplines and habits which are almost exclusive within the role of priest. It is in this way, Mason argues, that "even a totally priestly people... may have its own particular priests"⁵⁰.

The Role of Priests

The nature of priesthood then must have an influence on what the priest does. Consider what Mason says:

Priests as such are not concerned to get things done, ... Their skills are not

⁴⁶ Kenneth Mason, *Ibid.*, p.4

⁴⁷ Kenneth Mason, *Ibid.*, p.5

⁴⁸ Kenneth Mason, *Ibid.*, pp. 6 - 7

⁴⁹ Kenneth Mason, *Ibid.*, p.9

⁵⁰ Kenneth Mason, *Ibid.*, p.10

instrumental. Rather they have to call upon the symbols available to them to minister... to private and public confidence. They are to help people answer the question, 'What's the point?' That question is not answered by logical explanation or by undertaking to do the job for the questioner. It is only answered, for those to whom it is a real question, by bringing them to a new ordering of their perceptions and emotions, to a new symbolic understanding of the world in which they are set.⁵¹

This then involves a risk. It means being open to the risk of walking on the boundaries of daily life; of living with the question "What's the point?"; of bearing the silences that such a question and the questions that suffering and pain leave with us. It means being open to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit each moment of the day; and not just *open* to hearing His voice, but *expecting* to hear it. Leech is quite explicit about this risk:

We are entering a lifestyle and a ministry which is fraught with great danger, both to ourselves and to others. The priestly task involves an engagement with human life at its most profound, most vulnerable, most explosive and most terrible levels. We should not be surprised that priests stand on the borders of madness, depravity, violence and abuse. The realm of the sacred is open to the strong probability of the demonic.

Priesthood, then, is not an easy and tidy job - not in fact a job at all. We are not in control of our material. We are playing with fire, capable of doing great harm. Hence the spiritual preparation and spiritual resources for such ministry are literally matters of life and death. I believe, therefore, that spiritual warfare is more than a troublesome phase, a temporary visitation of the evil one, in an otherwise tranquil journey to holiness. It is of the very essence of the holy, of the priestly task. One could say that priesthood - including the priesthood of all the baptised - is an entry into that conflict with the powers which is the paschal mystery. Spiritual warfare is what priesthood is all about, and it calls for prayer and fasting, and a real solidarity with Christ in his conquest over evil.⁵²

The Quiet Role of Being

The role of the priest then is a quiet one, of not 'doing' but 'being'. Priests are not primarily heralds of faith but icons of a particular way of being human, that is Christ's way of being human. Priests then do not initiate, but are attentive to God in his initiation; they do not describe but relate; they are not wonder-workers but explorers. These tasks involve simply the ability to listen. This is the attentiveness of the 'cure of souls', the attentiveness at the heart of priesthood, and the attentiveness at the heart of the healing ministry. These tasks require space for

⁵¹ Kenneth Mason, *Ibid.*, p.10

⁵² Kenneth Leech, *The Sky is Red*, p.244

contemplative prayer, the prayer of silence - being addressed by God, being attentive to God.

This discipline of prayer is not just a repetitive recitation of the daily office (though it does offer continuity and discipline, and the opportunity to discover something new in the familiar, cf. Amos 7:7 "Amos, what do you see?") but a regular and disciplined waiting in the presence of God, allowing God to transform him or her into the likeness of Christ. This is a discipline which needs to be developed long before the priest dons their first dog-collar, and it does not stop once ordained: Christianity is a lifelong process of transformation into the likeness of Christ.

Person of Prayer

One of the first and most influential books I have read on priesthood was by Michael Hollings. In his book *Living Priesthood* he devotes the whole of his second chapter to "Priest: Person of Prayer", he writes:

The centre and core of the whole priestly life is the relationship with God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I mean that this relationship is to be so deep, strong and all-pervading that it is the very pulse, life-blood, heart of his whole being. Without it, he is empty, a functionary only, wrongly balanced and so ineffective.

To this you could say - Yes, but that is what every Christian should be, where every Christian should have his life centred. And I would agree with you, and say that this is why all baptised are to a lesser degree or in a lesser kind of priesthood. And I would sing many an Alleluia if we could find this attitude in the average Christian....

