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**THE HEALING MINISTRY OF THE EARLY CHURCH**

**S. L. Rayner**

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**15 DEC 2000**

## CONTENTS

	Page
Abbreviations	
Preface	
1. Scientific Medicine	1
2. Practical Caring	30
3. Supernatural Healing	53
4. Developments of Thought and Practice	85
5. Some Conclusions	116
Footnotes	126
Bibliography:	
A Original Sources	144
B Modern Sources	147

## ABBREVIATIONS

- ANCL Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh, 1864 ff.)
- CC Corpus Christianorum (Series Latina), Journal
- CHS Church Historical Society
- CIG Corpus Inscriptionum Graecorum, Berlin, 1828-77
- CIL Corpus Inscriptionum Latinorum, Berlin, 1862 ff.
- Connolly Connolly, R. H., The So-Called Egyptian Church Order and Derived Documents, Cambridge, 1961 (Texts and Studies, Vol.8, No.4)
- CSR Church Quarterly Review, London, 1875 ff.
- CSEL Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Vienna, 1866 ff.
- DACL Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie, ed. F. Cabrol and H. Le Clerq, 15 vols., 1907-1953
- DCB Dictionary of Christian Biography, ed. W. Smith and H. Wace, 4 vols., London, 1877-87
- ET English Translation
- Funk Funk, F. X., Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum, Paderborn, 1905
- SCS Die griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte, Leipzig, 1897-1941; Berlin and Leipzig, 1953; Berlin, 1954 ff.
- HERE J. Hastings (ed.), Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics (12 vols.), 1908-1926
- JEH Journal of Ecclesiastical History, London, 1950 ff.
- LCC Library of Christian Classics, London, 1953 ff.
- Loeb Loeb Classical Library, London, 1912
- NPNCF Nicene and Post-Nicene Christian Fathers, Oxford, 1890-1900
- PG Patrologia Graeca, ed. J. P. Migne, 162 vols., Paris, 1857-66

ABBREVIATIONS (continued)

- PL Patrologia Latina, ed. J. P. Migne, 221 vols.,  
1844-64
- Sarton G. Sarton, Introduction to the History of Science,  
Baltimore, 1972 (Repr. 1953)
- SC Sources Chrétiennes, Paris, 1940 ff.
- SJTh Scottish Journal of Theology
- TE Tischendorf, C., Evangelia Apocrypha, Leipzig, 1853
- TU Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der  
altchristlichen Literatur, Leipzig, 1882 ff.
- TWB Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament,  
ed. G. Kittel, 1933 ff.

PREFACE

This century has seen a growing interest in the ministry of healing and much has been written about spiritual healing and faith healing as part of the Church's ministry today. I write as one who has participated in some of the varied activities within the framework of the Church's healing ministry, small prayer groups on behalf of the sick, large rallies of 'full gospel' evangelists, healing services in Church, and private ministrations to the sick as priest and hospital chaplain.

The purpose of the research undertaken was to investigate how the early Church had, in fact, attempted to fulfil her Lord's command to heal the sick, in order to illuminate the function of an Anglican clergyman concerned with obedience to that command today. To this end the ministry of healing was considered against the background of contemporary society and in the context of the Church's total approach to medicine and the care of the sick.

I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the guidance and encouragement of Gerald Bonner, not only for his assistance with this research but for fostering an abiding interest in the early Church during my years as a theological student.

March 1973

Stewart Rayner

At the Greek physician...  
...to cure...  
...

Chapter 1

SCIENTIFIC MEDICINE

The growth of Graeco-Roman medicine

The cause of sickness mystified those who practised medicine in earliest times. It was natural to attribute anything mysterious to some form of divine agency and so it was customary to think of disease as having a supernatural origin. This way of thinking was questioned by the early Greek medical schools and the opinion that disease originated through natural causes was firmly stated by Hippocrates (c.460-360 B.C.). Disease, he claimed, was a disturbance of that state of perfect harmony within the body known as health. The Greek medical schools, formed in the centuries after Hippocrates may have disagreed with some of his views but they maintained his principle of seeking a physical cause for sickness.

Beside the medicine of the Greek schools there existed therapeutic practices of a magical and religious nature, whose practitioners believed disease to be of supernatural origin and therefore sought to cure it by supernatural means. Too sharp a distinction cannot be drawn between the practices of those who believed in natural causes of diseases and those who believed in supernatural. The former would at times seek divine aid and even indulge in superstitious practices hardly distinguishable from magic. The latter would at times practice in a methodical manner. However it seems justifiable to characterise as scientific the medicine of the Greek medical schools in so far



as the Greek physician sought by observation, experiment, and natural methods to cure disease believed to be due to natural causes.

The early Church was a persecuted minority for nearly two centuries with no influence on medical thought, yet, after the death of Galen, the great Greek physician, at the end of the second century A.D., Greek medicine made no significant advances. Even Galen, a firm exponent of experimental research, is noted more for his meticulous writings and his synthesizing of many of the opinions of the varying Greek medical schools in his medical practice than for original thought and discovery. Those who followed Galen lacked the ability to develop the experimental method he had expounded, and simply adhered to his findings. *Some of which by their enormous but plausible character prevented the advance of medical investigation for centuries* This was partly due to the dominating position the written works of Galen came to have in the field of scientific medicine stemming from the authoritative manner of Galen himself; *a security inflexible* but it is also indicative of a general decline of scientific ability in the ancient world.

Since some of the early Christian writers were, to some extent, familiar with Greek medical thought, a glimpse of the history and development of Greek medicine gives some picture of the ideas accepted or rejected by them.

Although he himself drew upon the legacy of earlier medical thinkers, Hippocrates of Cos (born circa 460 B.C.) had set a standard for all succeeding Greek physicians to admire and follow. Over one hundred books are attributed to Hippocrates, although they are clearly not all his work. His writings reveal his careful recording of the course of a patient's illness; his stress on the value of using natural methods to deal with disease; his concern for the sick rather than the sickness; his well-known code of medical ethics. Those who,

over the years, not only chose to be guided by his standard ~~work~~ but also claimed that all that was valuable in medical knowledge was contained in his works alone, became known as the Hippocratic Sect.

The foundation of a school of medicine at Alexandria about sixty years after the death of Hippocrates marked an important development led by the two physicians Herophilus and Erasistratus. Herophilus was the first great anatomist and is said by Galen to have been the first to undertake public human dissections. Erasistratus is regarded as the founder of physiology as a separate study.

The pupils of these two men divided into sects but, as so often seems to be a regrettable tendency of medical schools in general, their followers concentrated not on the spirit of the masters but on the letter, and gave their attention to written texts rather than to experiment and investigation.

As a reaction against these dogmatists there grew up at Alexandria a school of thought which maintained that only practice, experiment and observation were of value to medicine, dogmatic beliefs and theoretical discussions were useless. This 'Empirical' school made considerable progress in surgery and gynaecology.

The geographical position of Alexandria in relation to the Oriental world with its strange and often bizarre medical practices meant that scientific medicine had continually to maintain a struggle against superstitious and magical elements. So long as Greek political influence was strong there was little danger of this happening, but with the decline of Greek political power, the scientific status of the school at Alexandria also declined and came increasingly under the influence of Egyptian, Jewish and Persian magical practices.

As the power of Rome grew, the great metropolis became more attractive to able Greek physicians, although the Romans themselves had little to do with scientific medicine. Greek physicians probably came to Rome from the third century B.C. onwards, either brought forcibly as slaves or travelling freely from city to city practising their profession. The first physician of note in Rome is said to have been Asclepiodes of Prusa (born c.124 B.C.), who came from Alexandria at the beginning of the first century B.C.

Asclepiodes opposed much of the Hippocratic teaching, especially the theory of the four humours, and based his physiological ideas on the belief that the body was made up of solid atoms. These atoms were constantly moving in small canals or "pores", and it was this movement that constituted life. Any disturbance in the normal movement of these atoms resulted in disease. This theory gave rise to the school known as Methodists which flourished in Rome during the first century of the Christian era, and included within its discipline the renowned Soranus of Ephesus (fl.c.A.D.100), who is regarded as the father of obstetrics and gynaecology.

The first century A.D. saw in Rome the rise of the so-called Pneumatic Sect. The concept of 'pneumatism', already familiar for several centuries, was based on the observations of respiration and the gaseous state of the body. The Pneumatic sect held that life and health are associated with a spirit (πνεῦμα) which penetrates into the lungs, thence to the heart and to the whole body.

Although the stricter exponents of these various sects and schools adhered rigidly to their doctrines and were often very hostile to those who held other views, there must have been

many who combined various ideas, saw the weaknesses in the particular doctrines of the various schools, and replaced them with other views of their own. It was therefore not unnatural that, towards the end of the first century A.D., eclecticism - the deliberate selection of what was believed to be the most valuable contribution of each sect - became popular.

As has already been observed, the greatest of such eclectics was Galen of Pergamon. He disagreed strongly with the atomistic views of the Methodists and the basis of his therapy was the Hippocratic doctrine of the humours, modified by some pneumatic considerations. His principle method of cure, derived from Hippocratic theory, was to regularise the body by producing in it a state contrary to the disease. To bring this about Galen preferred to rely on drugs rather than more natural forms of treatment.

Galen is of particular interest to the student of early Christianity for he makes five references to Jews and Christians in such a way as to show that, even at this early date, a pagan intellectual could recognise Christianity as a philosophy which had some value, not merely dismiss it. Galen's references are given and fully discussed by Walzer in his study, Galen on Jews and Christians.<sup>1</sup>

In two references Galen condemns Moses for being content to accept beliefs and laws without applying critical reasoning, and yet obviously considers Moses' beliefs to be of sufficient standing for the purpose of comparison. Three other references compare the limitations of those who adhere dogmatically to particular medical schools without being prepared to change to the obstinacy of the followers of Moses and Christ. If Christianity fails to please him logically, Galen is ready to

admit that the moral qualities it produces are in no way inferior to those of genuine philosophers. He refers to the Christians' contempt of death, their self-control and voluntary abstinence from sexual intercourse, and their pursuit of justice.

Galen himself was a pagan inclined towards monotheism. Through his medical experimentation and practice he came to a deep belief in a divine creative purpose revealed in the operations of the human body. This view is particularly stated in his work De usu partium. Such an outlook, together with his not wholly unfavourable references to Christianity and his ability to express his conclusions and reservations about the other medical schools convincingly, resulted in Galen's medical system gaining the approbation of Christian thinkers in the Middle Ages. Thus, for example, one finds Cassiodorus (c.485-580) recommending, among other medical works, the study of the Latin translation of Galen's Therapeutica to his monks together with that of Hippocrates, De Herbis et Curis.<sup>2</sup>

The work and ideas of these Greek physicians and medical sects met with opposition from laymen outside the realm of scientific medicine as well as from fellow-practitioners within it. Medical practices continued to be superstitious, and Roman conservatism and scepticism were slow to accept Greek medical theory, although many Romans resorted to seeking Greek aid in a crisis. Early Roman distrust is well illustrated by Cato the Censor (234-149 B.C.), who accused physicians of poisoning and killing the sick, and saw in the cabbage a panacea for all ills. Martial's epigrams show this attitude extending into the first century of the Christian era.<sup>3</sup> Doctors are, of course, always fair game for the satirist; but in some cases suspicion was fully justified, since to bribe a physician could

be a discreet way of ridding oneself of enemies and rivals or of securing a long expected legacy. The value of surgeons and doctors to the Roman armies in their campaigns did something to enhance the position of the physician in Roman eyes. From the time of Julius Caesar, citizenship began to be granted to physicians, and in A.D.14 the first official medical school was organised in Rome. Nevertheless, it remained a rare and retrograde step for a Roman of good breeding to become a physician.

Ante-Nicene Christian views on medicine

Against the background, on the one hand, of medical sectarianism, and, on the other, of widespread suspicion of the medical profession, it is probable that the earlier Christians, who were persons of very varied culture and intelligence, held views on the practice of scientific medicine as varied as those outside the Church.

The occupation of physician does not appear to have been included among those which were regarded as untenable by a member of the Church. Whatever the exact profession of St. Luke may have been, he was known to the Early Church as a physician, and Christ Himself was early given the title of 'Physician'. On the other hand Christ had used no material means of healing apart from clay made with spittle. This characteristic of Christ's performing cures without medicines and herbs is noted in that legendary letter of Abgar, King of Edessa, to Christ recorded by Eusebius.

Abgarus, ruler of Edessa, to Jesus the excellent Saviour who has appeared in the country of Jerusalem, greeting. I have heard the reports of thee and of thy cures as performed by thee without medicines or

herbs. For it is said thou makest the blind to see and the lame to walk, that thou clearest lepers and castest out impure spirits and demons, and that thou healest those afflicted with lingering diseases and raisest the dead. 4

The Christian apologist Arnobius (c.350) recalls that Christ performed his miracles without any external aids,<sup>5</sup> and when the healing powers of other deities were likened to the healings of Christ, he enquires:

This only I long to hear, whether, without the addition of any substance - that is, of any medical application - he ordered diseases to fly away from men at a touch; whether he commanded and compelled the cause of ill-health to be eradicated, and the bodies of the weak to return to their natural strength. For it is known that Christ, either by applying his hand to the parts affected, or by the command of his voice only, opened the ears of the deaf, drove away blindness from the eyes, gave speech to the dumb, loosened the rigidity of the joints, gave the power of walking to the shrivelled, was wont to heal by a word and by an order, leprosy, agues, dropsies and all other kinds of ailments, which some fell power has willed that the bodies of men should endure. What act like these have all those gods done, by whom you allege that help has been brought to the sick and the imperilled? 6

This supernatural aspect of Christ's healing ministry would have had a particular appeal for the gnostic and ascetic elements in the Church who despised material things. The Oratio ad Graecos of Tatian (c.160), which contains one of the earliest Christian opinions about medicine, is biased in this direction. Tatian, who became a Christian in Rome about the time of Justin Martyr, whose disciple he became, is later said to have founded the gnostic-ascetic sect of the Encratites. He had a wide knowledge of Greek philosophy and accepted the opinion that some diseases are produced by natural causes through disturbances of the matter that composes the human body and through the changing of seasons. Illness however provides an opportunity for the demons to ensnare a sick man, for the materia medica, although the creation of God, can be used by

...~~... view on matter~~, they were nevertheless accustomed to evil spirits for their own ends. Tatian admits that drugs and other methods do indeed restore health to men, but he claims that health comes, not from any inherent value in the materials themselves, but from the demons working through them. Thus the demons can, by such means, deceive men into putting confidence in material things rather than in God. Tatian does however admit that one can use material means to aid cures and still retain full trust in God. He says:

As noxious preparations are material compounds, so are curatives of the same nature. If, however, we reject the baser matter, some persons often endeavour to heal by a union of one of these bad things with some other, and will make use of the bad to attain the good. But, just as he who dines with a robber, though he may not be a robber himself, partakes of the punishment on account of his intimacy with him, so he who is not bad but associates with the bad, having dealings with them for some supposed good, will be punished by God the Judge for partnership in the same object. Why is he who trusts in the system of matter not willing to trust in God? For what reason do you not approach the more powerful Lord, but rather seek to cure yourself, like the dog with grass, or the stag with a viper, or the hog with river-crabs, or the lion with apes? 7

However, gnostic-ascetic thinking on matter did not always reach the same conclusions. Hieracus (fl.c.300) an Egyptian teacher who seems to have founded a Gnostic sect similar to Tatian's known as the Hieracitae, was credited by Epiphanius<sup>8</sup> as being skilled in medicine and also having knowledge of astronomy and magic.

Although the rejection of all material means because of demonic associations might be regarded as that of an extremist element in the early Church it must be remembered that in the Roman world medicine and magic were often so closely intertwined it was difficult to differentiate between them. A truly scientific physician, unaffected by any superstition, would be as hard to find in the ancient world as in the medieval.

Though most early Christians would not have held Tatian's

extreme views on matter, they were nevertheless accustomed to a good deal of ascetic rigorism in their everyday life. They were forbidden by their religion to attend any place, such as the theatre or the circus, believed to be associated with demons, among whom were numbered the pagan gods. This prohibition naturally prevented Christians from visiting the temples of the healing gods to which many physicians were attached and where, apart from towns which maintained municipal physicians, the only free medical treatment was obtainable. It seems likely that the general poverty and political insecurity of Christians in the early years of Christianity meant that most of them would, in any case, have had little opportunity of consulting a physician.

Apart from Tatian's writings there was little apparent direct Christian denunciation of medicine or of physicians, but like their pagan contemporaries, many Christians would probably have been sceptical of the value of both.

In contrast to Tatian, the work of his near contemporary, Athenagoras (fl.c.A.D.177), displays a respect for scientific medicine. Athenagoras is the first apologist to try to link Christian theology with the medical knowledge of his day. L. W. Barnard<sup>9</sup> suggests that he was familiar with some of Galen's works, and notes, by example, that much of the medical knowledge expressed by Athenagoras in his De Resurrectione<sup>10</sup> has exact parallels in Galen. Athenagoras clearly shows that acceptance of Christianity did not inevitably involve a rejection of scientific medicine. However, his writings, like most of the Apologists, are ignored by virtually all the Fathers, and his influence was, in consequence, small.

Another Christian writer of the same period, Julius Africanus (c.160-240), the author of the famous Chronicle,

produced an encyclopaedia in twenty-four books entitled 'Κεστοί'<sup>11</sup> - 'Embroidered Girdles' - which included sections on medicine. Only fragments of this work remain. Although a Christian when he wrote it, there is nothing specifically Christian about the work.

In Alexandria a succession of Christian thinkers attempted to effect a synthesis of Christian revelation and classical culture. Clement of Alexandria (fl.190-202) considered Christianity in relation to Greek philosophy and especially Platonism. Although maintaining the superiority of Christianity, he had a high regard for the achievement of Greek thought. He considered philosophy and knowledge to be gifts of God and the practical details of living which he gave in the Paedagogos<sup>12</sup> were illustrated by quotations from Plato. These included suggestions concerning diet, exercise and sleep, all of which, although, directed to Christian deportment, would be to a certain degree conducive to health.<sup>13</sup> Clement does not make any specific medical comments, although he refers to the famous passage in Ecclesiasticus (38:1-2) which bids men honour the physician.<sup>14</sup>

The growing Christian interest in Greek thought, besides presenting Greek scientific medicine in a more favourable light, would also lead to a more speculative attitude towards miracles, and to the perennial problem of miracle and natural law. With the increase in scientific knowledge, much of what was to the ordinary man miraculous became, to the small group of rational thinkers, simply the functioning of natural processes. Moreover, certain individuals - never numerous in the Roman world, but a formidable challenge to belief - came to be sceptical about anything outside the realm of natural processes.

For the Christian apologist the argument raged most fiercely around the miracles and the resurrection of Christ. This specific issue was bound to have its influence on views about miraculous healing and medicine in general.

The attitude of Clement's successor at Alexandria, Origen, towards miracles is inconsistent and confusing.<sup>15</sup> At one time he appears to be indifferent to the factual element in the miraculous and concentrates solely upon its spiritual meaning, while at another he firmly upholds the credibility of miracle stories. This could be due to a change in his own views as he grew older or to the need to address his beliefs to the educated as well as to the uneducated; but it is more likely to be symptomatic of a tension between rational and literal thinking in Origen's own mind.

It is interesting to note that in his comment on the healing of the epileptic boy (Matt. 17:14-20),<sup>16</sup> Origen dismissed the idea of physicians who said that his condition is due to some bodily symptom, such as a flow of moist elements in the boy's head in sympathy with the moon, and stated clearly his own belief in an unclean spirit.

Not all Christians were as enamoured of Greek philosophy as the Alexandrians. The fierce African, Tertullian, combined great erudition with a bitter hostility to philosophy as the muse of heresy. With his particular way of thinking, he adopted a realistic rather than an intellectual approach. From Tertullian one can note the growing tendency of Christian writers from the third century onwards to illustrate spiritual truths by medical examples.