...Because life is what the human being is all about, the old cliché that "holiness is wholeness" fits well, and is deeply true. That the whole man should be taken up in priesthood is self-evident, because THE priest is Jesus Christ, and our share of priesthood takes its origin from him. He was entirely given up to the will of his Father,For the priest God must be central to his whole being. God's will is the priest's touchstone; God's love is his driving force and inspiration through the gift of the Spirit; his greatest desire is to be so one with God that it is God who lives and loves through him and so does the work. Once this centrality is lost, once another love or interest purges God to the periphery, the whole balance and texture of priestly life is altered. It could be said that he had not only lost direction but lost the "essence" of priesthood. Yet today how often the average priest sees his life in pastoral terms. His work for God is immediately in visiting, meetings, administration. He is fully, and generally energetically, engaged from morning till night on "the things of God", with very little time for God himself, because "someone had to do them". Prayer is fitted in as and when possible so as not to interfere with the business of life. Such priests are good men, hard working men. They are devoted to their parishes and their parishioners. They are doing their very best for them.

The sad fact is that the weight of work has thrown them off balance. The priest is

nobody, has no power, is empty no matter how hard he works, if he is not given over to God in the Spirit... [My] thesis is simply the need to allow God the first place in the mind, heart and strength of the priest.⁵³

Contemplation

While there are many kinds of prayer, prayers arising out of need, out of pain and astonishment, the kind of prayer which needs to be at the heart of the priest's prayer life I believe is contemplative prayer, silent prayer. Contemplative prayer is not R.S. Thomas's *Folk Tale* kind of praying, flung like gravel at the window of heaven to attract God's attention⁵⁴, but prayer which allows encounter with God - I-THOU prayer, Buber might say - in which I find that I am rooted in God, I find my purpose and will in God's will - in which and through which I allow God to transform me into His likeness so that I may be Christlike, so that I may be Christ to another. It is prayer which allows God to reach into the heart of who I am and change me. It is disciplined (ascetical) prayer.

Thomas Merton on contemplative prayer writes:

contemplation is the work of the Holy Ghost acting on our souls through His gifts of Wisdom and Understanding with special intensity to increase and perfect our love for Him. These gifts are part of the normal equipment of Christian sanctity.⁵⁵

It is

deep and intimate knowledge of God by a union of love - a union in which we learn things about Him that those who have not received such a gift will never discover until they enter heaven⁵⁶

Merton identifies two types of contemplative prayer, Mystical or Passive contemplation, and Active contemplation, though he acknowledges that the word used in its strictest sense refers mystical contemplation, sometimes called 'infused' contemplation. Mystical contemplation is "a supernatural love and knowledge of God, simple and obscure, infused by him into the summit of the soul, giving it a

⁵³ Michael Hollings, *Living Priesthood*, Great Wickering: McCrimmons, 1994, pp. 43 - 45

⁵⁴ cf. R.S. Thomas' poem *Folk Tale* which begins "Prayers like gravel / Flung at the sky's / window, hoping to attract / the loved one's / attention."

⁵⁵ Thomas Merton, *What is Contemplation?*, Whathamstead: Anthony Clarke Books, 1975, p.89

⁵⁶ Thomas Merton, *Ibid.*, p.90

direct and experimental contact with him."⁵⁷ It is a recognition that the greatest joy is to love God, and that God has given Himself to us and therefore love is all that matters. Contemplation therefore involves a gradual self-emptying of oneself so that it is no longer me, but Christ within me. This is a gift from God, and though is freely offered to all Christians, not all reach this stage. The second kind of contemplation, 'active contemplation' is perhaps more accessible, and this kind of contemplation, at least, should be sought by those in ministry. In fact Merton writes, "Passive contemplation is not demanded of all Christians. But at least *some* active contemplation would appear to be, in practice if not in theory *absolutely essential to a truly Christian life*."⁵⁸ Active contemplation demands our

thought and action and acts of will. Its function is to awaken and prepare the mind, to turn the heart towards God, to arouse a desire to know God better and to rest in Him. It introduces the soul to the joys of the spiritual life. It gives him a healthy taste for the things of the supernatural order and weans him away from the satisfactions of the body and of merely natural knowledge.

Above all, active contemplation prepares the way for love. It teaches obedience and humility. It shows a man how to seek God in His will. It makes the soul attentive to God's presence and His desires. It teaches one to think about God instead of about the world, to desire to please God rather than to enjoy the satisfactions of the world. It shows us how to trust God and leads us on to abandon ourselves more and more to Him.⁵⁹

Summary

Prayer, the way we respond to being, which is ultimately a response to God is at the centre of our humanity. Priesthood, as an image of a particular way of being human offers to people in that availability to people we call ministry that incarnational way of life modelled by Christ whereby God is expressed in humanity. Contemplative prayer, whether active or passive, involves self-disclosure and an abandonment to God of those comforts behind which we mask our true selves, so that eventually we are left standing open and vulnerable before God, able to live with the uncertainties that our lives, both interior and exterior present. It is this openness to God which enables us to stand alongside those in need. Prayer is at the heart of ministry. Prayer is at the heart of healing ministry, and in many ways prayer is healing.

⁵⁷ Thomas Merton, *Ibid.*, p.98

⁵⁸ Thomas Merton, *Ibid.*, p.96

⁵⁹ Thomas Merton, *Ibid.*, p.96

Chapter 4 - A Case Study

Outline

In this final chapter I shall be examining one scene from the novel *A Question of Integrity* by Susan Howatch as a case study investigating the healing ministry in the Anglican Church. It is my intention to relate my understanding of priesthood, the 'cure of souls' and healing to this scene. I shall be using a necessary variation of the Case Study Method as laid out by Michael Northcott in *Contact* 103, 1990:3. The purpose of this study method is

to describe an 'event' [in narrative form] which may be defined as 'an occasion in which the profession (presented) acts as a responsible agent'.⁶⁰

An orthodox case study requires involvement from the student. This cannot obviously be done in the event of an incident drawn from the pages of a novel. In a proper case study it is required that the event is not something which the 'student' observes, or an area which interests him, but

something in which the student was genuinely committed and involved and where the effectiveness, competence and consequence of his actions may be observed.⁶¹

As this case study is taken from a novel and not from first-hand witness I must rely on what is already written: descriptive narrative, insights into the narrators emotional dynamics, and the dialogue which is recorded. While I am necessarily distanced from this fictional event, it is in the nature of the human imagination to allow me to enter into this scene in a way which does affect me; in that sense I get involved. Of course, I am unable to interact with the action, or affect the drama. What I am able to do though is assess the effectiveness, competence and consequence of the actions of those who are directly involved. This is my aim: to observe, analyse and evaluate the actions, and listen to the dialogue of those involved in the narrative with the purpose of comparing this with the understanding of priesthood and the healing ministry which I have put forward in the preceding three chapters.

⁶⁰ Michael Northcott, "The Case Study Method in Theological Education", in *Contact* 103, 1990:3, p.27

⁶¹ Michael Northcott, *Ibid.*, p.27

While this does not strictly follow the method presented by Dr Northcott, I shall adhere to its form, which is to present the study in four parts: Background (filling in any necessary and relevant details about the actors); Description (a narration of the event); Analysis (an examination of the event, paying close attention to dynamics, relationships, tensions and conflicts, turning points, roles played, meanings, understandings and possible motivations which underlie the actions described⁶²); and Evaluation (where the presenter offers their own summary of the event). As a prefix I shall offer a brief précis of the novel.

A Question of Integrity

In her *Starbridge Novels* Susan Howatch has presented a portrait of the inner-workings of the Church of England, told from the perspective of the lives of its clergy and those with whom they come into contact. Woven through the series are threads which draw the novels into a congruent whole. This novel is no exception: the central priest, Revd Nicholas Darrow is the son of Revd. Jon Darrow, the Anglo-Catholic priest featured in the second novel, *Glamorous Powers*.