In the Scorpiace, Tertullian argued that martyrdom can be thought of as good because of its ultimate effects.

He compares those who avoid martyrdom to patients who avoid dangerous cures at the hands of a physician and so die rather than be healed. The agony of martyrdom for salvation is compared with the harsh treatment of medicine for healing.

The healing art has manifestly an apparent cruelty, by reason of the lancet, and of the burning iron, and of the great heat of the mustard; yet to be cut and burned, and pulled and bitten, is not on that account an evil, for it occasions helpful pains; nor will it be refused merely because it afflicts, but because it afflicts inevitably will it be applied. The good accruing is the apology for the frightfulness of the work. In short, that man who is howling and groaning and bellowing in the hands of a physician will presently load the same hands with a fee, and proclaim that they are the best operators, and no longer affirm that they are cruel. Thus martyrdoms also rage furiously, but for salvation. 17

Although it provides a frightening picture of contemporary medical practice, Tertullian's illustration is in no sense hostile to the work of the physician. Tertullian undoubtedly had a wide knowledge of ancient scientific sources and distinguished between the various medical sects and schools. Arguing in the De Anima for the corporeal nature of the soul, he affirms his claim by stating that this was also the opinion of Soranus whom he calls methodicae medicinae instructissimus,<sup>18</sup> and relates that he filled four volumes with his dissertation on the subject.

He is also familiar with the opinions of several physicians - Andreas, Asclepiades, Herophilus, Erasistratus, Diocles, Strato and Hippocrates - regarding the soul.<sup>19</sup> He denies the views of those who claim that the soul has a separate origin and becomes part of man at the moment of birth by giving an elaborate description of pregnancy and birth, including details of embryotomy and the instruments used to perform that operation.<sup>20</sup> The source of his medical knowledge was probably

general encyclopaedic learning, but he may have gleaned the latter information from Soranus' gynaecological treatise.

As we shall see, the danger of the newly-converted or semi-converted Christian relapsing into superstitious practices was always considerable, and this was most likely when someone was believed to be healed by magical or demonic means. A warning against this in the Third century Clementine Recognitions notes that on the same principle the doctor, who cures many people, ought also to be worshipped. The passage adds that the more skilful the doctor the greater will be the number of his cures.<sup>21</sup>

Arnobius (fl.c.303-313) faced with the similar practice of worshipping the gods of healing temples because of their cures, argues that healing power lies in the drugs themselves and in no special merit in the person or god who administers the drugs - a view which is radically opposed to that of Tatian. Arnobius goes on to state that it is praiseworthy that a man should have knowledge and ability to apply medicine by various methods and material means to improve the health of his fellow man, but for a deity to employ matter is to its discredit.<sup>22</sup>

Lactantius, the 'Christian Cicero', in his De Officio Dei attempts to prove the existence of God from the marvels of the human body. The work is more descriptive than medical and probably relies for its information of the Latin encyclopaedist Varro (117-27 B.C.). Faced with the problem of disease in his eulogy on the body, Lactantius shows what the condition of man would be otherwise. If man were not subject to disease, his body would have to be of such a quality that it would also not be subject to death; but if man's body were immortal, he would

no longer be man but God. Since, however, man by his nature must needs have a mortal body, the same body will therefore be mortal both in youth and in old age. It is because of man's physical frailty that diseases come, being caused by such things as changes in season; and it is also because of this insecure frailty that man may become humane and loving towards his fellow man and develop reason and wisdom to make his life more secure.<sup>23</sup>

St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, martyred in 258, had been faced with similar questions during the plague at Carthage in 252. Some Christians thought it unreasonable that they should be afflicted in the same way as pagans. Cyprian answers that as the frail flesh is common to all men, and so they are also subject to disease. It is only in the Spirit that they differ.<sup>24</sup> Disease and plague provide men with an opportunity to demonstrate their faith,<sup>25</sup> and proclaim the true nature of each person. Sickness reveals whether masters and relatives look after their sick dependents, and shows whether the physician truly cares for his patient or seeks to avoid the plague altogether.<sup>26</sup>

These references from the works of ante-Nicene writers, although primarily written to answer questions raised by the fact of disease and the problem of the attraction of pagan healing cults and practices, nevertheless provide some indication of the developing Christian attitude towards scientific medicine. Disease is recognised as being, at least sometimes, due to natural causes. The physician is recognised as a skilful man, and his methods are distinguished from demonic workings. Drugs are seen as possessing some value, and so too is surgery despite its manifest cruelty.

Early Christian physicians

Apart from passing references to medicine in the writings of the early fathers, it is reasonable to assume that if Galen was acquainted with Christianity, doctors would also become Christians. The description of the martyrs of Gaul in 168, preserved by Eusebius,<sup>27</sup> gives details of how a certain Phrygian, Alexander, a physician by profession, came to meet his death. A list of church leaders martyred during the Diocletianic persecution (303-312) includes Zenobius, presbyter of the church at Sidon, described as 'the best of physicians'.<sup>28</sup> Diomedes, a Christian physician from Tarsus at Nice during the time of the Diocletian persecution, was summoned before the Emperor but died before he was arrested.<sup>29</sup>

Shortly after the Diocletianic persecution Theodotus, bishop of Laodicea in Syria Prima, was noted not only for his outstanding ability in curing souls, but for his excellent skill in the science of healing bodies.<sup>30</sup> Although the names of such Christian physicians are few, it is probable that there were many other physicians in the body of the Church who remain unknown for lack of some other claim to fame.

This likelihood is made more conceivable if one remembers that a considerable number of doctors, in the West at least, were slaves, and Christianity held particular appeal for people in this position. This point is made by Capparoni,<sup>31</sup> who further illustrates his opinion that a number of physicians in the first centuries embraced Christianity by describing a loculus from the Catacombs engraved with a case containing surgical instruments. This stone has no name and is assigned to the period from the end of the second century to early

fourth century. Capparoni also notes a tombstone, dating from the end of that period, which refers to a Dionysius, doctor and priest.<sup>32</sup>

It should be observed at this stage that the possession of detailed knowledge of medicine in the later Roman Empire was by no means an indication that the possessor was a physician. Medical knowledge formed part of a general education and is to be distinguished from the physician's art of healing sicknesses and wounds. It must not therefore be automatically assumed that a Christian writer using medical themes was a physician, nor that the Christian medical practitioner was always professionally qualified; both however would have recognised the value of scientific medicine.

The distinction between medical knowledge and professional medical practice can be illustrated from what is known of Caesarius of Nazianzus (c.330-369) and Nemesius, bishop of Emesa, during the last years of the fourth century.

We learn of Caesarius from his funeral oration preached by his brother, St. Gregory.<sup>33</sup> After studying with his brother, Caesarius went on to continue his general philosophical education at Alexandria where he particularly excelled in mathematics, and in medicine 'in so far as it treats of physiology and temperament, and the causes of disease'.<sup>34</sup> This need not imply that Caesarius had any formal training in surgery or practical medicine. He began a career at the Imperial Court at Constantinople in a financial post, although Gregory seems to suggest that it was his practice as a physician that first attracted the Emperor's attention. He subsequently disassociated himself from the court of Julian the Apostate under pressure from his brother,<sup>35</sup> but, under later emperors, came to hold the

financial office of Quaestor of Bithynia. Caesarius is praised by Gregory for placing the humane functions of his art at the disposal of the authorities free of charge and Gregory alludes to the fact that Caesarius appears not to have taken the oath of Hippocrates though 'his manner of practice made an oath unnecessary'. It is not completely clear why Caesarius did not take the Hippocratic Oath. It may well have been that as a Christian he would not take an oath but this is by no means certain. Alternatively it could imply that he was not a fully recognised physician, although his medical assistance and skill equalled that of the professional practitioner.

Nemesius wrote a treatise De Natura Hominis<sup>36</sup> which contained considerable medical material, but it is doubtful if he was ever a physician. He shows acquaintance with at least fifteen treatises of Galen, and also has a much wider knowledge of earlier medical writers whose opinions he sometimes prefers to those of Galen.

Another Christian physician attached to a royal court was Theodoros (c.320-380). He was a Greek who served at the court of King Shaphur II of Persia, and wrote a compendium of medicine, now lost.<sup>37</sup>

A bishop who had been a physician, according to Jerome,<sup>38</sup> was Basil, bishop of Ancyra from 336 to 360, though he seems to have relinquished his profession on attaining office in the Church.<sup>39</sup> That some priests continued to practise medicine after ordination has already been noted (see p.16), and this seems to have been encouraged at a later date too.

Theodoret of Cyrus (393-458) writing in a letter to Apella says:

When I undertook the direction of the see of Cyrus, I procured for it from all directions men who practised necessary arts, and besides this induced skillful physicians to live there. Of these one is the reverend presbyter Peter, who practises his

profession with wisdom, and adorns it by his character. On my departure several have left the city and Peter also has determined to leave. Under these circumstances I beseech your excellency to give him your kind care. He is well able to attend the sick and to wage war against their ailments. 40

In another letter Theodoret says that the same Peter is noted for his wise practice in medicine as well as for his priestly rank.<sup>41</sup>

Favourable recognition of individual physicians is given by Basil and Augustine. Basil wrote two letters<sup>42</sup> to a certain Eustathius who is styled archiaterus. One of these was a doctrinal treatise maintaining the unity of the Divine nature in all three persons of the Trinity and asserting the full divinity of the Holy Spirit. These letters show that the physician was able to play an effective role in handling the physical and spiritual problems of Church members. Basil writes:

Humanity is the regular business of all you who practise as physicians. And, in my opinion, to put your science at the head and front of life's pursuits is to decide reasonably and rightly. This at all events seems to be the case if man's most precious possession, life, is painful and not worth living, unless it be lived in health, and if for health we are dependent on your skill. In your case medicine is seen, as it were, with two right hands; you enlarge the accepted limits of philanthropy by not confining the application of your skill to men's bodies, but by attending also to the cure of the diseases of their souls. It is not only in accordance with popular report that I thus write. I am moved by the personal experience which I have had on many occasions. 43

Basil also wrote to the physician Pasinicus<sup>44</sup> and again reveals, as is to be expected of the founder of one of the Church's first hospitals, his recognition of the friendship and value of physicians.

Augustine of Hippo is full of praise for Vindicianus, whom he describes as the most eminent physician of his day,<sup>45</sup> though it is not specifically stated that he was a Christian.

Vindicianus is known to have written two works, Gynaecia and De expertis remediis, and also to have been much admired by his pupil, Priscianus, physician to Emperor Gratian.<sup>46</sup> He helped Augustine by the fatherly advice he gave him before his conversion to reject astrology. He recalled how he himself had been attracted to it after his medical studies, but he found it to be completely false and declined to gain his living by tricking people.<sup>47</sup>

Apart from these men mentioned in the works of the Fathers there were probably many other Christian physicians of whom few traces remain. We learn of the busy life of the doctor from details of Chrysostom's letters concerning Theodorus, a physician of Caesarea, who first helped Chrysostom during a harassed pause on his way to exile at Cucusus in 404 A.D.<sup>48</sup> Later Theodorus wrote to Chrysostom apologising for not visiting him but explaining that he was very busy, to which Chrysostom replied that no excuses were needed, since he did not wish to deprive others of his skill.<sup>49</sup>

Sir William Ramsay in his study of the Church of Lycaonia in the fourth century describes the tombstone of Aurelius Priscus which he dated about 340. The tombstone, which is engraved with an elaborate Christian ornamentation, described the deceased as an excellent physician during the sixty years of his life.<sup>50</sup>

Other fourth century and fifth century sepulchral inscriptions of otherwise unknown Christian physicians are collected by Capparoni,<sup>51</sup> who confined his study mainly to finds at Rome. Two of the descriptions definitely specify the Christian physicians as πνευματικός, presumably indicating that they held Pneumatic medical views. Other inscriptions

show Christians occupying various positions from that of medical slave (medicus domesticus), to that of public medical officer (archiater). The inscriptions as a whole add weight to the argument that scientific medicine was widely accepted by Christians of that period.

#### Analogous use of medical terms in Christian writings

Frequent allusions to the work of physicians in analogous illustrations indicate that the skill of the physician was an accepted part of the life of the community. St. Jerome is particularly noted for the large number of medical similes or metaphors throughout his works. He gives details of physicians visiting patients, their diagnosis and their prescription of diet or drugs. The actions of cutting and cauterizing often serve to supply spiritual analogies, and similarly the relationship of patient (sinner) to the physician (the Saviour). Thus Christ is described as physician in such terms as verus medicus, solus medicus, ipse et medicus et medicamentum, verus archiater and quasi spiritualis Hippocrates. A. S. Pease in his study, Medical Allusions in the Works of St. Jerome,<sup>52</sup> suggests that Jerome's use of these terms came partly from his own reading of medical writings such as Galen and Pliny; partly through his own sicknesses and those of his friends, many of whom his letters show to have succumbed to illness; and partly from a general inheritance of ideas from classical and patristic authors. In general, Jerome's attitude to medicine and treatment is a fairly scientific one, but he naturally holds that prayer assists recovery and that physicians

labour in vain without the help of the Lord. The fire and the knife, and to be watched that he neither eat nor Gregory of Nazianzus compares the office of the priest, will endure, that he may die a little later, and the physician of the soul, with the physician of the body. He never die. If God, who is the Heavenly Physician admits that the diagnosis of the physician by enquiry into place, wouldst thou say, but "Yes".  
time, age and season, and the prescription of medicine or Augustines, the other educated son of his age, was a treatment by cautery or knife is arduous, but not as exacting general knowledge with the physician of souls. The doctor's patient as the work of the physician of souls. The doctor's patient is willing to reveal his disease and usually submits to treatment, but few are willing to reveal sin, the disease of the soul, and submit it to healing treatment.<sup>53</sup>

John Chrysostom, for his part, regards the curing of the soul as easier than the curing of the body. He notes that when a man is sick in body, physicians are readily called in, money is spent in fees and medicines, and pain is endured to produce a cure. Yet the cure of the soul requires no expense and no pain. Moreover concern over bodily sickness is ultimately of no avail for death will eventually destroy the body; the health of the soul is essential and should not be neglected.<sup>54</sup> Chrysostom seems to hold the view that the body consists of four elements - warm, dry, moist and cold<sup>55</sup> - and to endorse the treatment of applying contraries.<sup>56</sup>

The same concern over bodily and temporal matters and a corresponding neglect of spiritual and eternal matters is condemned in one of the sermons of Augustine:

Consider, brethren, how a physician is entreated for the preservation of temporal health; how, if anyone is desperately ill, is he ashamed or slow to throw himself at a man's feet? to bathe in tears the footsteps of any able chief physician? And what if the physician say to him, "Thou canst not else be cured, except I bind thee, and use the knife and fire?" He will answer, "Do what thou wilt, only cure me."

With what eagerness does he long for the health of a few days, fleeting as a vapour, that for it he

is content to be bound, and submit to the fire and the knife, and to be watched that he neither eat nor drink what, or when he pleases. All this he will endure, that he may die a little later; and yet he will not endure ever so little, that he may never die. If God, who is the Heavenly Physician over us saith to thee, "Wilt thou be cured?" what wouldst thou say but "Yes". 57

Augustine, like other educated men of his age, had a general knowledge of the standard physiological opinions of his day and was able to use physiological terms in theological reasoning and expect to be understood by his hearers.

With scientific medicine forming part of a general education it is easy to see that there was plenty of opportunity for charlatans to claim to be physicians, and use what knowledge they had to extort money from others. Gregory of Nyssa recalls how a certain Aetius gained the rank of physician. Aetius had escaped from serfdom in a vineyard and after performing some menial tasks became an assistant to a physician. Not liking his subordinate position he persuaded a foreigner, in some underhand way, to pay him to be his physician. Desiring to be fully recognised, he began to attend medical congresses and join in the disputes, without, it appears, very much knowledge. 58

Medical Saints

Some of the saintly pioneer evangelists in rustic areas beyond the influence of Greek thought might seem to the ignorant peasant to possess supernatural powers. Many of the miraculous cures related may well be due solely to superior knowledge. It is reported that St. Martin of Tours cured a potentially fatal snake bite by placing his finger by the wound, gathering the poison spot, and drawing out the mixture of poison

*ecclesi*

and blood.<sup>59</sup> On another occasion he cleared the eye of  
physician applied during the process of the 60 years.  
Paulinus with a brush when it began to go cloudy. These  
incidents are treated as miraculous events.

Two saints particularly associated with healing in  
Christian tradition were SS. Cosmas & Damian. Tradition has it  
that they were twin brothers who practised medicine at the port  
of Aegae in Cilicia. They gained for themselves the title of  
'Silverless martyrs' because of their custom of seeking no pay  
when in the service of the poor, using this as their means of  
winning many to Christ. They were beheaded in 303 during the  
Diocletianic persecution.

After their deaths legends grew up around their lives  
and they became the centre of a cult, with churches dedicated to  
them in Constantinople, Rome and elsewhere.<sup>61</sup>

The attitude of the Church to medicine

By the beginning of the fifth century scientific  
medicine had become fully acceptable to Christians and was  
regarded as a gift of God. Chrysostom preaching against  
Christians use of superstitious practices uses as one argument  
the fact that the Hellenes (i.e. the pagans) will scarcely be  
convinced of Christianity if Christians use practices which the  
Hellenes themselves reject. 'Was it for this,' he asks, 'that  
God gave physicians and medicines?'<sup>62</sup>

Likewise Augustine says:

For after a medical man has administered a cure, in  
order that the patient may be afterwards duly nourished  
with body elements and aliments, for the completion  
and continuance of the said cure by suitable means  
and help, he commends him to God's good care, who  
bestows these aids on all who live in the flesh, and

from whom proceeded even those means which (the physician) applied during the process of the cure. For it is not out of any resources which he himself has created that the medical man effects any cure, but out of the resources of Him who created all things which are required by the whole and the sick. 63

The overall picture shows that the Early Church was not, in general, hostile to scientific medicine. There may have been a dislike of particular practices and theories, and the appeal of science may have been more attractive to some classes and cultures than to others, but the attitudes revealed by the writings of the Fathers on medical details, the passing references to Christian physicians, and the use of medical terms by way of analogy, give an impression that the early Church was favourably inclined towards Greek scientific medicine. Perhaps the verdict of the period can be summarized by the answer to the question put in the Longer Rule of St. Basil, namely, 'whether the use of medical remedies is consistent with the ideal of piety?'<sup>64</sup>

The main theme of St. Basil's reply is that each of the arts has been given by God to supplement the deficiencies of nature, and he compares the healing art with agriculture and weaving. Agriculture gives supplementary food from the earth as natural growth is not sufficient, and weaving hides our indecency and protects us from the extremes of the weather. If man still remained in the Paradise situation there would be no need for agriculture or clothing or for healing; but since through sin we are subject to destruction and disease we are given the healing art to help us in our need. Moreover in the same way that a lack of moderation can lead to excesses of diet and fashion, so we are to beware of making wrong use of the medical art.

The fact that the art of medicine is sometimes abused

is no reason for neglecting the gift which God has given to men. To avoid entirely the benefit of medicine shows a contentious spirit, but on occasions when medical assistance is not available it must be understood that not all hope of alleviation of ills rests in the medical art. A Christian should not assign to medicine the whole cause of health and sickness, but rather accept the use of its remedies as designed for the glory of God and as a type of the care of souls.

Basil also uses the analogy that just as a man travelling on a ship entrusts the rudder to the pilot but prays to God to be preserved from the sea, so the introduction of a doctor in case of sickness does not imply a loss of trust in God or provide a reason for not praying. It makes no difference whether the care of God has come invisibly or through some physical means, it remains the care of God.

The original question suggests that there must have been some discussion at the time either on the place of spiritual healing in the monastery or on the degree to which one should simply accept suffering as the will of God. Although promoting the cause of medicine Basil also concedes that there is some place for relying for help on the command of the Lord and for bearing pain without seeking alleviation where this is thought of as a means of testing or a form of punishment from God. He concludes that whether medicine is used or avoided for one of the reasons just given, whatever is done should be done to the glory of God. The general tone of his reply suggests that he is clearly in favour of medical practice but that he respects the views of those who reject medical help on principle, as opposed to those who would merely be contentious. The opinion of Basil expressed in a monastic rule would have a wide influence

not only in the succeeding decades but in the centuries of monastic life that followed.