The plot of this book satellites the lives of the staff of the Healing Centre of St. Benet's-by-the-Wall, in the City of London, and those drawn into it. The story opens with Alice, a shy, dumpy, unhappy woman in her early thirties who, while wandering the streets of the City in a lunchtime downpour, stumbles upon a church. Looking for shelter she walks in on a healing service which she finds, at once overwhelming but which offers her the love, acceptance and listening ear that she desperately needs. By a fortunate series of events she is drawn deeper into the life of the church, and is eventually employed as cook to the clergy living in the Rectory: Nicholas Darrow (the Rector), Lewis Hall (his septuagenarian assistant) and Eustace (Stacy) McGovern (the young assistant curate). As the story unravels it becomes clear that the healers themselves are also in need of healing and wholeness, and Alice plays a key role in their care: Nicholas experiences marital difficulties which he traces back to a childhood insecurity - he finds closure when he accepts that his marriage is over and he will not be reconciled to his wife; Lewis faces his deep-seated desire for companionship which he has denied for so long, hiding behind a dodgy hip - he needn't face up to his desires when he is in a physical state which he is certain will be an immediate turn-off to prospective companions. A

⁶² Michael Northcott, *Ibid.*, p.28

hip-replacement operation and a series of 'pussyfooting' dates prove to be what he needs; Stacy, an enthusiastic but troubled young priest from Liverpool finds himself struggling to make sense of his sexuality. Through an unfortunate series of events which involves Nicholas' wife trying to seduce him, Stacy commits suicide.

The book is a fascinating exploration into the healing ministry of the Church of England. It lays bare those involved in this ministry, showing them to be the same vulnerable, fragile human beings as those to whom they also minister. It demonstrates the true nature of healing, that is as an on-going process which can only be found in relationship with God, and with one another in the Body of Christ, allowing the Holy Spirit to be the true minister of healing. There are many aspects of this book which I could examine in depth: the relationship of accountability between the members of the healing team; the importance given to the role of the Spiritual Directors for the 'healer's' wholeness; the scenes where Nicholas abuses his gift and tries to be a wonder-worker, using his own strength and psychic insights to manipulate a situation; and many more. However, I have chosen to focus on an event from the beginning of the novel (pages 26 - 42) which straddles chapters one and two of part one. Alice Fletcher is telling the story, looking back on the event.

Background

The scene is set in Alice's Aunt, Beatrice Harrison's house. Beatrice, a spinster, had brought up Alice single-handedly when her own mother had abandoned her. It is the evening after Alice had first visited the Healing Centre at St. Benet's-by-the-Wall. Present are Nicholas Darrow, Dr Val Fredericks, a G.P. at the Centre, Alice and her Aunt Beatrice who is lying in bed motionless. The background to this encounter is important.

Earlier in the day Alice had met with Nicholas, who had agreed to come and see her aunt that evening. Alice had collapsed in the Church following the healing service and been led down to the Healing Centre; she had been trying to touch Nicholas' cassock in the belief that she might be able to draw off some of his power to take back to her aunt. Alice had a crush on Nicholas which might explain why she stayed. During an interview in Nicholas' office, Alice had told him about her aunt's succession of strokes, and her desire to continue to stand by her and care for her, despite the financial and personal costs that this was incurring. Nicholas accepted this, which rather surprised Alice. He explained:

'I'd rather meet you where you are, not where other people think you ought to be, and that involves respecting a decision which is still valid for you. In the end only the carer can know when there's strength left to cope and when no avenue of help remains unexplored...'⁶³

This left Alice feeling heard and respected. When asked what the medical prognosis was she replied that it was not favourable. She explained that while she was not looking for a miracle cure, she *was* looking for some kind of reprieve: "All I want is for her to go back to where she was before she had the last stroke. Then I could cope on my own again with just the help from the Social Services."⁶⁴ Nicholas wisely advised Alice that realistically it was unlikely that her aunt could be cured. He explained that at the Healing Centre they made a distinction between healing and curing:

"Even if no cure is possible a healing can still take place... A cure is the disabled person who gets up from his bed and walks. A healing is that same disabled person coming to terms with his lack of mobility, transcending his anger and grief and becoming an inspiration to all those who visit him."⁶⁵

At hearing this Alice was overcome with gratitude though a bit worried that her aunt's non-belief in God might block the healing. Nicholas assured her that although he would prefer a non-hostile patient the hostility may be a surface emotion under which was a genuine desire to be well. Nicholas agreed to visit Alice and her aunt that evening.