The views of medical historians

In contrast, the verdicts of some medical historians on the influence of Christianity attribute to the Church's influence a decline in scientific medicine. They do so without a great deal of substantial evidence. Withington<sup>65</sup> criticises the Church on three counts; namely, for helping to restore primitive theories of disease; for imposing restrictions on free thought and investigation; and for giving rise to vehement religious controversies which absorbed the intellectual energies of the age.

Guthrie,<sup>66</sup> although admitting that Christianity has generally favoured the advance of medicine and noting the debt to the monks in their patient copying of many ancient works, considers the early Church had a retarding influence on the development of medical science. He claims the early Christians denied to physicians the power of healing lest the position of the 'Great Physician' was impaired. He also states that the sensible views of Hippocrates were denied, that the thinking about disease was similar to that of the followers of Aesculapius, and that in the early days no other method of healing except by miracles 'was admitted or permitted by bigoted Christians'. He notes too the restrictions imposed on dissection which deterred students from medical training, and the attraction of able minds to the theological disputes of the age. His criticisms have some validity and are perhaps more justifiable

in the period of the early Middle Ages, but would seem less reasonable in view of the evidence presented of the interest of the early fathers in medicine. Not all historians attribute the decay of medical science to Christians. Singer<sup>67</sup> maintains that science was already decaying before Christianity was in a position to have any real effect on pagan thought. Halliday<sup>68</sup> notes that the progressive decline of scientific rationalism was a general and continuous process which began before Christianity had been preached. Christian thought shared, but did not impose, the intellectual limitations of the period. Many factors have to be taken into account in assessing the decline of scientific thought in the first Christian centuries. There were threats to the Roman Empire from within and without, periods of war and political unrest and a collapse in the economy in the third century. Periodic plagues and epidemics had a demoralising influence on the population. Castiglioni<sup>69</sup> points out that the inability of physicians to cope with these outbreaks of disease would result in lack of faith in scientific medicines and an attraction towards supernatural aid of all kinds. It is in this kind of atmosphere that the influence of Christianity has to be considered.

The rise of monasticism and the later encouragement given to secular learning within the monastic community did give rise to compiling works of general knowledge. This included the copying of medical writings particularly those of Hippocrates and Galen. Medical information from such sources is found in the Etymologiae<sup>70</sup> which was compiled by Isidore of Seville (c.560-636).

Moreover the monasteries were not only interested in

academic study but were deeply concerned with the practical caring of the sick. Christianity sounded an altruistic note in the midst of the despair of the age by proclaiming the duty to care for the sick and by the provision of hospitals. Thus the positive contribution of Christianity to medicine lay in the spheres of the conservation of medical knowledge and in practical charity, possibly also in the promotion of health by curbing men's sensual appetite.

One interesting side-effect of religious controversy was the closure of the Christian theological and medical school and hospital at Edessa in 489 because of its Nestorian beliefs. Many members fled, with their own Arabic translations of Greek medical writings, into Persia to refound their school.<sup>71</sup> From there, a century or so later, these translated Greek works were to be used by Muslim doctors in the renewed Islamic interest in scientific medicine. Although Arabian medicine added little that was new to medical thought, it kept alive something of the spirit of Greek medicine until the new era of scientific development in the seventeenth century.

## Chapter 2

## PRACTICAL CARING

Graeco-Roman care of the sick

From considerations of medical knowledge and the theory of disease, we turn to the work of practical care for the sick in the Graeco-Roman and Christian world.

It is easy to imagine how the first small institutions for the care of the sick developed. Some of the patients who were brought along to the surgery (*ἰατρείον*) of the physician would require constant attention or would be too ill to be moved, so the physician would accommodate them in his own home. Thus he would need to have a small 'sick bay' as an essential part of his house where he and his attendants could provide more closely supervised treatment. Evidence for these *ἰατρεία* are found in Greek writings from the fourth century B.C., and it is quite likely that in the larger towns, under the more renowned physicians, the in-patient accommodation so increased in size that a separate building with many assistants and slaves was necessary.<sup>1</sup>

Although these *ἰατρεία* were associated with the home of the physician it is quite possible that in some towns they were provided by the municipal authorities. The early concern of the Greek city-state for its members would include those of its number who were sick, and the earliest evidence for some form of public medical officer is found at the close of the sixth century B.C. with the story of Democedes of Croton.<sup>2</sup>

By the fourth century B.C. the office of public medical officer appears to have been recognised throughout Greece. Aristophanes<sup>3</sup> in his references to Pittalus the public doctor, implies that he did not always charge fees. Allbut suggests it was probable that the Greek medical officers were obliged to attend all citizens, whether rich or poor, without fee, but might be permitted to receive fees from their wealthier patients. This latter point suggests that the poor may not in fact have received much attention unless their public doctor was particularly conscientious. That there were those who were conscientious is indicated by some of the inscriptions set up in their honour. One example, given by Allbut,<sup>4</sup> recalls a certain Menocritus who, working for citizens and strangers alike, continued his duties in time of pestilence and received no salary but lived in poverty.

The function of public medical officer continued into the Christian era, and in A.D.160 Antonius Pius regulated the duty of these men and fixed the establishment for large cities between seven and ten. In Rome and the West the title of *ἀγίατρος* described this office, although the origin of the title seems to have been oriental and to have been first applied in the West to Andromachus, the physician of Nero, by Galen. Constantine understood the term to refer to an official with powers over the Imperial doctors but the title was also used by Valentinian in A.D.373 in his appointment of fourteen physicians to the fourteen regions of Rome, and seven to the regions of Constantinople. The functions of these men included attending poor citizens free of charge and teaching their art of medicine to the sons of poor free-men.

Some form of public medical service seems therefore

to have been available from the fourth century B.C., and to have continued into the Christian era. It is impossible to tell just how effective this system was from the point of view of a poor person seeking medical treatment, or whether it was any more effective under the direction of Christian emperors than it had been under pagan emperors. One can only presume that the work would be carried out in accordance with the zeal and compassion of the individual employed. However, it is noteworthy that theoretically the sick citizens of all the great cities and many of the towns were able to receive free treatment if they were unable to pay.

The only other place where the general public could obtain some form of free medical treatment was at the temples of the various healing deities, although a man would be expected to make an offering according to his means or the effectiveness of the power of the god. The place of the healing gods in the life of the period will be discussed later, but it would be useful at this point to give some details of the facilities available at these temples.

The main event of a visit to the healing temple was the practice of incubation. The patient would be directed by the priests to spend a night at the incubation hall during which the god would appear, either in a dream or when the patient was drowsy. The healing deity would either effect a complete cure, perform some form of surgery, prescribe some drugs or indicate other forms of treatment. The priests at the temple would initiate the treatment. The visitor to the temple had to wait until the night specified by the priests, and this meant, at the larger temples at any rate, that some form of hostel would have to be provided for the sick visitors. Moreover on occasion the god might advise a lengthy course of treatment and prescribe

remedies which the patient was not able to afford outside the temple. He would therefore have to remain on in the hostel receiving treatment from the priests. It is unlikely that any were turned away on grounds of poverty and Asclepius, particularly, was noted for his generosity.

The larger temples provided other facilities as well as sleeping accommodation. There might be baths and covered colonnaded walks, or even a theatre as excavated at Pergamon. In fact the plan of the temple of Asclepius at Pergamon has some similarities to that of a monastery. Clearly, the local shrines would be on a very much smaller scale, but it is important to note that there was some practical care for the sick on a pagan religious basis in the pre-Christian and early Christian centuries.

Other medical treatment was available for members of specialised groups, notably, for the army. Not only were doctors required to tend wounds after battle; as the conquests of the Empire took them into less civilised parts, the soldiers were in greater danger of being afflicted by disease. At first the dispensaries of the military doctors would be mobile units travelling with the conquering armies; but, when the army began to build forts, more permanent nursing units seem to have been set up. Roman military hospitals have been discovered near Vienna, near Dusseldorf, and at Baden in Switzerland. These excavations provide the earliest evidence of medical institutions planned on similar lines to those of modern hospitals. A series of rooms, presumably wards, led off corridors, and other rooms were used as pharmacies and surgeries. The sanitary arrangements were also well planned. These hospitals date from about the beginning of the second century A.D.

Considerable evidence from inscriptions is available concerning the various ranks of the military physicians. There are details concerning the medicus cohortis and medicus legionis, and also epitaphs of medici of the naval triremes 'Cupid', 'Tiger' and 'Faith'.<sup>5</sup> The position of the medicus was that of a non-combatant and he had the right of restoration of material loss incurred through his absence on military service.

Other groups receiving specialised treatment were athletes and gladiators, and there were also physicians for actors, and for some of the tradesmen's guilds in Rome. At a later date valetudinaria were made available for sick slaves. On the whole slaves were looked after in illness by the household to which they belonged, but if they became chronically ill they ceased to be of any value or use to their master. In Rome it had long been the custom for some masters to expose their sick and worn-out slaves on the island temple of Asclepius in the Tiber to save the trouble of treating them. During the first century A.D. the Emperor Claudius decreed that slaves left on the island were free and need not return to their masters if they recovered. This valetudinarianism became a haven for the sick poor for centuries.

Much of the practical concern of the Romans for health lay not in the caring of the sick but in the prevention of disease by excellent sanitary and hygienic facilities. Underground sewers were laid in Rome, streets were kept clean, no burials were allowed within the city walls and fresh water was distributed by means of aqueducts.

Thus by the time Christianity was beginning to wield some influence, free medical treatment was available, at least in theory, in large towns and for members of specialized groups.

Military hospitals and *ἰατρεία*, some possibly municipal, had been built to deal with 'stretcher cases'. For those unable to obtain these services and for those in rural areas there might be a healing temple available to provide some form of help in time of sickness.

### The Christian duty to the sick

Some criticism has been made of the Church in its failure to take advantage and build on the municipal medical services that already existed. Whether the criticism is justifiable or not, it is quite clear that, from the very earliest times, Christians regarded the care of the sick an essential part of their religious duty. The Scriptural basis for their beliefs lay in Matthew 25:31-46, in the explanation and expansion that follows the parable of the sheep and the goats.

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

(Matt. 25:37-40) R.S.V.

The duty of the elders to visit the sick is laid down by James 5:14, and also one might include the command of St. Paul:

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

(Gal. 6:10) R.S.V.

This latter verse, in fact, indicates the kind of emphasis that Christians must have had to put on their activities

in the early years. It may seem to our twentieth century way of thinking that the concern of the Early Church for its own members may have been a somewhat selfish one, but it must be remembered that this would have been necessary in view of the social background of their time, and their own precarious social position. Moreover, since Christianity was regarded with great suspicion by those outside the Church, it is unlikely that many opportunities to visit non-Christians arose. However, if the visiting of the sick tended at times to be restricted to its own members, the Church was always willing to exercise its gifts of healing for the benefit of all and, under inspired leaders like Cyprian, to tend all in times of plague.

The duty of visiting the sick was a function of the officers of the Church and is laid as an obligation on bishops, presbyters, deacons, exorcists, widows and virgins. One of the earliest references to this duty is found in St. Polycarp (c.69-155) in Epistle to the Philippians where he states that it is the duty of the presbyters to visit all the infirm.<sup>6</sup> Cyprian writing to his presbyters and deacons exhorts them to take care of the widows, the sick and the poor.<sup>7</sup> He bases his injunction to visit the sick on the Scripture passages of Matthew 25:36 (already noted), and Ecclesiasticus 7:39 ("Be not slack to visit the sick man; for from these things thou shalt be strengthened in love.").<sup>8</sup>

Lactantius, in explaining what he understands by the true virtue of justice, condemns those who only bestow gifts and aid on those who can later return it, or on relations and friends whose neglect would incur the censure of others. A Christian should give and work for those who can give no reward, nor expect any reward.

To undertake the care and support of the sick who need someone to assist them is the part of the greatest kindness, and of great beneficence; and he who shall do this will both gain a living sacrifice to God, and that which he has given to God for a time he will himself receive from God for eternity. 9

In this, again, the basis of the duty is in the nature of a gift to God made through giving help to another.

Jerome in a letter to Nepotian on his duties as a presbyter says it is his duty to visit the sick, and also notes that anything he learns in confidence in any kind of visiting is to be guarded and kept as the physician obeys the oath of Hippocrates.<sup>10</sup> In another letter to the aristocratic young lady, Demetrias, who was about to take the veil as a professed virgin, Jerome tells her that it is her duty 'to clothe Christ in the poor, to visit Him in the sick, to feed Him in the hungry, to shelter Him in the homeless, particularly such as are of the household of faith ....'<sup>11</sup> Clearly Jerome has both Matthew 25 and Galations 6 in mind, and finds a theological justification for his exhortations in the notion of visiting Christ in the persons of the sick.

The duty of the bishop to visit the sick is noted in the Apostolic Tradition dating from the early third century.

And let each of the deacons with the subdeacons attend upon the bishop; and let it be reported to him who are sick, that if it seem good to the bishop he may visit them; for the sick man is much comforted that the high priest remembered him. 12

From other Church Orders information is obtainable on the duties of deacons, deaconesses and widows. It is the part of the duty of the deacon to take the reserved sacrament to members of the congregation when ill, but if the patient was a woman, a deaconess might be employed.<sup>13</sup> It was thought both more fitting and less likely to cause suspicion if a sick

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woman living in a heathen household was visited by a deaconess, who would be able to help in a practical way by washing the patient and caring for her generally.<sup>14</sup> The emphasis on the use of deaconesses for reasons of modesty is made by Epiphanius:

Though there is an order of deaconesses in the Church, yet it is not for priestly service, nor to undertake anything of the sort, but on account of the modesty of the female sex with a view to either the occasion of baptism, or of inspection of illness, or of suffering, and when the woman's body is bared, so that it may not be seen by the men officiating, but by the deaconess, who is directed by the priest to see to the woman when her body is bared. <sup>15</sup>

Widows were also to visit the sick and might lay hands on them at the command of the bishop or deacon.<sup>16</sup> Commodian, in giving instruction that the sick are not to be visited empty-handed, states that if a sister is sick, the matrons are to take her food.<sup>17</sup>

### Sickness in Christians

The early Christians then considered the visitation of the sick as a prime duty, especially those of the 'household of faith'. What evidence is there of Christians who were, in fact, ill?

There would seem to be definite evidence from the New Testament of at least four followers of Christ being ill.

In Acts 9:36,37 there is the story of the healing of the disciple Tabitha of Joppa, who had fallen sick and died. Timothy is exhorted to 'no longer drink only water, but to use a little wine for the sake of his stomach and his frequent ailments.' (I Timothy 5:23). From St. Paul's epistles we also learn of Trophimus, who was left ill at Miletus, (II Timothy 4:20) and of Epaphroditus, the messenger for the Philippians, who was

ill and near to death (Philippians 2:26,27). Whether St. Paul himself can be classed in this group of sick Christians is open to dispute depending on the interpretation of the ambiguous "thorn in the flesh". Whatever St. Paul's affliction may have been - whether physical, mental or spiritual - it is looked on by some of the Fathers as a physical malady, and as such is a source of inspiration amid their own physical infirmities.

The two centuries following the New Testament writings do not provide any notable instances of Christians being ill. The exhortations to visit the sick and the evidence of the liturgical custom of the deacons taking the eucharistic elements to the sick indicates, as we should expect that Christians were subject to sickness.

From a later period there is evidence that the Fathers themselves suffered from ill-health and none more than St. Basil of Caesarea. Basil tells in his letters how he suffered from ill-health from early manhood,<sup>18</sup> and came to regard his sickness as a natural infirmity. The illness seems to have been some form of chronic complaint,<sup>19</sup> although the Saint records that he also suffered from fever, diarrhoea, intestinal disturbance,<sup>20</sup> and quartan ague.<sup>21</sup> It would seem that some of Basil's sickness was brought on by extremes of asceticism or was of nervous origin, and he often regrets not dying. Many of the Saint's letters mention his ailments<sup>22</sup> and make reference to sickness among his colleagues.<sup>23</sup>

In one letter, referring to a certain Hypatius, Basil says:

You know how ill he is. It distresses me to think that all hope of comfort is cut off for him, as those who have the gifts of healing have not been allowed to apply their usual remedies in his case. Wherefore again he implores the aid of your prayers. 24

In another letter to Deacon Eustathius it is recorded

that Basil remained with him when he was ill for two months.<sup>25</sup>

Jerome also seems to have suffered sickness. He recalls that he was in bed for five days with a burning fever,<sup>26</sup> and a year later he is writing that a severe illness seized him and he was brought to the threshold of death. From this, he claimed that he was saved by the mercy of God and the prayers of his friends.<sup>27</sup>

In his long letter on the life of Paula, Jerome said,

In her frequent sicknesses and infirmities she used to say, "When I am weak then I am strong. (II Corinthians 12:10) We have our treasure in earthen vessels" (II Corinthians 4:7) until "this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality" (I Corinthians 15:54). Again "as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ" (II Corinthians 1:5) and then, "as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation." (II Corinthians 1:7) 28

Paula finds consolation for her sufferings in the words of St. Paul, but is strangely quiet on the healing power of Christ to cure her infirmities.

Gregory of Nazianzus recalls in a letter a sickness which reduced him almost to immobility<sup>29</sup> and in other letters tells of the illness of his saintly mother and amongst his friends.<sup>30</sup>

St. John Chrysostom is known to have suffered from some infirmity which compelled him to remain at home when he would have otherwise been addressing the people.<sup>31</sup> He also noted that Scripture tells of Paul and Timothy being ill,<sup>32</sup> and says of the Apostles in general:

Since they used to perform many great and astonishing signs and wonders, God suffered them constantly to be scourged, to be expelled, to inhabit the dungeon, to encounter bodily infirmities, to be in continual tribulations, lest the greatness of their miracles should make them to be accounted as gods amongst mankind. 33

John goes on to say that God did not remove the Apostles' infirmities because He wanted to give full proof of their frail nature. It is clear that Chrysostom saw a problem in the fact that the Apostles had been capable of miracles of healing and yet suffered sickness themselves. A similar problem faces us in the case of saints of the Early Church who are credited with healings and yet themselves were in poor health. Perhaps Chrysostom's solution to the problem of the Apostles is applicable to all the saints who, after all, were followers of One of whom it was said, 'He saved others, Himself he cannot save'.

Christian action in time of plague

The opportunity for Christians to show compassion and give practical help to the sick was inevitably increased during the periods of plague that swept through the Mediterranean area during the early Christian centuries. The appalling effects of the pestilence filled the populace with terror and led to the breakdown of natural ties and feelings. It was a case of 'every man for himself' resulting in the desertion of the sick by those who should have cared for them; the neglect of the dead, whose unburied corpses were flung into the street; and general disorganisation and demoralisation.

The mid-second century outbreak of plague, supplies us with most of our details regarding Christian reaction to a crisis. It spread to Egypt from Ethiopia and raged across the civilised world for a period of twenty years before returning again to Egypt. In 252 the plague struck Carthage; in 261 it was back delivering a severe blow to Alexandria; and at its

height it is said to have killed 5,000 people in Rome in a single day. It is against this background that we learn of at least two examples of self-sacrifice by the early Christians.

At Carthage, Cyprian appealed to the authority of Matthew 5:46 when he exhorted his flock not only to care for fellow-Christians but for all who were in distress. Details of Cyprian's work at Carthage are found in his biography by the deacon Pontius. Pontius describes the effect of the plague and the selfish instincts it brought out, and how Cyprian "on the people assembled together in one place, first of all urged the benefits of mercy, teaching by examples from divine lessons, how greatly the duties of benevolence avail to deserve well of God. Then afterwards he subjoined that there was nothing wonderful in our cherishing our own people only with the needed attentions of love, but that he might become perfect who would do something more than the publican or the heathen, who, overcoming evil with good, and practising a clemency which was like the divine clemency, loved even his enemies".<sup>34</sup>

Yet despite his work, and the organisation of relief during the plague, Cyprian was still to be persecuted, banished, and finally put to death for his loyalty to Christ.