Description

Early evening, Big Ben had just struck the hour, and the doorbell rang. Nicholas was standing on the doorstep of Beatrice Harrison's Westminster cottage, with Dr Val Fredericks, a G.P. at St. Benet's. Receiving permission to sit and observe the patient, Val was introduced to Miss Harrison, while Alice and Nicholas retired to the living room for a chat; Nicholas wanted more information about her aunt. Before he sat down Nicholas took in his surroundings, stroking the recently-bought daffodils, noticing a proudly-displayed photograph of a cat. Sitting down Nicholas asked for

⁶³ p.25

⁶⁴ p.25

⁶⁵ p.25

some more information from Alice: her aunt's name, age, marital status, the whereabouts of Alice's parents, their relationship with their G.P. Nicholas asked if Alice had spoken to her aunt about him. She had. She immediately asked him again what he thought might happen. He replied that while there may indeed be a miraculous recovery it was more likely that there would not be. He explained that what he often hoped for when treating terminally ill patients was that there would be a chance to help clear up any unfinished business. He said that he would assume that her aunt could hear (given that hearing is often the last sense to go), and that she was *compos mentis*, unable to communicate because she found it difficult to, not because she had no desire to, or was entirely unable to do so.

Nicholas explained that he was going to pray for her. He assured Alice that if she was not able to join in the praying to simply muster up the love that she had for her aunt and in her mind's-eye wrap it around her aunt like a coat:

"If your aunt's surrounded by love then God will be present... The important thing is that you should believe that *I* believe..., and back me up every inch of the way. So long as you're a positive presence there'll be no danger of things going wrong." ⁶⁶

This seemed to confuse Alice. She objected, "But you're the channel, not me!"

Nicholas disagreed:

"No, this is a joint venture. Remember what I said earlier about the built-in human desire to be well? That desire seems to exist on the level of consciousness where all human beings connect, and we'll be operating at that level when we try to help your aunt. It's the level at which we're all potentially healers, all capable of bringing our special energy to the healing process and linking up - if only the channel can be kept clear - with the overall energy of our Creator"⁶⁷

Alice again frowned, "But you're the professional healer and I could only be just an ignorant amateur!"

Nicholas gently explained,

"In a worldly sense, yes, but we're both human beings so the access to God is the same - and since we're equal before God it's pointless to quibble about status. The big challenge is not to become what the world describes as a professional but

⁶⁶ p.32
⁶⁷ p.33

to harness one's energy properly and keep the channel unclogged...

All healers, religious and secular, have their techniques. My technique is to try to follow the example of Jesus Christ, the greatest healer who ever lived. I'll always fall short, of course, but if I stopped trying I'd be done for."⁶⁸

Shortly after this they moved through to Aunt Beatrice's bedroom, where she was still lying motionless on her bed. When seated next to Miss Harrison Nicholas introduced himself to her. He spoke clearly. He assured her that he was familiar with illness, and of his credentials, protecting Alice in the process: "You can be sure that Alice hasn't made a fool of herself and hired some shady wonder-worker..." He made it clear that Alice's intentions were right, "she was seeking help for someone who's special to her."

Nicholas waited, but there was no response from Aunt Beatrice.

Nicholas again spoke to Miss Harrison. He praised her for taking in Alice when she was a child and bringing her up. He consciously recognised that this must have caused Aunt Beatrice some stress and given her some unfamiliar problems which she had to confront on her own. Lastly, he acknowledged that she had been heroic in trying to keep these anxieties from Alice, and recognised that the deepest anxiety of all was her fear that she might fail Alice, and that Alice would be disappointed in her.

Nicholas paused again.