The scene in Alexandria is even more vividly described by Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria in 263 when the plague was at its worst.

Now, indeed, everything is tears and everyone is mourning, and wailings resound daily through the city because of the multitude of the dead and dying.

The most of our brethren were unsparing in their exceeding love and brotherly kindness. They held fast to each other and visited the sick fearlessly and ministered to them continuously, serving them in Christ. And they died with them most joyfully, taking the afflictions of others, and drawing the sickness from their neighbours to themselves and willingly receiving their pains. And many who cared for the sick and gave strength to others died

themselves, having transferred to themselves their death. And the popular saying which always seems a mere expression of courtesy, they then made real in action, taking their departure as the others' offscouring (περίψημα).

Truly the best of our brethren departed from life in this manner, including some presbyters and deacons and those of the people who had the highest reputation; so that this form of death, through the great piety and strong faith it exhibited, seemed to lack nothing of martyrdom.

They took the bodies of the saints in their open hands and in their bosoms, and closed their eyes and their mouths; and they bore them away on their shoulders and laid them out; and they clung to them and embraced them, and they prepared them suitably with washings and garments. After a little while they received like treatment themselves, for the survivors were continually following those who had gone before them.

But with the heathen everything was quite otherwise. They deserted those who began to be sick, and fled from their dearest friends. They cast them out into the streets when they were half-dead, and left the dead like refuse, unburied. They shunned any participation or fellowship with death; which yet, with all precautions, it was not easy for them to escape. 35

This description gives a sharp contrast between the actions of Christians and non-Christians both in the care of the sick and the treatment of the corpses. In Alexandria there seems to be no emphasis on the Christians helping non-Christians, and their acts of devotion and self-sacrifice are directed only to 'those of the household of faith'. However the Christians of both Alexandria and Carthage had had their share of persecution and it would be understandably human of them not necessarily to think of their enemies in such trying times.

#### The growth of Christian institutions for the sick

In view of the existence of secular medical services and institutions in the early Christian period, and also of the

Christian sense of obligation towards the sick, it was to be expected that the church would, at some stage, want to establish her own institutions for those who could not be cared for in any other way. Their precarious position before Constantine, and the general level of poverty, would seem to have prevented any formal construction of Christian medical institutions at this period. It is highly likely, however, that much took place on an informal basis, and that the various institutions which sprang up in the fourth century were only an extension and crystallization of what the Church had been doing since her inception. The sick, the poor, the traveller, and the homeless had always been in the world and would have been the concern both of Christian congregations and of their individual members. This would seem to be the case from the New Testament period onwards. Indeed, to some extent it was inherited from Judaism.

When Christian medical institutions were finally organized, they were established for a wide variety of purposes. This is revealed in their titles in the fourth century, including the hostels for travellers ( *ξενοδοχεῖα* ), for the poor ( *πτωχοτροφεία* ), for orphans ( *ἑρφανοτροφεία* ), for foundlings ( *βρεφοτροφεία* ), for the aged ( *γεροντοκομεῖα* ), and for the sick ( *νοσκομεῖα* ). However some of the earlier institutions were used for several or all of these purposes, and it is impossible to say definitely when the first hospital for the sick alone was established. Even St. Basil's hospital served as a hostel for travellers and a home for the poor. Obviously a hostel served by a religious community or established by a Christian congregation would try to cope with any kind of need, and those that were established for more specialised functions may well have tended to be the results of personal acts of charity.

Specific dates and places for the first establishments are not available, but a letter attributed to Julian the Apostate written in 362 to Arsacius, the high priest of Galatia, gives us a picture of the scene fifty years after the edict of Constantine.

In every city establish frequent hostels in order that strangers may profit by our benevolence; I do not mean for our people only, but for others also who are in need of money. I have but now made a plan by which you may be well provided for this; for I have given directions that 30,000 modii of corn shall be assigned every year for the whole of Galatia, and 60,000 pints of wine. I order that one fifth of this be used for the poor who serve the priests, and the remainder be distributed by us to strangers and beggars. For it is disgraceful that, when no Jew ever has to beg, and the impious Galileans support not only their own poor but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us. 36

Even when allowance is made for doubt about the validity of this letter as being that of Julian, it reflects what we would expect from our knowledge of the times and the picture in the subsequent decades.

Ten years after Julian's letter we can be sure that St. Basil's great hospital on the outskirts of Caesarea had been established, for Basil wrote a letter in 372 defending its size and manpower.

Basil's foundation may have been influenced by the work of Eustathius whom he admired. Eustathius had founded coenobitic monasticism in Armenia and devised a rule for religious communities. He was appointed to the see of Sebaste by the year 357 and one of his first acts was to set up a home for the poor. As a conciliatory gesture to a certain Aerius who had had his eyes on the bishopric, Eustathius had put him in charge of the home. It would seem therefore that to preside over a hospice for the poor was regarded as a post of some importance in the Church at the time.

A picture of Basil's hospital can be built up from the known references about it - the first being the letter of 372, already mentioned, in which Basil says:

But to whom do we do any harm by building a place of entertainment for strangers, both for those who are on a journey and for those who require medical treatment on account of sickness, and so establishing a means of giving these men the comfort they want, physicians, doctors, means of conveyance and escort? All these men must learn such occupations as are necessary to life and have been found essential to a respectable career; they must also have buildings suitable for their employments, all of which are an honour to the place, and, as their reputation is credited to our governor, confer glory on him. 37

It seems clear from this reference, and from others that follow, that St. Basil's institution was much more than a local hostel and was in fact an extensive unit for the care of those in need. There were numerous buildings and many people involved in the work, so that the hospital could be described by Gregory of Nazianzus as a "new city". In these circumstances, it is not unreasonable that St. Basil should be regarded as the founder of the first Christian hospital, although, as has already been indicated, the term hospital at that time included care of the traveller and the welfare of the poor, as well as treatment for the sick.

St. Basil wrote two other letters<sup>38</sup> in connection with the hospital he had set up. Both were addressed to accountants of different name and it is possible that they were the two numerarii of the province. In both letters Basil is seeking for tax exemption on his institution and tells each accountant that 'his colleague' has already promised to relieve the assessment on the property. In his letters he calls his institution a home for the poor (κτωχοτροφεία) and in the second letter indicates that there were already other such homes

and refers to one by name at Amasea, which the accountant already helps to support. It may have been that *πτωχοτροφεία* were already subject to tax exemption and Basil so classifies his "new city" in order that it might come within this category, although the tax-collectors think otherwise. The fact that Basil is involved in a tax assessment of this kind is a further indication that his hospital was in the nature of an innovation. The second letter also suggests that the choreiscopeus was the manager of the home for the poor, and it is possible that small homes for the needy were already in being in each district of the choreoscopi.

Further description of the 'Basiliad' is given by Gregory of Nazianzus in his panegyric on St. Basil.

Go forth a little way from the city, and behold the new city, the storehouse of piety, the common treasury of the wealthy, in which the superfluities of their wealth, aye, and even their necessities, are stored, in consequence of his exhortations, freed from the power of the moth, no longer gladdening the eyes of the thief, and escaping both the emulation of envy and the corruption of time: where disease is regarded in a religious light, and disaster is thought a blessing, and sympathy is put to the test ....

There is no longer before our eyes that terrible and piteous spectacle of men who are living corpses, the greater part of whose limbs are mortified, driven away from their cities and homes and public places and fountains, aye, and from their own dearest ones, recognizable by their names rather than by their features .... He however it was, who took the lead in pressing upon those who were men, that they ought not to despise their fellowmen, nor to dishonour Christ, the one Head of all, by their inhuman treatment of them; but to use the misfortune of others as an opportunity of firmly establishing their own lot, and to lend to God that mercy of which they stand in need at His hands ....

Basil's care was for the sick, and the relief of their wounds and the imitation of Christ, by cleansing leprosy - not by a word, but in deed. 39

This passage reveals both Basil's method of raising money for his hospital and his concern for lepers. He appealed to the wealthy for financial assistance and it is hinted elsewhere

that he may even have been prepared to play off one benefactor against another in order to increase their giving. The theological basis for the work of caring for the lepers is regarded by Gregory as being done in imitation of Christ's own work, in order not to dishonour Christ who is head of all men whatever their physical disabilities.

However if physical disabilities did not debar a man from the attention of the Church, spiritual or moral disabilities might. A question from the Shorter Rule of St. Basil (No.155) asks this;

'We who serve the sick in hospital are taught to serve them with such a disposition as if they were brothers of the Lord. Now if the man who receives our service cannot be given this title, how ought we to attend him?'

In the reply it is stated, 'that he needs first of all exhortation and admonition from the Superior. But if he persists in the same conduct, the condemnation pronounced by the same Lord clearly rests upon him: "The bondservant abideth not in the house," (John 8:35), and that by the apostle who advised, "Put away the wicked man from among yourselves," (I Corinthians 5:13). In this way those who serve will be free from doubt and all who live together will be in safety'.<sup>40</sup>

It is difficult to know how one ought to interpret this section in the Rule. It can be taken that St. Basil's hospital was intended primarily to strengthen influence and power of the Church and therefore spiritual discipline at all costs had to be preserved, and thus the hospital was not as philanthropic as it first appeared.<sup>41</sup> However this would depend on the degree of the misconduct, and it is clear from the answer that only the persistent offender is condemned.

This would suggest that the hospital, like any institution, had to have its rules for the well-being of all and those who refused to co-operate would have to accept the consequences.

How far the hospital would be prepared to welcome non-believers is never clearly specified, but probably many nominal Christians were received. It may be presumed that pagans with strong objections to Christianity would not want to go to a Christian hospital in any case.

Apart from the great hospital at Caesarea the evidence of other institutions is scanty. At Constantinople it is recorded that the Empress Flacilla (d. 385), the first wife of Theodosius the Great, visited the guest chambers of the Churches and performed such mundane tasks as cooking, feeding and washing-up for the poor, the sick and the crippled. Flacilla is noted as an example of the aristocratic lady who, because of all that she had been given by Christ, now gave her own service to the Giver in terms of charity and practical caring.<sup>42</sup>

This reference confirms the likelihood of many churches having their own small hostels for those who were suffering in some way or other. That this was true at least for Antioch is seen from Chrysostom when he declared that it was not sufficient for Christians to know that provisions were given and a hostel run by the Church, and all that was needed was to support that, but that they as individuals should be prepared to look after the traveller, the poor and the sick, and to set apart a room in their home for a guest, namely, for Christ.<sup>43</sup> John's theology is based on the Matthaean notion of finding Christ in the sick and the poor.

Chrysostom set his own example and on his arrival as Patriarch of Constantinople in 397 sold much of the episcopal

wardrobe, plate and works of art, and used the proceeds for almsgiving. He dressed simply, ate sparingly and alone. Much of his money went on the maintenance of the hospital ( *νοσοκομείον* ), and it appears that he founded two others over which he put two presbyters and for which he engaged physicians, cooks and attendants.<sup>44</sup>

The ideal of personal involvement and aid that goes beyond the mere provision of money is found in Jerome as well as Chrysostom. In a letter written about 397 to his friend Pammachius, the Roman patrician turned monk who had built a hospice for strangers at the Portus Romanus, Jerome declares that he must offer to Christ not only his money but himself, and minister to others with his own hands. Jerome goes on to give the examples of the noble ladies Paula and Eustochium who now light fires, lay tables, sweep floors, boil cabbage and do other menial tasks with their own hands.

In the same letter Jerome recalls that he is building a hospice in Bethlehem and that owing to lack of funds he has had to sell some of his property in Italy. His reason for building the hospice emphasises the theological basis of his charity. He states that he is building 'so that if Joseph and Mary come to Bethlehem they may not fail to find shelter and welcome'.<sup>45</sup>

In another letter written about two years later Jerome makes an interesting comment about the founding of the first hospital. The letter, addressed to Oceanus, recalls the life of Fabiola who, after unwittingly breaking the Church law by marrying while her divorced husband was still alive, submitted to penance and devoted all her money to charity. Jerome says

of her that:

'she was the first person to found a hospital (et primo omnium instituit), into which she might gather sufferers out of the streets, and where she might nurse the unfortunate victims of sickness and want'. 46

It is not clear in what way Fabiola was credited by Jerome as being the first to found a hospital. Fabiola died in 399 and her charitable activity did not begin until after the death of her second husband. It would seem likely that she may have been the first person to found a hostel specifically for the sick in Rome, or perhaps in Italy. It is of note that Jerome used the Greek term rather than the Latin 'valetudinarium'. This would suggest an Eastern origin for these institutions, and perhaps Fabiola's institution was the first to be run on Eastern lines in the West.

It would seem clear that, from the year 400, institutions, either for all those in need or specifically for the sick, were established in many of the towns in Christendom largely through the gifts of the more wealthy Christians. Moreover in the earlier years these seemed to come under the authority of the local bishop instead of that of a monastic order as was the case in the later Medieval period.

In the early Christian centuries, then, the practical care of the sick evolved from the concern and voluntary and practical domestic help given by a small congregation to its own needy members to the establishment of institutions endowed and built by a wealthy patron. The disadvantage of this development, quickly noted by Chrysostom and Jerome, was that in general the members of the congregation were no longer

personally involved in the care of the sick within their community.

## Chapter 3

## SUPERNATURAL HEALING

Exorcism in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman world

This work has so far concentrated on what can be termed the scientific and practical approaches to sickness and disease in the Graeco-Roman world and the Early Church's response in activity. At the same time it has been realised that it is impossible to isolate these approaches from thought and action stemming from supernatural beliefs and it is now necessary to look further at the supernatural approach to sickness and healing.

It was a commonplace reaction in the Graeco-Roman world among the uneducated - and among many educated persons as well - to attribute sickness to the action of an evil spirit or to the action of a displeased deity so that relief from suffering was to be found by seeking a powerful means of driving away the influence of the evil spirit or by placating the god or enlisting the aid of another. A discussion on the origin of the belief in evil spirits and the many gods is beyond the scope of this work but it should be noted that by the time of the period under study the term demon ( δαιμόνων ) had a wide application.

In earlier thought δαίμονες had referred more specifically to 'minor deities' and hence to those beings who were intermediaries between the gods and men. In Neo-Platonism demons were again incorporated into the scheme of intermediaries

but they were those nearest to man and hence were evil because of their closer link with the world of matter. In popular imagination, demons were seen as evil spirits connected with the misfortunes of man, able to possess him or project malady into him.

The attempted control of the demons provided the main content of the practices of magic. The remedy for possession or sickness lay in driving away the demon or nullifying its influence. This was thought to be achieved by the use of magical formulae and incantations, by the concocting of potions that would send the demon away or by placing a magical or powerful object near the afflicted part. Likewise prevention of sickness was thought to be procured by adorning oneself or one's home with protective charms and amulets and also by performing rituals or repeating words that were believed to immunize those who practised them. The charms might be of animal origin, carved symbols or metal bracelets and brooches inscribed with protective signs and formulae.

Quite clearly the exorcizing of demonic spirits was an important part of everyday Graeco-Roman healing practice but it is also found in Rabbinic and apocalyptic Judaism although appearing contrary to the general emphasis of the Old Testament which does not refer to demons but attributes evil more directly to man or the divine purpose of God, often affected by His angels. The practice of magic is thoroughly condemned by the laws of the Pentateuch and the magician is to forfeit his life.<sup>1</sup> In popular Jewish thought of the first century however there seems to have been a general belief in demons and a consequent use of protective charms and incantations against them. The following quotations from the Talmud

reflect something of this situation.

It has been taught: Abba Benjamin says, If the eye has the power to see them, no creature could endure the demons ....

R. Hume says: Everyone among us has a thousand on his left hand and ten thousand on his right hand. 2

For an abscess one should say thus: let it indeed be cut down, let it indeed be healed, let it indeed be overthrown; Sharlai and Amarlai are those angels who were sent from the land of Sodom to heal boils and aches; bazak, bazik, bizbazik, mismazik, Kamum Kamik .... 3

Clearly in the latter the incantation lapses into a magical formula of unintelligible words.

The extent of the practice of exorcism and the miraculous by the rabbis of Jesus' day is open to question depending on how far one can regard the later traditions of the marvellous works of first century rabbis as being original.<sup>4</sup> The evidence of the New Testament seems to point to evidence of the Jewish practice of exorcism. The retort of Jesus, "And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out?" suggests that our Lord's practice of exorcism was no novelty in Jewry. The "sons" probably refer to the pupils of the rabbis who presumably had been taught by the rabbis themselves.<sup>5</sup>

The incident of the strange exorcist<sup>6</sup> is probably not to be thought of as an Early Church interpolation, as such a tolerant attitude would have then been unlikely, but rather as genuine historical tradition. It confirms the impression or reflects the fact that exorcism was a fairly common practice and that it would be natural for an exorcist to incorporate the names of those who were believed to have power over demons. The man may well have copied the method that he had observed the disciples themselves using.

In the Acts of the Apostles, there are references to a Jewish magician Bar-Jesus or Elymas and seven itinerant exorcists who were the sons of Sceva, a Jewish high priest.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover the Gospels show that the Jewish officials were singularly unimpressed by the healing miracles of Christ, although they were eye-witnesses of them on several occasions. The fact that their concern was not so much with the healing power of Jesus as his claim to forgive sins and his breaking of the Sabbath, suggests that they were moved to resentment rather than to wonder because he, as an unorthodox teacher, was receiving more acclaim and performing with greater effectiveness actions similar to those of the rabbis of the 'establishment'. The words of the ruler of the synagogue, "There are six days in which men ought to work; in them, therefore, come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day",<sup>8</sup> treat Jesus' healing of the crippled woman in a very matter-of-fact manner. Even accepting the feasibility that a number of these healing narratives have their origin in a corpus of pre-Gospel material, concerned with the controversies of Jesus with the Jews; that therefore the controversial elements may have been over-emphasised, does not completely explain the fact that the Pharisees and Scribes are not moved to wonder by the healings of Christ.

A further pointer is the fact that although the Talmud later denounces Jesus as a magician, no mention of his miracles was made at his trial. If Jesus' miracles had been thought uncharacteristic of his times, the Jewish leaders could have condemned Jesus solely on charges of sorcery. Even with reasons for bringing political charges against Jesus, it is unlikely they would have omitted the accusation of sorcery together with that of blasphemy unless there were grounds for

doing so. The supposition is that the outward healing acts of Jesus Christ were sufficiently similar to contemporary rabbinic practice not to be distinguished from them by the undiscerning.

### The healing work of Jesus Christ

The supernatural healings of Jesus Christ are then to be considered against their more immediate context of Rabbinic Judaism and the wider background of Graeco-Roman magic and culture. It is not proposed to go into the details of each miracle of our Lord, but rather to consider His general approach and purpose and what the early church was to understand from it. Although His contemporary world could produce healers who practised in a similar way so that His ministry could pass by without attracting too much attention, it would seem clear from our present understanding of the first century situation that there were many unique aspects of Jesus' healing work.

The healing commands of Jesus, in the Gospel tradition, contain no elaborate formulae but are direct, to the point, given on his own authority. It is unlikely that the early Christian writers would have failed to note any magical formulae if Jesus had any. The concern of St. Mark to give his reader the Aramaic rendering of certain of Jesus' sayings suggest that if he had been aware of any other valued phrase or formulae, He would certainly have passed them on.

The healing miracles of Jesus are performed to meet a clamant need. They are in no way contrived by Him to create a sensation for its own sake. In fact He refuses to

do this very thing. No mention is ever made of His expecting some form of payment or a gift, he performs no additional miracle to keep his audience amused over and above the response to a situation of need. Magic arts in the use of charms, amulets and potions has no part in Jesus' healing activity and, with the exception of the use of spittle<sup>9</sup> Jesus uses no material aids to healing, his command or touch is sufficient. Moreover, apart from two healings, Jesus is able to effect a cure without any delay or difficulty<sup>10</sup> and leaving aside the blighting of the barren fig tree<sup>11</sup> the Gospels never record Jesus using his power for a punitive purpose. Compared with his contemporaries, there was a certain uniqueness in the methods of healing adopted by Jesus.

It may be that his personal authority, the arousing of faith and evocation of an expectant response are characteristics that can be found in modern psychotherapy and faith healing today, yet it is not unreasonable to suppose that in expressing the divine will our Lord might utilize those laws of 'mind-over-matter' with which psychology is now conversant. The "supernatural" means of Jesus Christ are merely the "natural" means of the Kingdom of God. His miracles were part of his teaching about the Kingdom. They were neither incidental aspects of His ministry arising solely from compassion, nor a means of drawing attention to himself, but an integral part of his whole ministry of salvation and redemption. In this Jesus revealed that God the Father loved and cared for man and that physical health was part of this concern. He showed that the attitude of God to the sick is one of compassion and not condemnation. This is not to belittle the consequent result of many of the miracles in arousing or restoring faith to the

healed. The stress then falls on the healing of the spirit and the purpose of our Lord to restore a right relationship between man and God. The link between forgiveness and healing<sup>12</sup> emphasises this and both point to Jesus' power over all that is evil. His actions show sickness as an evil that needs to be contested, not just accepted as the will of God or even sent by Him. This is not to deny that sickness can be of spiritual value to some individuals, but the good lies in the response of the individual or the concern of those who care for him - disease remains evil, evil can be overcome by good.

The mission and work of our Lord Jesus Christ was to announce and initiate the Kingdom of God - a Kingdom which would have as its characteristics the conquest of evil and the restoration of disharmony between man and God and man and man. His healing work is an indication of the character and power of the Kingdom.

It has been noted that Jesus did not use either material means or long formulae but whether in exorcism or healing the direct command was sometimes accompanied by a laying on of the hands or, as in the case of the woman with the issue of blood, an indirect touch. The implication is that Jesus has an authority and power which the afflicting demon or evil cannot withstand and this is conveyed not only in the command but in the laying on of hands. The symbolic use of this act seems to have been fairly general throughout classical times with the association of the passing of some virtue or authority from one person to another. From the Old Testament the imposition of hands is seen used in blessing, in investiture of office, and also in the passing on of prophetic power. Thus the means Jesus uses reflect his own authority and power and not a secret

knowledge of formulae and potions. It is the former alone which he can pass on to his disciples.

### Healing in the Apostolic Age

In his commissioning of the disciples, Jesus shows clearly his intention that his authority be passed on to them and that they should continue his healing activity as part of the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. He gives them authority over unclean spirits in his commissioning charge in St. Mark's gospel. As well as casting out demons they heal by anointing the sick with oil.<sup>13</sup> The parallel incident in Luke<sup>14</sup> gives them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, 'and He sent them out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick', and Matthew<sup>15</sup> also includes cleansing the lepers and raising the dead. The use of the formula 'in the name of Jesus'<sup>16</sup> indicates that the disciples saw Jesus as the source of their authority and power. In John there is the slightly ambiguous reference: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father."<sup>17</sup> Whatever the greater works are which the disciples are to do they are in some way a continuation of Christ's earthly ministry after his Ascension, this then would include miracles of healing.

The basis for the healing activity of the disciples both before and after the Resurrection lay in response to the direct command of Christ. Moreover they would have those memories of His actions and teaching which revealed that disease must be combatted and the diseased cared for, and the understanding that healing was an integral part of the message of the Kingdom

which they sought to proclaim. The experience of Pentecost was a realization and confirmation that Christ's power was available for them to use.

The Book of Acts gives us evidence of the disciples performing a number of miracles - the healing of the lame man, of Aeneas, of Tabitha, of the cripple at Lystra, of Eutychus, and of the father of Publius.<sup>18</sup> There are also seven general references to the healings, signs and wonders performed by Peter, Paul, Stephen and Philip, including those cured by the shadow of Peter and by the handkerchiefs that had touched Paul.<sup>19</sup> St. Paul himself has his sight restored to him by Ananias, and escapes the peril of the snake.<sup>20</sup>

The evidence of Acts has led some to the conclusion of a 'golden age' or 'period of miracles' in the Apostolic Age of the Church, performed by the young spirit-filled church freed from controversy, heresy, slackness of discipline and lack of faith that were to lower her spiritual temperature at a later date and reduce the effectiveness of her healing work.<sup>21</sup> While not denying the evidence of Acts, the above conclusion would seem to need some amendment in the light of the Epistles, and a more detailed consideration of the healings recorded in the Book of Acts.

There are no specific healings mentioned in the Epistles. St. Paul in I Corinthians 12 listing spiritual gifts and then later the abilities of Church members included those of healing and the working of miracles.<sup>22</sup> If it was intended that the list in verse 28 was setting out the gifts in order of priority then 'healer' came fifth on the list. Moreover, as 'apostles' and 'healers' seem to be listed as separate categories, and healing as a separate gift distinguished

from working of miracles, it could be understood that healing was more the work of a specialist group and its work not necessarily miraculous. Again the question - "Do all possess the gifts of healing?" - suggests that healing was not practised by all the spirit-filled members of the Early Church.

Moreover there is no mention of the gift of healing in four other lists of gifts and duties found in the Epistles where one might possibly expect it to be found.<sup>23</sup> The instructions in I Timothy on his duties of preaching and teaching and those of other church officials contain no reference to the work of healing. The laying-on of hands<sup>24</sup> would seem to refer to ordination or the restoration of penitents. There is, however, an allusion<sup>25</sup> to the work of the office of 'widow' in relieving the afflicted. Depending on one's views of the date of the Pastoral Epistles, it could be argued that perhaps the apostolic age of miracles was already over when I Timothy was written. Even so it seems a little odd that in all the wide range of activity included in the Pastoral epistles healing is not mentioned.

St. Paul seems to consider that signs and wonders ought to be the mark of a true apostle. In defence of his apostleship to the Corinthians and the Romans he claims this for himself.

I have been a fool ! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I am not at all inferior to these superlative apostles, even though I am nothing. The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. 26

In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem

and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. 27

In his epistle to the Galatians when he is contending against the way they have been influenced by the Judaizing party, he asks,

Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? 28

It is not clear how 'works miracles among you' ( ἐνεργῶν δυνάμεις ἐν ὑμῖν ) should be understood. It has already been noted that for St. Paul 'the working of miracles' ( ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων ) is something other than 'gifts of healing' ( χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων ). It is possible that this phrase in Galatians 3:5 could refer to the spiritual transformation that the Gospel wrought in the Christians in Galatia but which the law had failed to do. Clearly this points out that caution must be taken in interpreting the 'signs and wonders' of the apostolic age solely in terms of miraculous healing.

The only other reference to healing in the Epistles is the well-known directive of St. James 5:14-15 which occurs in a short section primarily concerned with the value of prayer.

If any one among you is sick let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up: and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

In view of the generally accepted Jewish characteristics of the Epistle of James, it seems reasonable to assume that the Epistle is recommending a contemporary and desirable custom of some Jewish groups. There is some hint of this practice in the Talmud where there is a reference to the mingling of oil and wine to anoint the sick on the Sabbath.<sup>29</sup>

It is to be recalled too that the Jews had used oil in the anointing of their Kings and also the priesthood<sup>30</sup> so

that the use of oil as a symbol of consecration and the imparting of God's spirit would be familiar to Jewish Christians.

In his epistle the writer of James does not use the Greek verb  $\chiρῖω$  associated with ritual anointing but  $\alphaλειφω$  a verb commonly used to express anointing for toilet or medical purposes. Elsewhere in the New Testament this verb occurs eight times in the gospels. In his analysis of its usage, J. Wilkinson<sup>31</sup> notes that in seven instances it is used of smearing the body with oil for toilet purposes. The remaining instance is St. Mark 6:13. Here Wilkinson draws attention to the distinction in the verse between the exorcism of demons and the anointing of the sick and suggests that, as in the New Testament anointing was only used for the healing of physical disease and not possession, it is easier to understand its significance as medical than religious. He concludes that James saw healing as a combination of medical and non-medical methods and so gives the illustration of a contemporary medical method of anointing with oil which should be used in the name of the Lord and with prayer.

Whether the reference to anointing is seen primarily as medicinal or sacramental in character the verse suggests that sickness is the concern of the community and that it is right and proper for the sick person to seek healing by prayer and help from the representatives of that community. The 'saving' and 'raising up' of the sick man ought primarily to be thought of in relation to his physical condition, although obviously the cause or effect of physical healing may be spiritual healing. Moreover, with the close association of sin and sickness in contemporary thought, it would be natural for a sick person to make some examination of his past life and, if need be, seek forgiveness. There is no indication that the anointing is to

produce an instant miraculous healing.

Apart from James, the Epistles do not contain clear directives concerning healing. References to Timothy, Trophimus, Epaphroditus and possibly Paul seem to indicate sickness amongst the early Christians yet the Epistles do not contain any reports of actual incidents of healing such as those described in the Book of Acts. This is not too surprising in view of the different purposes and needs behind their writing.

In this thinking about the continuation of the healing ministry of Jesus Christ by the apostolic church it is necessary to bear in mind that the contents of the Gospels also reflect something of the thought of the early Church. Particular reference must be made to the emphasis of St. John on the miracles as 'signs'. In one way St. John's use of the word 'sign' detracts from the value of the healing miracle and lays stress on the need for the healing of the spirit through faith in Jesus Christ. This can lead to the conclusion found in later writers that it is only the spiritual and not the bodily healing that matters. Yet against this the miraculous 'signs' in St. John are both impressive in their achievement and also vital to the structure of the gospel. It seems clear that John sees miracles of healing as an integral part of the gospel of Christ. Moreover he indicates that Christ's power and ability are available to those followers who abide in His love.

It would seem, then, on present knowledge that the use, power and extent of supernatural healing in the apostolic age is not as clearly definable as one would like it to be. There is not sufficient evidence to indicate a 'golden age of miracles', especially as the picture of the early church also reveals controversy, apostolic rivalry, heresy and problems of

discipline and faith. Yet it seems fair to say that the disciples continued the healing ministry of Christ and of the Kingdom as far as their spiritual insight and power enabled them to do so. They sought to heal the sick as He had done, to fight the evil of disease of mind and body, and to show compassion for the suffering. It is not to be expected that they should have had the same ability as their Master, yet in so far as any one of them, at any time, allowed himself to be completely controlled by the Holy Spirit, so surely he could become an agent of the power pertaining to the Kingdom of God.

#### Exorcism in the post-Apostolic Church

Looking now beyond the New Testament, consideration is given to the use the post-apostolic church made of the healing methods of Jesus Christ and his apostles. In particular the use made in healing of exorcism, of laying on of hands, the use of oil, the name of Christ, and of prayer.

There is a sense in which the term exorcism is out of place in the above list, for it signifies a particular way of approach to the healing of sickness rather than an observable method of curing it. Thus exorcism could incorporate any or all of the other actions listed. The early church shared the view of the contemporary Graeco-Roman world that some sickness was caused by demons and exorcism proved to be a powerful means of treatment. It had moreover a wider application than to effect the cure of physical and mental sickness. Those who were in a state of sin were thought to be possessed by demons and in need of exorcism. The newly-converted were thought in some way to be contaminated by demons from their pagan past and thus

Christian Initiation included exorcism at some point before Baptism. Members of other religions were regarded as possessed and likewise the places and objects associated with their pagan cults. Similarly places associated with immoral activity were the haunts of demons. Tertullian and Cyprian state that it is inconsistent for a Christian who is freed of demons to go to the public shows or the circus<sup>32</sup> and Lactantius, like many others, attributes the invention of magic, astrology and soothsaying to demons. These are therefore to be avoided by Christians.<sup>33</sup>

The practice of casting out of demons could then be associated with the healing of physical ailments, the restoration to sanity or the cleansing of converts and sinners. Nevertheless, apart from baptismal exorcism, a large number of the references to exorcism in the post-apostolic period are associated with some form of illness and it is clear it did prove to be an effective means of healing. The powerful nature of Christian exorcism is used by Justin Martyr to defend the Christian faith and its practices.

For numberless demoniacs throughout the whole world, and in your city, many of our Christian men exorcising them in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, have healed and do heal, rendering helpless and driving the possessing devils out of the men, though they could not be cured by all the other exorcists, and those who used incantations and drugs. 34

As this is addressed to non-Christian hearers the reference to demoniacs is more likely to refer to the possessed in mind and body rather than to the unconverted. Note that Justin implied that Christian exorcists did not use incantations or drugs but the phrase 'crucified under Pilate' suggests the possible use of a credal formula in exorcism. In his Dialogues with Trypho there is again found both the accusation that the Jewish and Gentile exorcists use craft when they

exorcise by employing fumigations and incantations and also further evidence of the use of the credal formula in exorcism. In the following extract concerning Jewish exorcism Justin admits that demons can be effectively exorcised by the Jews using the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

For every demon, when exorcised in the name of this very Son of God who is the First-born of every creature, who became man by the Virgin, who suffered, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate by your nation, who died, who rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven - is overcome and subdued. But though you exorcise any demon in the name of any of those who were amongst you, either Kings, or righteous men, or prophets and patriarchs, it will not be subject to you. But if any of you exorcise it in the name of the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, it will perhaps be subject to you. Now assuredly your exorcists, I have said, make use of craft when they exorcise, even as the Gentiles do, and employ fumigations and incantations. 35

The credal statement in exorcism as recorded by Justin certainly seems to reflect actual practice and this is corroborated by Origen. He points out to Celsus that the Christians' power over evil spirits is not through long incantations or spells but the use of the name of Jesus accompanied by additional words of faith and narratives which relate to Him according to the Holy Scriptures.<sup>36</sup>

The origin of the use of the credal expression with exorcism is not certain. Perhaps the newly converted from pagan ways felt the absence of the customary long incantations, and the additional statements were a Christian compromise or, perhaps pagan exorcists were hopefully using the name of Jesus and the early church considered some distinguishing statements of belief by Christian exorcists desirable. It may well have been that the connection of credal formulae and exorcism stemmed from the preparations for baptism and the association still continued in exorcism practised for healing.

The power to exorcise is linked with those who are baptised according to the Clementine Homilies, where in reference to the privileges of the baptised Christian it is said:

you shall not only be able to drive away the Spirits which lurk in you; but yourselves no longer sinning, and undoubtedly believing in God, you shall drive out evil spirits and demons with terrible diseases from others 37

However, although there is recognition that all baptised Christians may exorcise and that Baptism gives protection against demons, it was clear that some were more gifted in the art of exorcism than others. The position of those with the particular gift of exorcism within the structure of the local church obviously gave rise to difficulties at times and forms part of that tension found within the Church at different stages in its history between the charismatic and ordered authority. Thus, for example, Athanasius reminds his readers:

it is not fitting to boast at the casting forth of demons, nor to be uplifted by the healing of diseases. Nor is it fitting that he who casts out devils should alone be highly esteemed, while he who casts them not out should be considered nought .... For the working of signs is not ours but the Saviour's work and so He said to his disciples. (Luke 10:20) For the fact that our names are written in heaven is a proof of our virtuous life, but to cast out demons is a favour of the Saviour who granted it. 38

Even where exorcism is considered as a gift for all Christians, this is not to be seen as a matter for pride or self-congratulation. Like Athanasius, the Clementine Homilies warn that though all demons with all diseases flee before the Christian, they are not to rejoice in this only, but rather that their names are written in heaven.<sup>39</sup>

The development of the Christian practice of exorcism to the establishment of the order of exorcist has been investigated in detail by other writers.<sup>40</sup> They show that despite

the insistence and defence of Christian exorcism as being a simple and powerful act the uncontrolled use of the gift by converts of varying intellectual levels in a world in which superstitious beliefs were on the increase, tended at times to lead to pagan excesses and displays being conducted, sometimes for financial benefit in the name of Christ. On the other hand the development of a pre-baptismal training which followed a fixed form would tend to make the regular exorcism of the catechumens the work of one person.

These two tendencies coming at a time when the rapid increase in Christian congregations demanded some form of re-organisation and definition of duties, led to the establishment of the order of exorcist. The inception of the order is dated by J. G. Davies in the period 220-240 on the basis of references to the order of exorcist in the writing of Cyprian and Pope Cornelius.<sup>41</sup> The exorcist seems to have relieved in part the priest and deacon in their duties of visiting the sick. He<sup>s</sup> was commissioned and blessed by the bishop, but not ordained and his primary function was in connection with the healing of the sick rather than the preparation of the catechumens.

By the end of the fourth century, however, it is clear that, in the West, the order of exorcist was becoming simply a preliminary to Holy Orders. The role of the exorcist in the healing of the sick is gradually superseded by the priest and the sacramental act of anointing with oil.

#### The use of oil

The earlier use of oil by the post-apostolic church is something of an enigma. Although there is little evidence for its regular use in the first three centuries this by no

means indicates it was not used. The directive on the use of oil in the Epistle of James (if it relates to a religious act) may well reflect a more local or oriental custom and it seems likely that the epistle was not generally known until after the second century (and then primarily in the East) where it is first mentioned by Origen. Its use in the West may not have been until the mid-fourth century and it was recognized at the Council of Hippo in 393. It is interesting to note that although Origen refers to St. James 5:14-15 he does so to illustrate the remission of sin through penitence, and seems to pay no attention to the reference to anointing.<sup>42</sup>

The earliest reference to post-apostolic use of oil is found in Tertullian<sup>43</sup> where he alleges that the Emperor Septimus Severus had once been cured by a certain Christian named Proclus by the use of oil, and, in gratitude had kept him in his palace until the day of his death. Whether this cure was of medicinal or supernatural action is not completely clear from Tertullian. Certainly the preceding section has been dealing with supernatural cures by Christians but perhaps the greater emphasis lies on how Romans have, in the past, been helped by Christians and shown kindness to them. The passage may illustrate that Christians were prepared to use oil in healing pagans, although if Proclus was sought out by the Emperor perhaps he did not have much choice.

Tertullian also gives us the earliest reference to the use of anointing with oil as part of the final rites in the administration of Holy Baptism. He also explains that the name Christian comes from 'chrisma' (anointing) which gives its name to the Lord.<sup>44</sup> Another reference to the use of oil at the beginning of the third century in Rome is to be found in

the prayer for the Blessing of oil in the Apostolic Tradition now normally associated with St. Hippolytus. The prayer is inserted after the anaphora of the Mass together with blessings for other offerings including cheese and olives. It clearly has medicinal and healing use in mind.

O God, in making this oil holy thou givest holiness to those who use it and who receive it. Through it thou didst confer anointing on kings, priests and prophets. Let it procure likewise consolation for those who taste it and health for those who make use of it. 45

The same document also gives a detailed account of the rite of Baptism. This includes the bishop saying a prayer of thanksgiving over the 'oil of thanksgiving' and pronouncing an exorcism over the 'oil of exorcism'. The priest anoints the catechumen with the oil of exorcism immediately prior to the triple immersion, and with the oil of thanksgiving immediately afterwards. The anointing in the rite of confirmation that followed was performed by the bishop alone. 46

The more numerous accounts of the use of oil for healing, found in connection with the early monks in Egypt and Syria, suggest it was common practice there, at least by the end of the third century.