He continued:

"I want to tell you what a success you're made of bringing Alice up... Alice thinks that in your eyes she's riddled with faults, but she's got it wring, hasn't she? You don't care about any run-of-the-mill shortcomings because all you've wanted is for Alice to be a woman of integrity, just as you are. Well, you've got what you wanted and now Alice has the guts to stand by you just as you always stood by her. She loves you and she wants justice for you - which is why I am here tonight. Pain and suffering have ruled this house long enough, and now it's time for them to be challenged."⁶⁹

He paused again. While there was no visible response from her Aunt Alice seemed deeply moved.

Nicholas informed the eighty-two year old lady lying in the bed that he was now going to recite three short prayers, to the God who is "still creating the world and in

⁶⁸ p.33

⁶⁹ p.35

consequence suffering alongside us"⁷⁰

During the second prayer Alice remembered that she was needed to support Nicholas, and cried out in her head "Come on, Nicholas, *come on!*", and to God: "Help her, help her - please, please, please -". It was then that Alice described that as these words rang out in her head she realised how much she did actually love her aunt, and how much she wanted to show her aunt that she was worth the trouble and effort to bring up.

After his final prayer Nicholas stood up, joined hands with Val, Alice and her aunt so that they formed a circle and he prayed for help. Breaking the link he gently laid his hands upon Aunt Beatrice's head and remaining silent he prayed in a concentrated way. He concluded the ritual by crossing himself and reciting the Grace.

Nothing had seemed to happen. Alice described that she was now embarrassed and unspeakably angry, when all of a sudden her thoughts were interrupted by a whispering voice, the voice of her Aunt: "Alice".

Nicholas reassured her Aunt that she was there. Alice burst out with a stream of apologies for all the times she had let her down, and the disappointment that she felt she must have been to her aunt. Beatrice managed to say her niece's name one more time, and a third time prefixed it with '*Dear Alice*'

Nicholas addressed Alice's aunt: "This is what you wanted, wasn't it, Miss Harrison? You wanted so much to talk to Alice one more time"

Beatrice confirmed this by tightening her grip on Alice's hand. She then uttered another word: "Forgive".

Alice misunderstood this, thinking that her aunt was saying that she forgave Alice for not being the kind of girl she would have liked. This agitated her aunt until Nicholas explained that perhaps what her aunt meant was that she wished Alice to forgive her. At this Alice burst into tears, realising what she must do said, "Of course I forgive you. I forgive you because I love you. It's alright. Everything's all right, and you don't have to worry any more."

This released her aunt to whisper clearly, "Best of girls. Such a blessing. How lucky I was", before she slipped back into silence.

After her aunt had settled, Alice slipped off to the bathroom to freshen up. She was surprised to find that she was remarkably calm, and wrapped in a deep peace. She returned to the bedroom, and surprised herself by saying, "Alice is healed.... I was

the patient, wasn't I? You always knew there'd be nothing much you could do for Aunt, but you realised there was a lot you could do for me."

Nicholas affirmed her, "Healing's an ongoing process. We all need healing all the time, but each healing makes us fitter for the journey". He stroked her aunt's hair and said goodbye for the first and last time, and left.

Beatrice Harrison died a few hours later, with her niece, Alice Fletcher, sitting by her side.

Analysis

I can identify three relationships at work in this event, which I shall address in the order given:

1. Alice and Nicholas
2. Aunt Beatrice and Nicholas, and lastly
3. Alice and her aunt.

Alice and Nicholas

The situation in which Alice found herself at the beginning of the novel was indicative of where she was at that period in her life: she was lost, struggling to live in a situation over which she felt she had no control. She felt she had as much control over her aunt's progressive demise, and her inability to find full-time employment, as much as she did over the shower of rain she found herself being soaked by. She was wandering, looking for a safe-haven, for somewhere familiar where she had some say. She found that in the Healing Centre - in the midst of somewhere unfamiliar she found acceptance and understanding. In listening to Alice and respecting her decision to stay by her aunt, Nick affirmed who she was as a person. He gave her dignity. He affirmed that her choice was a valid one. Perhaps he was one of the few, if not the only person, who had really listened to her. He was providing the very important role of caring for the carer. As we have seen assurance, according to Mason, is a priestly task.