Jerome in his life of Hilarion (291-371) tells how the Saint blessed some oil to be used by those shepherds and husbandmen, who were bitten during a plague of poisonous reptiles. 47 The large number of reptiles were the result of Hilarion bringing a drought to a sudden end, so presumably he felt obliged to alleviate the suffering he had indirectly brought about. It is also recorded of Hilarion that he saved a husband and wife from death by anointing them with oil, and that it was his custom to bless bread and oil for individual use. 48

In the Historia Monachorum, attributed probably erroneously to Rufinus, as well as in his free translation of the Eusebius' Historia Ecclesia, there are references to the early monks anointing with oil for healing and also supplying oil that they had blessed to be used in healing.<sup>49</sup> St. Pachomius (292-346) was once begged by a man to heal his possessed daughter, which he did by sending the man some oil which he had blessed. Palladius who stayed in the desert of Nitria from 390-400 relates how a paralysed wealthy virgin had been brought all the way from Thessalonika to see St. Macarius and was cured by his anointing her for twenty days with holy oil and much praying.<sup>50</sup> The Lausiac History contains other wonders done by the monks in the desert.

The Sacramentary of Serapion dating from the same period contains two forms for the blessing of oil intended for supernatural healing, some of which would be brought by lay people, to be used in their own homes to drive away disease and expel demons.

The first blessing seems to have been used after the communion of the people as in the Apostolic Tradition.

In the name of thine only Son, Jesus Christ, we bless these creatures. We invoke the name of him who suffered, who was crucified, who rose from the dead and sits at the right hand of the Eternal, on this water and on this oil. Give these creatures the power to heal, let them drive out every fever, every demon and every sickness. Let them become for those who use them a healing and reviving remedy, in the name of the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. 51

The other blessing is included as a separate item towards the end of the sacramentary.

We call on thee, thou who dost control every authority and power, thou, the Saviour of all men, the Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We beg thee to send from the height of heaven (where thine) only-begotten Son

(reigns), a power of healing into this oil. For those who receive anointing, or make use of these creatures, let it put to flight every disease and every infirmity; let it poison the poison of every demon, let it expel every impure spirit and drive away every wicked spirit; let it eradicate every fever, all shivering and weakness; let it procure good grace and remission of sins, remedy of life and salvation, health and wholeness of soul, body and spirit and full vitality.

Let every satanic power, Lord, every demon, every plot of the Adversary, every plague and every torment, every suffering and every pain, every blow shock and shadow, dread thy holy name that we now invoke, and the name of thine only-begotten son. Let them depart from thy servants inwardly and outwardly, so that his name may be sanctified who was crucified for us, who rose from the dead, who bore our diseases and infirmities, Jesus Christ, who is to come to judge the living and the dead. 51

These full quotations show the importance (in this kind of blessing) of the name of Jesus which is in places linked on to a kind of credal formula, as has been noted earlier. The oil (or water or bread) is in effect exorcised so that it, in itself, can become an agent for exorcism. Thus the power and authority of the person is transferred in part to an object. It is when the object is then thought to have a power of its own that abuses in the form of amulets and charms arise.

It seems clear that the use of oil was widespread amongst the early monastic movement in Egypt and Syria. It is possible to imagine that the desire of the monks to be set apart in their cells from the persistent demands of personal contact and enquiry, led to the impersonal practice of proffering holy oil. Since the monastic movement acted as a kind of charismatic revival within the life of the church, it would seem natural for its method of healing to become popular as its influence spread throughout the west although St. Basil does not appear keen to encourage this activity within his hospital. 53

The earliest consistent use of oil in the west seems to have been at the hands of the monk St. Martin who uses it in some of his healings and exorcisms as well as adopting the practice of receiving oil to be blessed and returned to individuals for future use.<sup>54</sup>

In all therefore, a number of possible factors, such as the role of exorcism in baptismal preparation; the priestly use of oil for exorcism in the Baptismal rite, the move to establish order within the church, the influence of monasticism and the wider use of the Epistle of James in which the exhortation is to call for the elders (πρεσβύτεροι), probably contributed to the anointing of holy oil by the priest replacing the lay practice of exorcism.

The letter of Innocent I to Decentius written in 416 confirms that it was then regarded as normal practice for the priest to anoint the sick on behalf of the bishop with the holy oil of chrism that had been blessed by the bishop. However the use of the chrism was not confined to the clergy alone for the letter states that all Christians may use it in their own need or for the members of their household. The exception seems to be the penitents in whose case sacraments were restricted. Pope Innocent I calls the use of chrism a kind of sacrament and asks how one kind of sacrament can be granted to those to whom the other sacraments are denied.<sup>55</sup> The situation reflected by the letter shows that of oil used for personal anointing by the laity and the visiting of the priest to the sick taking the form of rite of unction.

The development of the visitation of the sick into a definite order including unction is established by the time of the Gregorian Sacramentary which is thought at least to reflect

the practices of the Roman church in the time of Pope Gregory I (590-604). The rite includes the sprinkling of the sick with water, the laying on of hands, and the anointing of oil on the neck, throat and breast and also where the pain is most felt.<sup>56</sup>

By the end of the early church period the use of oil seems to have been firmly established as part of the healing ministration of the church.

### The Name of Jesus

In the foregoing consideration of exorcism in the early church it has been seen that the practice of exorcism, both for the driving away of disease and in the preparation of the catechumen for baptism, incorporated those actions and words associated with healing in the New Testament and apostolic times. Moreover it would seem that, even on those occasions where no specific reference to exorcism is made, the action represents the power of God to dispel disease and suggests an underlying association with exorcism.

The use of the name of Jesus Christ is seen in passages already noted from Justin Martyr and Origen who elsewhere claim that the Name of Jesus can still remove distractions from the minds of men, expel demons and take away diseases and that down to the present time, those whom God wills, are healed by His name.<sup>57</sup> Athanasius states that mention of the name of Jesus drives out demons and likewise Arnobius affirms that, not only did Christ perform miraculous deeds in his own name, He permitted many others to attempt them and to perform them by the use of his name.<sup>58</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus notes:

Yea, even now, when Christ is invoked, the devils tremble, and not even by our ill-doing has the power of this Name been extinguished. 59

Chrysostom, speaking at a time when superstitious practices seemed dominant needed to repress the element of faith.

For we have, we surely have, spiritual charms, even the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ and the might of the Cross. This charm will not only bring the serpent out of his lurking places, and case him into the fire, but even wounds it healeth. But if some that have said this Name have not been healed, it came of their little faith, and was not owing to any weakness in what they said. For some did throng Jesus and press him and got no good therefrom. But the woman with an issue, without even touching his Body, but merely the hem of his garment, stanch'd a flux of blood of so long standing. This Name is fearful alike to devils, and to passions and to diseases. 60

### The Imposition of Hands

The imposition of hands continued to convey the same meaning and purpose as found in the New Testament. It was an act of authority and power, of blessing and protection and was performed in imitation of the healing touch of Jesus Christ. It was used in baptism, penance and ordination as well as healing and exorcism, as details of these rites in Tertullian's De Baptismo and in the Apostolic Tradition show. Apart from the liturgical references there are in fact few specific references to the laying on of hands. Irenaeus confirms that the laying on of hands for healing was practised in his day, and indeed was amongst the gifts used day by day by the disciples of Christ for the benefit of Gentiles.<sup>61</sup> Ambrose, in his discourse on repentance implies that at least sometimes healing comes through the laying on of hands,<sup>62</sup> and in the detailed

account of the life of St. Martin, the saint uses the power of touch and even the kiss in performing his miracles.<sup>63</sup> Despite the absence of many references it does seem likely that the imposition of hands was a widespread and continuing activity within the life of the church.

### The Sign of the Cross

The sign of the Cross<sup>64</sup> seems to have been a general custom, at least from the time of Tertullian. It was to be used to heal wounds and also as a means of protection and cleansing throughout daily life, on coming in or going out, at table or in washing and retiring to bed.<sup>65</sup> The Cross was the symbol of victory over evil and thereby gave protection from demons and power over disease.

The sign of the cross was part of the ritual of baptism. The Apostolic Tradition gives details of the newly-baptised being marked with a sign on the forehead and the Sacramentary of Serapion specifies that the sign is that of the saving Cross of the only-begotten Son by which Satan and every hostile power have been defeated.<sup>66</sup> It would therefore seem quite natural for the sign of the cross to be used in healing and for baptised Christians to feel some immunity from unclean spirits. Athanasius recalls that St. Antony used the sign of the cross on a number of occasions to heal the oppressed and to counteract pagan magic; St. Hilarion cures the three sons of Aristaeon by making the sign of the cross over their bed and fevered limbs;<sup>67</sup> Chrysostom tells his hearers that the sign of the cross has been powerful in the past and is powerful in the

present. It has quenched poisonous drugs, taken away the power of hemlock and healed bites of venomous beasts.<sup>68</sup> Lactantius, in referring to the power of the sign of the cross, notes that disciples in the name of their Master and with the sign of his passion banish polluted spirits from men and that the presence of 'crossed' men can prevent pagan divination. In the Epitome of the Divine Institutes it is stated:

Christ gives to his disciples the power of working miracles, that they might act for the welfare of men as well by deeds and words. As he before his passion put to confusion demons by His word and command, so now by the name and sign of the same passion, unclean spirits, having insinuated themselves into the bodies of men, are driven out, when racked and tormented, and confessing themselves to be demons, they yield themselves to God who harasses them. What therefore can the Greeks expect from their superstitions and with their wisdom, when they see that their gods, whom they do not deny to be demons also, are subdued by men through the Cross. 69

Similarly Cyril of Jerusalem teaches that the cross could be the seal of the Christian made with boldness on the brow with his fingers. It is a sign that is without price, for the sake of the poor, without toil for the sick. It is a sign of the faithful and the dread of devils for by the cross Christ triumphed over evil.<sup>70</sup>

The instructions of the Apostolic Tradition include:

At all times be ready to sign yourselves carefully on the forehead. For this sign shows forth the Passion which opposes the devil, if you make it with faith not to please men, but knowing how to use it as a breastplate. Thus the adversary, seeing the power of the Spirit which comes from the heart, flies as soon as you show this spiritual likeness outwardly. It is not you who inspire fear in him, but the Spirit who dwells in you. This is what Moses represented through the Passover lamb which was sacrificed, when he sprinkled the thresholds and smeared the doorposts with its blood. It denoted the faith which we now have in the perfect Lamb.

When we make the sign on our forehead and our eyes, we drive away him who seeks to destroy us. 71

Augustine gives an account of how Innocentia, a noted

woman of Carthage, is told in a dream to wait at the baptistry and is there healed of breast cancer by a newly-baptised woman signing the diseased part with the sign of the cross.<sup>72</sup>

Thus the sign of the cross became a manual representation of the name of Jesus Christ and all the power conveyed by that name, especially that of the crucifixion itself and its victory over the devil. It was used for personal exorcism and protection and in healing of the sick might be made on the diseased member. The Apostolic Tradition implies that for the sign to be effective it must be accompanied by faith and sincerity and it is not the sign itself which is powerful but its spiritual significance, although, no doubt, some would rely upon the sign in itself. It is important to note that the same sign used fervently at the time of illness would be used formally at the time of baptism together with similar formulae and theological ideas.

#### The value of Prayer and the Eucharist

The use of prayer in the preparation of an act of healing is a feature of some of the miracles of Jesus, and clearly one would expect prayer to accompany the healing activity of the early church. Prayer and fasting were at times linked and often a group or a church would be involved. Irenaeus suggests it was quite a frequent practice for the entire church in a locality to pray and fast for a brother in need.<sup>73</sup> Basil asks for prayers for the sick Hypatius,<sup>74</sup> and Augustine is relieved of toothache after he asks all those present to pray on his behalf.<sup>75</sup> Prayer and fasting seems frequently to be linked with the healing activity of St. Martin.

He cures himself when in danger of death through eating poisonous grass, he restores to life, through prayer, a child in a heathen village to which he went to preach, and also a catechumen on whose limbs he also stretches himself. Learning by letter that the household of a certain Lycontius, a believing soldier, had been smitten by violent disease, he spends seven days and nights in prayer and fasting.<sup>76</sup>

Prayers and blessings for the sick are to be found in the Sacramentary of Serapion<sup>77</sup> and often form part of later liturgies. The receiving of sacrament itself is seen as a protection from every evil malady.<sup>78</sup> At a later stage, too, the reserved sacrament seems to have been a means of gaining bodily strength through spiritual strength as Gregory of Nazianzus puts it, recalling his sister's recovery from an extraordinary and malignant disease by holding on to the altar and applying the sacrament. He also describes how his sick father was taken into the Easter Vigil and when the time of the mystery was come began slowly to recover. Again in a letter to Amphilochus he refers to the value of Holy Communion in the recovery of illness and says that the tongue of a priest meditating on the Lord raises the sick.<sup>79</sup>

#### Water and breathing in exorcism

Like the signing of the cross, the use of water and of breathing can only be linked with the New Testament in a tenuous manner. The reference to our Lord's use of spittle, the instruction to the blind man to wash in the pool of Siloam and his breathing on the disciples to impart the Holy Spirit<sup>80</sup>

can hardly be considered scriptural justification for these practices. However breathing and blowing away demons is found as a means of exorcism. St. Martin exorcises a certain Avitianus by blowing<sup>81</sup> and this technique seems to have been a fairly widespread practice in baptismal preparation. Cyril refers to it in his instructions to baptismal candidates.

A man still clothed with a body wrestles with many fiercest demons, and often the demon, whom men could not master with iron bands, has been mastered by the man himself with words of prayer; through the power which is in him of the Holy Ghost; and the mere breathing of the exorcist becomes as fire to that unseen foe. A mighty ally and protector, therefore, have we from God; a great Teacher of the Church, a mighty Champion on our behalf. Let us not be afraid of the demons, nor of the devil; for mightier is he who fighteth for us. 82

The Apostolic Tradition recounts that before the start of the baptismal vigil the bishop exorcises by laying on of hands and then breathing upon the faces of the candidates.

The same document also links breath with water.

When you breathe into your hands and sign yourself with the damp breath you have gathered, your body is purified right to the feet. For the gift of the Spirit and the purification of water, which rise from the heart as from a spring, purify the believer who offers them. 83

The blessings found in the Sacramentary of Serapion impute to water the power to heal and drive out demons and sickness.<sup>84</sup> Many of the later rites include the blessing of holy water and the sprinkling of the sick and the home. The water of Baptism was also seen as having some healing power and it has already been noted how the presence of the baptised Christian could be effective as a means of exorcism. Augustine gives an account of how a physician of Carthage was permanently cured of gout through receiving the sacrament of baptism, and how, also, a man of Curubis was freed from palsy and hernia by baptism.<sup>85</sup>

The act of baptism was also seen as a form of spiritual medicine. Gregory of Nazianzus in teaching about Holy Baptism tells his hearers not to delay baptism until they are ill, but to heal themselves before their extremity and through baptism apply to themselves the really saving medicine.<sup>86</sup> Ambrose, in illustration, makes a link between the rite of baptism and the healing power of the pool of Bethesda and comments that when the waters were stirred only one was healed but now in baptism all are healed. Tertullian in a similar remark about the pool of Bethesda in his treatise On Baptism notes that whereas the emphasis was then on a bodily healing through the power of angelic forces, now in holy baptism they heal the spirit.<sup>87</sup>

The association of baptism and healing in the activity of the early church is considered to be an important influence and factor in the development of the church's thought and practice of healing. All the actions and formulae associated with healing are also associated with the initiation of Christians - the imposition of hands, the use of oil and water, the formula of the name, and the practices of signing and breathing - because basically both rituals are seen as the exorcism of evil and the empowering for new life. The particular distinguishing feature of baptism was the threefold immersion which identified the baptised with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These similarities would tend to convert the healing activity of the Church as an informal practice of every member to a formal practice by the clergy. Though this would be no limitation of the power of God it may have been less demanding on the faith of the sick person so that less was expected. A formal practice is a less spectacular event to recall for posterity than some of the manifestations of divine power by saints and holy men. If the level of the apostolic healing power seemed to decline with

the years it may be partly due to the church failing to grasp fully that God was equally at work in its formal practices and could be seen in the unspectacular as well as the overtly miraculous.

The connection of healing with baptism - the sacrament of spiritual rebirth - would also emphasise the priority of spiritual healing over physical healing. It implied that the power of the Church to heal diseased bodies was of less or little value compared to its power to heal diseased souls. A change in the healing ministry of the church seems to have come about through an increasingly formal practice and a greater stress on the priority of spiritual benefits, both these factors being influenced by the close association and similarities of baptism and healing.

## Chapter 4

### DEVELOPMENTS OF THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

#### Jesus Christ - The Physician

A frequent analogy found in early Christian writing is that of God or Jesus Christ as the Physician. Perhaps there is some Old Testament precedent in "I am the Lord that healeth thee" (Exodus 15:26) for giving the epithet 'physician' to God. It is used of God by Theophilus of Antioch in his discussion on the attributes and ability of God and he exhorts Autolycus to entrust himself to the Physician, namely God, who heals and makes alive.<sup>1</sup> At a later date the same thought of God as the Physician is found in Chrysostom,<sup>2</sup> and Augustine who sometimes gives an adjectival elaboration such as the good Physician, the great Physician, the mighty Physician, the heavenly Physician.<sup>3</sup>

The thought of Jesus Christ as the Physician would seem to have its scriptural warrant in the two short references - "You will say unto me this parable; Physician, heal thyself", and "The healthy need not a physician, but the sick".<sup>4</sup>

Tertullian uses the latter text in Adv. Marcion with the implication that Christ is the physician.<sup>5</sup> At an earlier date, Ignatius in warning the Ephesians against false teachers reminds them of the one Physician Jesus Christ,<sup>6</sup> and in the fragment On the Resurrection attributed to Justin Martyr, Christ is called our physician.<sup>7</sup> The argument of the latter passage, in seeking to prove the resurrection of the flesh, reminds the

reader that a physician faced with an incurable patient will allow him to indulge his desires, whereas when there is a chance of recovery the physician may impose strict regulations. So Christ the physician regulates the flesh since it has a hope of resurrection and salvation.

The relation between sin and sickness and the effective analogy between the means of healing and the means of salvation led many to use the picture of the work of the physician in their sermons and writings and, in particular, reference has already been made to the thought of St. Jerome.<sup>8</sup> The concept of Jesus Christ the Physician, therefore, is one that would come naturally to mind especially to those given to allegory and metaphor. Among such are writers like Ephraim the Syrian and Origen.

The hymns of Ephraim picture both the Father and the Son as 'Physician' and 'Medicine', though the emphasis is on the Father as the 'Physician' and the Son the 'Medicine of Life', as in the following extracts from the Hymns of the Nativity of Christ in the Flesh.

The soul of just men perceived in the Son a  
medicine of life.

Blessed by the Physician who came down and  
amputated without pain, and healed wounds with  
a medicine that was not harsh. His Son became  
a Medicine that showed sinners mercy.

A store of medicines is this Thy Great Day,  
because on it shone forth the medicine of life  
to the wounded. 9

In his Homilies Origen frequently depicts Jesus as the Physician. On one occasion he draws a parallel between the position of the physician who needs to compound his medicines from the juices of herbs, or living creatures or rocks, (things which in their natural state would seem to have no especial healing virtue), and the position of Jesus Christ the physician, the Word of God, and the healing power that can be

found in the sacraments of the Word and in the words of Christian Scripture read in the churches, words that at first seem without any grace of style yet are healing remedies.<sup>10</sup>

Arnobius in his apologetic argument notes that if a physician came from distant and unknown regions, promising to deliver all from bodily sickness, how gladly would men flock to do him honour, and strive for his favour. How extraordinary, states Arnobius, is the conduct of those who revile and abuse Christ who has come to deliver us from spiritual evils and work out our salvation.<sup>11</sup>

The description of physician is elsewhere associated with Jesus Christ as the Word or Logos. Gregory Thaumaturgus refers to the Word as the Protactor and Physician of all,<sup>12</sup> and Clement begins his Paedagogus by referring to the Logos as the physician who heals suffering, and later describes the Logos as the only Paeonian physician for human infirmities, and the all-sufficient physician of humanity, the Saviour.<sup>13</sup>

In many of these references no real distinction is made between Jesus as physician of the body and physician of the soul. This double aspect is stated quite clearly by Cyril.

Jesus then means according to the Hebrew "Saviour", but in the Greek tongue "The Healer"; since He is physician of souls and bodies, curer of spirits, curing the blind in body, and leading minds into light, healing the visibly lame, and guiding sinners' steps to repentance, saying to the palsied, 'Sin no more', and, 'Take up thy bed and walk'. For since the body was palsied for the sin of the soul, He ministered just to the soul that he might extend the healing to the body. If therefore, anyone is suffering in soul from sins, there is the Physician for him; and if anyone here is of little faith, let him say to Him, 'Help thou my unbelief'. If any is encompassed also with bodily ailments, let him not be faithless, but let him draw nigh; for to such diseases also Jesus ministers. 14

The concept of Jesus as physician would also extend to those who continued his work. A number of writers see

priests and, in particular, bishops as physicians through their power to forgive and thereby provide a remedy for the repentant sinner. The bishop is also the prime participant in the "healing" act of Baptism. A detailed analogy of a bishop as physician is found in the Apostolic Constitutions where the bishop is encouraged to heal, like a pitiful physician, all who have sinned not only by methods of cutting and cauterizing but by means of bandages and drugs.<sup>15</sup> Similar analogous descriptions have already been mentioned on page 22.

In addition to written references an interesting inscription was found at Timgad in 1919.<sup>16</sup> The accepted reading is

Rogo te, Domine, subveni, Criste,  
tu solus medicus sanctis et penitentibus.

and the probable date of the inscription is towards the end of the second century. This together with the frequent use of Christus medicus by the North African writers Tertullian and Augustine may indicate that the analogy originated from this area. It seems however more likely from the general reference that the concept of Jesus Christ as physician was widely held and used by the Church.

The analogy of Jesus Christ the physician is an important feature in the development of Christian thought and practice in connection with healing and medicine. Pressed to the extreme the analogy of the divine physician could lead to an over-emphasis on the relation of sin, spiritual need and physical sickness and an underestimation of the value of and need for human physicians.<sup>17</sup>

### The influence of The Cult of Asclepius

The concept of Jesus Christ as Physician led Harnack<sup>18</sup> to consider how far Christianity was influenced by the cult of Asclepius. Castiglioni goes so far as to say that the statue of the Greek god was sometimes carried over to the Christian temple and honoured there as the image of Christ.<sup>19</sup> Others note some semblance between representations of Christ and Asclepius. Harnack states that conclusive evidence is hard to find but it is right to follow his lead and take into account the whole background of pagan healing deities and their cultus, and in particular the cult of Asclepius, when considering early Christian healing practice.

The cult of Asclepius<sup>20</sup> which has already been referred to earlier in this work had grown and remained very popular throughout the first three centuries of the Christian era and still had devoted adherents in the fifth century. Asclepius, was referred to as 'physician', 'healer', 'Saviour', and, largely due to his similar appeal to those who looked to religion for deliverance and healing, seems to be regarded by the early Christians as Christ's strongest rival. His cult certainly was the most successful in withstanding the advance of Christianity.

The centre of the cult was the large temple at Epidaurus but other temples were found throughout the Roman Empire. The main feature of a visit to the temple was the spending of a night in the abaton of the temple near the statue of Asclepius to await a visit from the god whilst sleeping. Asclepius was expected to heal or give directions for healing in a dream. All this took place after a period of preparation purification and participation in cultic ceremony.

Evidence of the effectiveness of this practice is revealed in the numerous inscriptions or testimonies to the healing power of the god set up by healed devotees in the temples. Contemporary writers bear further witness and even some of the Christian writers admit the ability of Asclepius to heal the sick. It is difficult, therefore, to disagree with the conclusions of Edelstein.

Despite the shortcoming inherent in the character of the available evidence, one essential point is indubitable: people went to the Asclepieia, they had dream visions and awoke healed, or at least informed what to do in order to heal themselves. What the physicians Rufus and Galen report is ample proof of the actuality of the dreams and the effectiveness of the cures. These men were good scientists, keen observers, and interested in the results achieved rather than in any religious controversies or beliefs. Their testimony gives assurance that one is not dealing with fiction only, but with facts. 21

Although the cures of Asclepius were not denied by Christians they tended to regard the god as an agent of Satan, who deceived those whom he healed by drawing them away from the true Saviour who could cure the soul as well as the body.<sup>22</sup> The legendary association and common portrayal of Asclepius with a serpent would convince Christians of the cult's satanic origin. Justin Martyr twice states the view that when the devils learned that it had been foretold that Christ should heal every sickness and raise the dead they produced Asclepius.<sup>23</sup> He seems not to deny the power of the cult but clearly associates it with evil and, although elsewhere notes similarities between Christ and Asclepius, is scornful of his origin and divine power.

Asclepius and Apollo are taught to heal by Chiron the Centaur - a very novel thing indeed, for gods to be taught by a man. 24

Both Justin and Arnobius use the legend of Asclepius

however, as a means of argument against those who questioned the divinity of Christ on the grounds of his human origin and his ignominious death. Arnobius reminds them that it was after his punishment and death by lightning that Asclepius, who was of mortal birth, was named the discoverer of medicine and protector of health.<sup>25</sup> Arnobius claims, moreover, that the simple healing command and touch by Jesus on all who came to Him reflect true divinity compared with the remedies given by the god in the healing temple. These were but modes of treatment followed by earth-born physicians and were not always very successful judging by the many thousands left unaided and the few healed. He also argues for the divine nature of Christ by pointing out his ability to allow his disciples, through his Name, to use his own power, and that transferring to man, the frailest being, the ability to perform that which God alone is able to do, is a proof of supreme power over all. To back up this argument he gives a graphic description of the direct healings of Christ and how the disciples also performed the same miracles, claiming that this transfer of power to men was something none of the other gods had achieved.<sup>26</sup>

The similarity and the controversy between the cult of Asclepius and Christianity had an effect on the development of Christian thinking and practice in connection with healing. Whilst not denying at least the partial effectiveness of Asclepius' treatment, the Church upheld the superiority of Christ's methods and the power of his followers to use them. At the same time the importance of the moral factor in healing and the need to cure the soul were stressed. The Church was thus further influenced towards regarding healing primarily as spiritual rather than physical. However other Christians wer

still attracted by pagan practices and features of the cult of Asclepius, particularly incubation, came to be adopted by parts of the Church.

### The influence of the Apocryphal Writings

As well as the direct teaching of Christ and the Apostles recounted in canonical scriptures, sections of the early Church would have knowledge of the various apocryphal writings about our Lord and the apostles and such writings as the Book of Enoch and the works of Philo Judaeus. Moreover the Church was subject to some pressures from the gnostic and other groups from which some of these writings stemmed. The story of the opposition of the Apostles to Simon Magus' magic art and his claim to be Christ is something that has found its way into much of the writing of the early Fathers,<sup>27</sup> as well as such extant apocryphal works as the Acts of Peter and the Acts of Paul, and gives an indication of how widely a non-canonical account could be accepted.

There seems to have been a wide readership of the apocryphal "Gospels" and "Acts" during the early Church period under study and some of the legends find a place in the beliefs of the medieval period, and indeed were elaborated upon, despite the condemnation of these Apocryphal works by Pope Gelasius in 494 at the Synod of Rome.

In general these writings heighten the miraculous element in the lives of Jesus and the apostles. This is especially true of those gospels that concentrate on events in the infancy and childhood of Jesus. These include the Gospel of James, the Gospel of Thomas, the pseudo-Gospel of Mattheu

and the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy. Any exact date for the origin of these gospels is difficult to determine but it is likely that they were compiled some time during the period under study and reflect the thoughts of some sections of the Christian Church or groups that considered themselves to be Christians.

Within these infancy gospels there are numerous stories relating the miracles of the infant Jesus and the miraculous property of articles with which he had been in contact. Lepers and sick children were cured by wearing coats made from Jesus' swaddling clothes or through the healing virtue of the water in which he had been bathed.<sup>28</sup> Thus a possessed priest's son was exorcised by one of the Christ child's swaddling clothes being placed on his head.<sup>29</sup> Many of these tales would seem relatively harmless but when the Christ child is used to restore a man who had been changed into a mule it is clear that a more definite magical element has been introduced.<sup>30</sup> Of similar substance is the story of the eight year old Jesus miraculously increasing the width of a throne intended for the King of Jerusalem which his father had constructed.<sup>31</sup> Moreover the powers of the child Jesus are related as being used for evil ends. He transforms some children into kids and orders them to skip before restoring them to human form.<sup>32</sup> A child who runs into him is cursed and dies.<sup>33</sup> The teacher of Jesus starts to whip him but his hand withers and he dies. Consequently Joseph informs Mary, 'Henceforth we will not allow him to go out of the house; for everyone who displeases him is killed.'<sup>34</sup> Clearly such stories as these about Jesus together with stories of similar marvels performed by the apostles in some of the Apocryphal Acts would have some influence on Christian thought. Some perhaps would be encouraged to continue practising something of the magic arts

under the guise of Christianity. To the pagan the circulation of these stories would give further evidence for the belief that Christ was a magician and Christians practiced sorcery, a charge that was common in the early Christian era. It was in combatting the charges of magic that Christian thinking on healing and the miraculous took a significant emphasis.

### The Christian defence against magic

Although the exact date of the original version cannot be determined, perhaps one of the earliest Christian defences against the accusation of magic is to be found in the Recognitions of Clement. In one of the long doctrinal discussions St. Peter is asked how the miracles wrought by Simon Magus and other magicians may be distinguished from divine signs and Christian miracles. In what way is anyone sinning who infers from the similarity of the signs that Simon Magus is divine or that Christ was a magician?<sup>35</sup> Peter's reply follows one of the standard arguments found more frequently at a later stage. Christian miracles of healing the sick and expelling demons are of benefit to mankind whereas the magic art of Simon Magus was not for the good of men. Since, however, magic was considered a deceitful practice and its adherents themselves both being deceived and deceiving others,<sup>36</sup> it is able to imitate exorcism and healing in an effective way in order to delude unwary people.

The wonders of Apollonius of Tyana, whose life spanned most of the first century A.D., were occasionally cited by pagan writers to diminish the apologetic value of the miracles of Christ. The supernatural powers attributed to Apollonius were

exaggerated by his chief biographer Philostratus who wrote over a hundred years after his death. Of the marvels he recounts seven relate to healing, of a demoniac boy and a boy bitten by a dog, the healing of a dislocated hip, a paralysed hand and loss of sight, a bride is raised from the dead, and a general reference is given to healing the sick at Pergamum. Other wonders are more apocryphal in character such as his instantaneous transportation from Smyrna to Ephesus. A later history of Apollonius was written by Hierocles, governor of Bithynia (c.303) with an anti-Christian motive.<sup>37</sup>

The moral argument that Christian miracles are to be distinguished from magic by their beneficial effects is frequently used. Origen's defence against such accusations of Celsus that Jesus was a magician whose tricks were less wonderful than those performed by jugglers and Egyptians in the middle of market places was that Jesus required a moral response from men.

There is not a single juggler who, by means of his proceedings, invites his spectators to reform their manners, or trains those to the fear of God who are amazed at what they see, nor who tries to persuade them so to live as men who are to be justified by God. 38

Origen further distinguishes Christian miracles from magic by the simplicity of their achievement in contrast to the elaborate nature of much magical practices.

It seems clear from the writings of Tertullian, Origen and Cyprian that Christians did not deny that magic was able to perform marvels although to wrong ends. Magic was the work of demons who were wicked spirits out to deceive men and even the magicians themselves. Demons could send disease to afflict a man and then take it away in order to encourage adherence to magical practice or a pagan god.<sup>39</sup> It was because of this demonic

influence that magic was considered evil and to be shunned by Christians.

A feature of the first three centuries was the increasing acceptance of the doctrine of demonic power.<sup>40</sup> The disappearance of many of the ancient religious traditions and beliefs had given rise to some sense of uncertainty. Without a strong tie to one particular pattern individual practice was more open to the influence and ideas of many backgrounds and sources. The tendency was for the more primitive ideas to become dominant. Moreover in an age of general uncertainty the individual adheres closely to that which seems to offer some protection against misfortune. By attributing all evil to demons the individual could gain some protection by complying with the magical arts that claimed power over the demons. As already noted, the Church accepted the thinking of the contemporary world but went on to say that not even magic could offer protection but was itself the work of demons. Augustine, for example, accepts the reality of the marvels worked by magic but attributes the secrets and power of magic to the work of demons although magicians imagine they are working the marvels they are really performed by demons.<sup>41</sup> He restates the fact that Christian miracles were wrought by simple confidence and devout faith, not by incantation and spells compounded by an art of depraved curiosity.<sup>42</sup>

Augustine further enhances the moral argument by stressing the superiority of moral and spiritual achievement over the magical arts. The seeming superiority of marvels of magicians over most Christian achievement is divinely ordained so that Christians may remain humble and practise works of justice rather than seek to perform miracles. Magicians seek

their own glory but the saints strive only for the glory of God.

### The purpose of miracles

The comparison of Christian practice with magic and the controversies which arose concerning miracles led some writers to consider their purpose and, in particular, their apologetic value in convincing non-Christians of the power of Christ.<sup>43</sup> The healing miracles were performed not only from compassion but as an integral part of the proclamation of the Gospel. Miracles were a means therefore of arousing faith in times and places where there was little or none.

Even miracles of the Old Testament conformed to this pattern. In reviewing them Chrysostom notes that they took place for certain purposes. The signs and wonders found in the Exodus, the Wilderness wanderings, the Babylonian exile were means of demonstrating the power of God, of increasing the number of proselytes and of strengthening the faith of believers in a time of error and apostasy. Likewise in the history of the Church they were of particular value at certain periods of declining faith and practice. Where true religion had taken root they were no longer essential.<sup>44</sup>

The miracles of Christ were seen as a demonstration of his compassion and of his divine nature on the one hand and a faith-arousing technique on the other. In a sense even these could be seen as unnecessary had his listeners been sufficiently perceptive and responsive to his message. Augustine speaks of the miracles of Jesus as necessary for the simple evangelism of

many, and as having a deeper spiritual significance for a few.

Therefore He bringeth to us a medicine such as should heal our utterly corrupt manners, by miracles procured to himself authority, by authority obtained himself belief, by belief drew together a multitude, by a multitude possessed antiquity, by antiquity strengthened religion. 45

He however goes on to qualify this statement by saying that no one of these is necessary to the wise man. Some reacted to Christ's miracles with wonder but those who had understanding attained to their true meaning. Augustine felt it important to stress that the miracles of Jesus were intended to convey spiritual truth. 46

Attention was focused too on the miracles of the first disciples. These would be seen as of particular interest and relevance because members of the Early Church were more easily able to identify themselves with the disciples than with Christ Himself. Origen states that the Apostles could not have made men change their ways without the help of miracles and wonders. 47 Lactantius considers that the power to work miracles was given to the disciples by Jesus Christ so that they might work for the welfare of men by deeds and words. 48 The two-fold purpose of the performance of miracles was seen as a continuation of Christ's ministry. It demonstrated compassion and effected the conversion of men to God by a demonstration of the power pertaining to the Kingdom.

Their value, from an evangelistic standpoint, is highlighted in the discourse on spiritual gifts in the Apostolic Constitutions referring to Christ's final command to his disciples in St. Mark's Gospel (16:17).

These gifts were first bestowed on us, the apostles, when we were about to preach the gospel to every creature, and afterwards were of necessity afforded to those who had by our means believed, not for the advantage of those who perform them, but for the conviction of the unbelievers, that those whom the

word did not persuade, the power of signs might put to shame: for signs are not for us who believe, but for the unbelievers, both for the Jews and the Gentiles. 49

The writer goes on to state that obviously not all the ungodly are affected by the signs but only those of a good disposition. Therefore it is not necessary that every one of the faithful should cast out demons, or raise the dead, or speak with tongues, but such a one only who is vouchsafed this gift for some cause which may be of advantage to the salvation of the unbelievers. Some unbelievers are often put to shame not by the demonstration of the Word, but by the power of the signs, yet not all are shamed into belief.

We see then that miracles, while of value in arousing faith, will not necessarily convince unbelievers. We have the example of St. Paul noted by Chrysostom. When preaching to the Thessalonians (Acts 17:2) Paul reasoned with them from Scripture and, like Christ Himself, by no means used miracles on every occasion. Miracles could lead to accusations of imposture or the resort to magic, persuasive Scripture-based reasoning was open to no such charge.<sup>50</sup> He makes the same point in a Homily on St. John.

For prophecies bring men over not less than miracles, and are free from the appearance of boasting. Miracles may possibly be slandered among foolish men, but nothing of the kind has ever been said of prophecy.

For they were the more perfect among His disciples who came to Him not only because of His miracles, but through His Teaching also. The grosser sort His miracles attracted, but the better reasoners His prophecies and doctrines. 51

The accusation of performing magic was one that, as we have seen, was levelled at Christians from some sources. Chrysostom goes on to emphasise that it was the quality of St. Paul's character rather than his power to work miracles

that attracted converts.

It was not then by his miracles that men were made believers, no, it was not the miracles that did this, nor was it upon the ground of these that he claimed his high pretension, but upon those other grounds. For a man must be alike irreproachable in conduct, prudent and discreet in his dealings with others, regardless of danger and apt to teach. It was by these qualifications that the greater part of his success was achieved. Where there were these, there was no need of miracles. 52

Chrysostom seems therefore deliberately to underrate the value of miracles in effecting conversions. However his sermons indicate that on a number of occasions he is perhaps attempting to answer the question: "Why have miracles ceased to happen?" - a question which was in all probability frequently raised at the time. He notes for example:

Indeed the asking of signs is a practice of tempters both then and now: for even now there are some that still seek them and say - "Why do not miracles take place also at this present time?" If thou art faithful, as thou oughtest to be, and lovest Christ as thou oughtest to love Him, thou hast no need of signs, they are given to unbelievers. 53

He later refers to the fact that the heathen urge against Christians the absence of miracles. He is discussing Christian love and dismisses the criticism that must have been in the minds of some of those listening to him. The heathen are attracted less by miracles than by a mode of life. It is lack of love, the hallmark of Christian character, that is most likely to cause the heathen to stumble. The best and most effective testimony is a loving, pure and upright life. He notes that the heathen often termed those who worked miracles 'deceivers' - a charge they could not make against a pure life.<sup>54</sup>

Chrysostom goes on to point out that miracles had a place in a given period and were of some value to the unbeliever,

but that ultimately the faith that does not demand signs is the more deserving of praise, the unbeliever more likely to be convinced by love than by miracles.

He elaborates his position on this issue in considering St. Matthew 7:21-23.

Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father, who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you: depart from me, you evildoers.'

This passage, he declares, indicates that neither faith nor miracle working avails for him who works such wonders without virtue. Those to whom he speaks are not to think less of themselves because they perform no miracles.<sup>55</sup> Augustine, commenting on the same passage, writes:

What doth it profit a man if he do miracles and is proud, is not meek and lowly in heart. <sup>56</sup>

Elsewhere Chrysostom goes on to argue that the cessation of miracles may be of positive value. It was an indication of their noble calling and of their love that they should believe in God without proof. After all, if the heavens were suddenly to open and Christ appear to all mankind the heathen would fall down and worship as well as the believer, yet the adoration of the heathen could not be accounted to them as faith because this is not faith. Therefore in proportion to the evidence wherewith the miracle is set forth is the reward of faith lessened.<sup>57</sup>

God had caused miracles to cease for this reason and because spiritual gifts tend to lead to pride and division as in the Corinthian Church. He repeats his earlier criticism that signs often provoke evil suspicion but a pure life does not admit any such reproach.<sup>58</sup>



Miracles, then, apart from divinely ordained periods of history as far as God's activity and saving purposes are concerned, are for Chrysostom unnecessary. They are seen as an obstacle to true faith and of no great value to unbelievers other than those of spiritual disposition. They arouse opposition and lay those who perform them open to false accusations. It is obvious that the element of compassionate response to human need is absent from Chrysostom's thinking on this subject. Miracles are seen as acts relevant only to the evangelistic and apologetic thought and practice of the Church. However we need to recollect that Chrysostom was simultaneously urging his congregations to care for the sick, actively encouraging the building of hospitals, commending the work of doctors and commenting favourably on help people received from faith in the relics of the saints. The influence of this kind of thought and teaching concerning the purpose and effectiveness of miracles concentrated attention on the spiritual rather than the physical aspects of wholeness or health.