Alice found this loving acceptance quite overwhelming. Perhaps she stayed at the church for a number of reasons: she was fascinated; because she recognised that she was accepted and welcomed there; because she fancied Nicholas.

In her conversation with Nicholas she told him that she was not looking for a miracle cure, but a reprieve, that her aunt might return to a state of health which Alice believed that she could better cope with. Her focus was backwards - recovery - rather than forwards - towards death. Nicholas did not rebuke her for this, but gently indicated that this might not happen, that perhaps the way forward was for her aunt to address any unfinished business and be allowed to die. But he did more than this. His presence had broadened her horizon. He had enabled her to look up for her situation, and the few paths which she had considered, namely various aspects of medical care, and had allowed her to also consider prayer and Christian healing. It is unlikely, given her aunt's attitude to the Church that Alice would have considered this particular avenue. Nicholas represented something bigger than she could find on her own. He represented hope. He represented Christ - remember that she had tried to touch his cloak to drain off some power to take back to her aunt, like the woman with the haemorrhages in Luke 8. That may have been a desperate act, but it showed some faith and an openness to God, however conscious or unconscious it may have been. In some respect then, she *did* expect a miracle.

Nick was attentive to the present moment - another priestly task. He met her where she was, not where he wanted her to be. There was no attempt to cover over her emotions, he allowed her to be herself, and she responded to that. His attitude was not one of 'What can I do here to fix it?' but rather 'What is already happening here?', perhaps he was asking 'What is God already do here?'. While he was in her house Nick too was being attentive. He was observant - he took the time and care to notice his surroundings, the flowers, the photographs. He noticed that Alice had taken the time to make the place look nice, and paid her a compliment by his attention to it, though nothing was explicitly said.

Nicholas didn't claim any power for himself, but he always pointed away from himself towards God. He acknowledged that he too was in need of healing, saying that he always fell short of what God required of him, but he did this in a way which did not jeopardise Alice's faith in God's ability to work through him. This was important. In not claiming the healing power for himself he was able to share it with Alice, and allow her to realise her part in the venture. He pointed out that while the healing did not depend upon her faith, or lack of it, and indeed her aunt's hostility (or

lack thereof), it would be essential that she be focused - believe that Nick believed, and support him in that. He made explicit that what was important was the channel with God, and this must be open for any kind of healing to take place. Nicholas would have been aware that what was most important would be that his relationship with God be open, he needed to be attentive to God to allow the Holy Spirit to be allowed to work freely. Nicholas was able to explain a theological issue in the kind of everyday language that made sense to Alice, without scaring her or making it overly complicated. This is the language of the cure of souls. This is the kind of language which Jesus used with those whom he met. This put her at ease, and gave her permission to be involved. This was important because Nicholas understood that the healing could only be done with her involvement, because much depended on the restoration of relationship between Alice and her aunt.

Aunt Beatrice and Nicholas

Nicholas' relationship with Aunt Beatrice was necessarily more one-sided, as she was unable to communicate with him. However, he gave her the dignity and respect that he also gave Alice. He assumed, rightly, that Beatrice could hear and was able to respond although with some difficulty. He afforded her that dignity.

He was attentive to her - he explained who he was, what he would do, and that Alice had asked him to come because she loved her aunt. Between stanzas of conversation he paused, looking for change.

Having listened to her niece Nicholas was able to facilitate some kind of reconciliation. He spoke those things which he believed needed to be said, the unspoken emotions and feelings of gratitude and fear which had gone on unconsciously for many years. This was unfinished business which needed to be addressed before any movement could be made. Nick was a catalyst - the real 'healers' were Alice and her Aunt. He was pointing not to himself, but to the two involved. Mason identifies as aspects of priesthood a rehearsing of promise by word or sign, a bringing of assurance to those in need of healing, and a bringing of reconciliation to those apart. Nicholas fulfilled these priestly tasks here. He affirmed that they belonged to each other, and made that explicit.

Alice and Aunt Beatrice

A question which strikes me is why Aunt Beatrice was able to come to this point. It seems that despite her outspoken hostility to the Church while she was well she

recognised that she was in good hands, she was respected and accepted by this representative of God. In some respect God himself had visited her in her profound illness and entered into it with her. This representative of God had articulated those things which she held most dear, and had approved of them. He had drawn out in a short time those things which were important and which needed to be said: that it was good of her to have brought Alice up, that it had indeed been challenging but that in the end she had done a good job. By addressing these things to Beatrice he gave her permission to stop fearing that she had messed things up. He had shown her the love and approval that she had lacked for so many years. Beatrice asked forgiveness from Alice - this was what she needed to do. This could not have happened had Nick not been involved. Beatrice's illness would have probably got progressively worse and she would have struggled against death as she desperately clung on to life, feeling that she was a burden and disappointment to Alice, but wanting the courage to ask Alice to forgive her. Nick also gave Alice the permission and courage to tell her what she really felt, that she loved her aunt and was grateful for all that she had done. Nicholas' request that Alice focus on her love for her aunt was not only essential for there to be an open channel of love for the Holy Spirit (remembering that God is love), but it was important for her to get in touch with her emotions at the deepest level - he allowed her the space which she had been denied by the worry and concern about health care and finances.

The moment of healing came when both Aunt Beatrice and Alice gave themselves and each other the permission to let go. Beatrice was able to die knowing that she was forgiven, knowing that what she had devoted her life to had not been a waste but had been appreciated, knowing that she was loved by her niece and by God. Alice was able to let go of her aunt knowing that she herself had done what her aunt had done for her, knowing that in the end she loved her aunt and had told her so. Alice could now move on knowing that she didn't have to live with a bad conscience, worrying that she may have done the wrong thing. She had shown her love to her aunt and told her about it.

Evaluation

Nicholas Darrow brought something to this situation which could not have been realised without him, and yet he did this by not drawing attention to himself, rather drawing Alice and her Aunt to each other. He used the tools of the cure of souls - he

treated Alice and her aunt with integrity, he addressed them as whole human beings refusing to focus on isolated aspects of them, as the medical and employment agencies had clearly done. He was attentive to their present situations - he accepted them where they were, and engaged with them at that deep level. He used the personal language of conversation and prayer to draw Alice and Beatrice to each other, and made explicit in doing so what was already at work between them.

An important question is could this have only been done by a priest? In many respects the answer is no. If we are to understand priesthood as being a specific example of something which is done by everybody, then this healing could have been facilitated by anyone, ordained or not. However, two important aspects are worth noting: firstly that ordained priesthood makes no sense outwith the context of both the Church and society, and secondly the priest's internal life of prayer and contemplation as essential aspects in the ministry of healing and wholeness. What was not made specific in this event was the background of prayer and contemplation - attentiveness to God - which Nicholas commits himself to. Later in the novel we are shown the importance and centrality of his prayer life and the importance of his relationship with his Spiritual Director which help to keep him focused on Christ and restrain his human desire to be a wonder-worker. Priesthood, I said above, was about a special ability to handle what is common to all humans, but which requires skills which are not common to all. While Nicholas included Alice in the healing act by assuring her that all human beings have an ability to heal, he was able to facilitate this because of the skills which are peculiar to the priesthood: an attentiveness of God disciplined in contemplative prayer and Spiritual Direction, an attitude of attention to the present moment and a willingness to risk walking on the boundaries of life. In this respect the healing ministry and priesthood walk side by side. Priests are called to be healers.

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Marker's Comment

A highly competent piece of work exploring the relationship between healing and priesthood. The context of healing is holistic and priesthood is rooted in prayer. This is not the healing of the 'quick fix' but that which grows out of the pastoral relationship. The dissertation is well-structured, urging a strong case based both upon experience and well-chosen reading. The episode from Susan Howatch's book A Question of Integrity analysed by means of an adaptation of the Case Study method used in class provides an original method for relating theory and practice.

Revd. Dr. David Lyall
New College, Edinburgh, 1999

Mark awarded: 65%