However Augustine's career bears witness to a change in his understanding of the value of miracles.<sup>59</sup> His earlier view that men no longer needed spectacular proof for their faith and that miracles such as had happened in the times of the Apostles were no longer allowed to take place altered to one of encouraging publicity to the contemporary miracles that were taking place. He himself examined and recorded each instance of healing at the memoriae of St. Stephen established in Hippo in 424.

In the City of God he states

For even now miracles are wrought in the name of Christ whether by His sacraments or by the prayers or relics of His saints; but they are not so brilliant and conspicuous as to cause them to be published with such glory as accompanied the former

miracles. For the canon of the sacred writings, which behoved to be closed, causes those to be everywhere recited, and to sink into the memory of all congregations; but these modern miracles are scarcely known even to the whole population in the midst of which they are wrought, and at the best are confined to one spot. For frequently they are known only to a few persons, especially if the state is a large one; and when they are reported to other persons in other localities, there is no sufficient authority to give them prompt and unwavering credence, although they are reported to the faithful by the faithful. 60

He goes on to give a number of detailed accounts of healing to underline his argument. His credulity is not superstitious and appears to arise from a growing sympathy for those who suffered physically as well as a desire to witness spiritually.

The priority of spiritual wholeness and the virtue of suffering

John Cassian was one who emphasised the priority of spiritual wholeness. His views on Christian spirituality, as expressed in his Institutes and Conferences gained widespread acceptance among the monastic orders and he therefore exercised a considerable influence on early medieval Church thought both in the East and in the West.

Although he recalls in his writings the healing miracles of the Desert Fathers, he generally dissuades his monks from emulating miracle workers and encourages them to regard the expulsion of evil from the soul as the greatest miracle of all. True perfection, he teaches, lies in virtue rather than in miracles. He advises them, in considering miracle workers, to examine the lives and characters of such persons. The height of perfection and blessedness does not consist in the

performance of wonderful works but in the priority of love.<sup>61</sup>

In reference to the invitation of Christ he notes

"Come and learn of me," not chiefly to cast out devils by the power of heaven, not to cleanse lepers, not to give sight to the blind, not to raise the dead .... but do ye, says He, learn this of me "For I am meek and lowly of heart". For this it is which is possible for all men generally to learn and practise, but the working of signs is not always necessary, nor good for all, nor granted to all. Humility therefore is the mistress of all virtues. For he can perform all the miracles which Christ wrought, without danger of being puffed up, who follows the gentle Lord not in the grandeur of his miracles but in the virtues of patience and humility. But he who aims at commanding unclean spirits, or bestowing gifts of healing, or showing some wonderful miracle to the people, even though, when he is showing off, he invokes the name of Christ, yet he is far from Christ because, in his pride of heart, he does not follow his humble Teacher. 62

This concern for correct priorities is shared by Cassian's contemporaries Augustine and Chrysostom. Augustine writes

For as the soul is better than the body, so is the saving health of the soul better than the health of the body. The blind body doth not now open its eyes by a miracle of the Lord, but the blinded heart openeth its eyes to the word of the Lord. 63

He further emphasises the spiritual priority as apparent in the healing ministry of Jesus in his discourse on the healing of the paralysed man by the pool in the Gospel of St. John (5:1-18).

There lay so many there, and yet only one was healed, whilst He could by a word have raised them all up. What then must we understand but that the power and goodness was doing what souls might, by His deeds, understand for their everlasting salvation, than what bodies might gain for temporal health? 64

Chrysostom writes

For inasmuch as from bodily sickness no great injury could arise (for though we were not diseased, yet death would in any case come and destroy and dissolve the body), but everything depends upon the health of our souls. 65

However an acknowledgement of the priority of spiritual wholeness leaves unanswered the issue of suffering and disease. This is faced elsewhere. Physical suffering is seen as of value in promoting spiritual growth and understanding. Moreover temperance and obedience to spiritual principles can assist us towards physical as well as spiritual health.

The purpose of sickness and suffering became a vital issue during times of plague and pestilence. Cyprian cites plague as a great revealer of the true nature of men.

You reproach plague and disease while by plague and disease the crimes of individuals are either detected or increased, while mercy is not manifested to the weak, and avarice and rapine are waiting open-mouthed for the dead. 66

The pestilence and plague which seems horrible and deadly, searches out the righteousness of each one, and examines the minds of the human race, to see whether they who are in health tend the sick; whether relations affectionately love their kindred .... whether physicians do not forsake the beseeching patients. 67

Augustine's approach is a similar one. He relates it to the individual and associates sickness with the will of God. Our reaction to suffering reveals our true nature.

The will of God is sometimes that thou shouldest be whole, sometimes that thou shouldest be sick. If when thou art whole God's will be sweet, and when thou art sick God's will be bitter, thou art not of the right heart. 69

Augustine states that God will grant physical health if that is right for us. In times of ill health we are to accept that this is more profitable for us than good health would have been. It is better to be ill, for example, and comparatively innocent than to be well and commit a crime. One is quite right to pray for the relief of suffering but God alone knows what is expedient for us. He points to the example of St. Paul:

The Apostle Paul besought Him that He would take away the thorn in his flesh, and He would not. Was he disturbed, was he filled with sadness and did he speak of himself as deserted? Rather did he say he was not deserted, because that was not taken away which he desired to be taken away to the end that the infirmity might be cured. For this he found in the voice of the Physician, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. 69

Chrysostom comments on the suffering endured by the disciples of Jesus Christ, despite the miracles they themselves could perform, as a necessary reminder of their humanity.

Since the Apostles used to perform many great and astonishing signs and wonders, He suffered them constantly to be scourged, to be expelled, to inhabit the dungeon, to encounter bodily infirmities, to be in continual tribulations lest the greatness of their miracles should make them to be accounted as gods amongst mankind. 70

Chrysostom himself suffered hardship and ill health but he continued to affirm that these are instructive. In physical sickness we are to look to our souls and examine ourselves, for God often scourges the inferior part so that the better part of us may receive some healing.<sup>71</sup>

There is some confusion as to whether God himself is the author or instigator of sickness or whether He regulates the sickness, which itself stems from some evil source, thus transforming evil into good.

Some writers certainly were not happy about attributing sickness and suffering to the will of God. They felt that this view was not substantially supported by New Testament evidence and that the acceptance of suffering and disease as being willed by God for a specific purpose undermined the Church's healing ministry. To accept disease as God given was a retrograde way of thinking.

Ambrose in his writings on this subject attributes disease to the Devil but accepts that it can be put to victorious use.

For the Devil destroys himself when he makes the man whom he is seeking to overthrow by temptation stronger instead of weak because whilst he is weakening the body he is strengthening the soul. 72

Cassian, in upholding the good that can be wrought through patient suffering, mentions the example of the beggar Lazarus.

How useful bodily sickness sometimes may be the blessing on Lazarus, the beggar who was full of sores, shows us. For Scripture makes mention of no other good qualities or deserts of his, but it was for this fact alone, that he endured want and bodily sickness with the utmost patience, that he was deemed worthy of the blessed lot of a place in Abraham's bosom. 73

We see then an important distinction to be made in the Early Church's views on suffering. One saw disease as the work of the Devil which can be victoriously overcome but must at the same time be resisted. The other attributed suffering and disease to the will of God which was not to be resisted but met with joyful resignation in the belief that it assisted the health of the soul. A third view imputed disease to sin and regarded it as evil. Clearly some disease can be seen as a direct result of intemperance. Christian writers therefore often postulated temperance and moderation as necessary not only for the health of the body but also the soul.

Thus Chrysostom writes

"What then," saith one, "do all diseases proceed from sin?" Not all, but most of them and some proceed from different kinds of loose living, since gluttony, intemperance and sloth produce such like sufferings. But the one rule we have to observe is to bear every stroke thankfully, for they are sent because of our sins. 74

In concluding this section then one may summarise the view of early Church writers on spiritual wholeness and the virtue of suffering.

It is clearly correct for the Christian to emphasise the priority of seeking spiritual rather than physical health.

Suffering and disease however can be used creatively. They can increase our awareness of our failure to live as we should and draw our attention to the need to reform our attitudes, our habits or way of life, our whole nature. They can teach us virtues of patience and endurance and in times of weakness strengthen our faith by increasing our dependence on God. They can thus foster rather than hinder spiritual growth.

On the other hand an undue emphasis on the need to accept sickness as the will of God could lead to an undermining or slacking off of the Church's efforts to resist disease, to cure or render help and care to those who suffered. The positive approach was creative acceptance together with faithful continuance of Christ's ministry of healing the sick and extending care and compassion to those whom the Church was unable to cure.

However even the rather negative approach that advocated non-resistance to sickness and suffering since it was ascribed to the will of God could be deemed preferable to the ready relapse into pagan practices in order to relieve rather than endure suffering. The virtue of suffering was stressed against a background in which pagan and superstitious practices were rife, and it is to a consideration of this fact that we now turn.

#### The influence of pagan superstitious practice

Throughout the centuries the Early Church had to contend with the influence of pagan superstitious practices of contemporary society. Some converts to Christianity found it easy to make a complete break with their old attitudes and

former superstitions, upon others the customs and practices of the past maintained a greater hold.

To have taken a strong stand against such influences may have been the right course of action for Church leaders, it cannot have been an easy one. The alternative was to incorporate pagan customs and superstitions into Christian practice, but this was always seen as a compromise which weakened the Christian position. It was perhaps arguable that it was better for one to be a weak Christian than not to be one at all or, conversely, that it is better not to be a Christian at all than to be a weak or half-hearted one. A similar issue has perhaps to be faced by the Church with regard to Christian initiation today.

A certain temptation to resort to pagan practice was perhaps to be expected at times of crisis or weakness such as sickness and we find Christians resorting to pagan remedies despite continual exhortations not to do so. These can be found in the lectures and courses of training given to catechumens. Cyril warns the newly-converted against heeding the stars, auguries, omens and all forms of divination, witchcraft and necromancy. They are never to use amulets in times of sickness and are not to seek cures for their bodily ailments by burning incense by fountains or rivers, through charms written on leaves or watching birds.<sup>75</sup> Chrysostom in his instructions to his catechumens warns not only against amulets but against the practice of bringing half-witted old women into the house to make predictions or incantations. The fact that she may use the name of God does not make this a Christian procedure. Recourse to the local 'white witch' was far from uncommon.<sup>76</sup>

Similar instructions are given in the Apostolic Constitutions:

Thou shalt not use enchantments or purgations for thy child. Thou shalt not be a soothsayer, nor a diviner by great and little birds. Nor shalt thou learn wicked arts. - for all these things the law hath forbidden. 77

Childbirth was a time peculiarly surrounded by and subject to superstition. Chrysostom complains about the scarlet wof, amulets and bells hung upon the hand of a child when the only protection needed is that of the Cross. 78

He alludes to a practice of placing tablets with impious inscriptions on the heads of newly born children. This, he claims, teaches them from the first to lay aside virtuous endeavours and draws them partly at least under the false domination of fate. 79 He warns women against tying the names of rivers about their children and advocates the sign of the Cross at all times of sickness or childbirth.

For these amulets, though they who make money by them are forever rationalising about them, and saying 'We call upon God and do nothing extraordinary', and the like; and 'the old woman is a Christian and one of the faithful', the thing is idolatry. Art thou one of the faithful? Sign the cross; say, this I have for my only weapon; this for my remedy; and other I know none. 80

Chrysostom also commends the practice of some women and children, who suspended Gospels around their necks as a powerful amulet and carried them about wherever they went. 81

The use of the Gospel was similarly recommended by Augustine, who strongly condemned any recourse to superstitious practices.

When our head aches, let us not have recourse to the superstitious intercessor, to the diviners and remedies of vanity. My brethren shall I not mourn over you? Daily do I find these things: and what shall I do? Not yet have I persuaded Christians that their hope ought to be placed in God. Behold if one dies to whom these remedies have been given (and how many have died with remedies and how many have lived without them!) with what confidence does

the spirit go forth to God? He has lost the sign of Christ and has received the sign of the Devil ....

When thy head aches we praise thee if thou placest the gospel at thy head, instead of having recourse to an amulet. For so far as human weakness proceeded and so lamentable is the estate of those who have recourse to amulets, that we rejoice when we see a man who is upon his bed, and tossed with fevers and pains, places his hope on nothing else than that the gospel lies at his head. 82

This use of the gospel is of interest in that it may be considered a Christian substitution if not a compromise with pagan practice for the amulets whose use is condemned by Augustine.

We go on from this to other similar developments in this respect - the approbation extended to the use of relics and the practice of incubation, both of which could be considered Christian compromises with or substitutes for pagan practices and customs.

#### The cult of martyrs and the practice of incubation

The consideration of influences affecting the development of the thought and practices of the healing ministry of the Church of this period would be incomplete without a brief reference to the cult of martyrs.

Persecution, varying in intensity and spasmodic in outbreak, was the lot of the Christian Church throughout the first three centuries of the period of history under discussion. Those who were martyred for their faith in Christ faced and were subjected to forms of execution slow, cruel and designed often for the amusement and bloodlust of the crowds. Martyrs then not surprisingly were held in the greatest respect, the

records of their sufferings and the way in which they met their deaths serving as necessary propaganda for instilling courage and fortitude in those who might soon find themselves similarly treated. So it was that the heroic example of fellow Christians was recalled on the anniversaries of their deaths and detailed accounts given for the edification of those who commemorated their martyrdom.

The respect for martyrs extended as time went on to their relics. These were venerated in the belief that honour was due to the mortal remains of those who had suffered so bravely. A further factor was the use of the catacombs, subterranean burial chambers, found in Rome, where they were very extensive, and in many Mediterranean localities as well as in some of the more northerly cities of Europe. Roman law regarded every burial place as sacrosanct so that they were usually a refuge where Christians could meet for worship in times of persecution. Their use in this way perhaps acted as a further reminder of the Christians' association with their dead.

The earliest certain evidence of the practice of venerating relics is in connection with the martyrdom of the aged Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna in 156. The Martyrium Polycarpi<sup>83</sup> written from Smyrna gives an account of his trial and martyrdom.

So we afterwards took up his bones, more valuable than precious stones and finer than gold, and laid them where it was most fitting. There the Lord will permit us, as shall be possible to us, to assemble ourselves together in joy and gladness, and to celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom, alike in memory of them that have fought before, and for the training and preparation of them that are to fight hereafter.

Although in one sense the emphasis on the glory vouchsafed to those who suffered persecution joyfully and the Christian virtue of suffering itself may have detracted from

the Church's commitment to heal and give relief from pain, it is of particular interest to consider the part relics came to play in the ministry of healing itself. The early Fathers, in their writings, are careful to record that miracles were wrought by means of the relics of the saints. Hilary of Poitiers notes that the working of wonders at the tombs of Apostles and Martyrs bears witness to the power of Jesus Christ.<sup>84</sup> Augustine comments on the power exercised in the use of the bones of the saints to exorcise demons. He also gives an account of perhaps one of the best authenticated miracles of the period - the healing of blind Severus at Milan through touching with a napkin the bier on which the bodies of Saint Cervasius and Saint Protasius were carried. Augustine refers to it at least three times<sup>85</sup> and Ambrose also gives an account of it. In a letter to his sister he goes on to say:

For not without reason do many call this the resurrection of the martyrs. I do not say whether they have risen for themselves, for us certainly the martyrs have risen. You know - nay you yourself have seen - that many are cleansed from evil spirits, that very many also, having touched with their hands the robes of the saints, are freed from those ailments which oppressed them: you see that the miracles of old time are renewed, when through the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ grace was more largely shed forth upon the earth, and that many bodies are healed as it were by the shadow of the holy bodies. How many napkins are passed about? how many garments laid upon the holy relics and endowed with healing power are claimed! All are glad to touch even the outside thread, and whoever touches will be made whole. 86

Chrysostom in particular seems to have encouraged the faithful to revere the memory of the martyrs, to visit relics and to seek help in sickness. He often preached panegyrics on the feast days of the martyrs of Antioch. He is however aware of the dangers of abuse to which such veneration may lead and emphasises that the examples of the saints should draw us

nearer to Christ, the master for whom they died.

The cult of martyrs was not without its critics. Vigilantius, a presbyter of Aquitaine, condemned the practices of the Church at Jerusalem - the veneration of relics, the burning of candles, late night vigils - in a work written in 406 after a visit to the East. The work did not survive and our knowledge of it comes from a defence against its accusations by Jerome in his Contra Vigilantium.<sup>87</sup> Jerome maintains that the power of worthless dust and ashes to produce miracles and signs validates the cult associated with martyrs. The condemnation of the practices by Vigilantius does not seem to have had any great effect as the practices themselves became more elaborate.

It is of interest to note that the Council of Laodicea forbade members of the Church to attend the so-called martyrries of heretics for prayer or service (θεραπεία) - a Greek word which could mean both worship and the healing of sickness.<sup>88</sup>

The cult of martyrs, though dating from relatively early in the mid-second century became more prominent from the mid-fourth century. Memorials of local martyrs gave way to more universal observances. It became customary and indeed obligatory for new churches to contain some relics within their walls, and pilgrimages to the Holy Places, such as those recorded in the Peregrinatio Aetheriae, produced a wealth of Biblical relics of doubtful origin.

Another practice associated with some of these churches was that of incubation. This was one of sleeping in the church to seek divine aid through dreams for the healing of disease. Both the Old and New Testaments give some support for the importance of dreams, and often dreams had far-reaching effects. One recalls St. Peter's dream of the sheet let down from heaven

or St. Paul's vision of the man of Macedonia.<sup>89</sup> At a later date we find Augustine accepting that the dreams of his mother were means of guidance. He relates how the relics of Protasius and Gervasius were discovered at Milan through a dream of Ambrose and tells of a number of healings that followed a course of action dictated in dreams. Moreover it is recalled that, on his death bed, Augustine acceded to the request to heal a man because he had received his instruction in a dream.<sup>90</sup>

Yet, despite this greater value given to the interpretation of dreams, a value that has been revived in more recent thinking,<sup>91</sup> the practice of incubation is probably better seen as an example of the adoption by the Church of a pagan custom. It was particularly associated with certain saints who were regarded as having healing power and certain churches linked with them - Saints Cosmas and Damian at Constantinople, Saint Cyrus and Saint John at Alexandria, Saint Thecla at Seleucia. It was also associated with the widespread cult of Saint Michael the Archangel, who was venerated as a healer and as one who could protect individual Christians against the power of the devil.<sup>92</sup> Constantine built a sanctuary dedicated to the Archangel Michael near his new city at the mouth of the Bosphorus. Sozomen relates the help received at this Michaelium by his friend, Aquilinus. He was despaired of by physicians but the divine power appeared at night with a prescription that cured his sickness.<sup>93</sup>

The practice of incubation, though it extended throughout the whole Church, was more prominent in the East where it has persisted as one associated with Christian healing up to recent times.

**Chapter 5****SOME CONCLUSIONS****The Religious and Social Background**

The place of medicine and the care and healing of the sick within the early Church must be seen within the context of the religious and social life of the period. It is therefore important to pay some attention to the major religious and social developments of the time.

The most important religious factor was the growth and development of the Christian Church itself, from its beginning as an apparently small and obscure Jewish sect to an institution embodying Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. This led inevitably to the emergence of liturgy, creed, tradition and the evolution of more formal systems of order, discipline and government within the Church. Some changes may seem in retrospect regrettable concessions to the pressures of the time, but an attitude condemning the Church for her failure to maintain the simplicity of structure and practice of an earlier period, fails perhaps to appreciate that changing circumstances necessitated adaptations to meet new demands.

This period saw, however, the development not only of orthodox Christianity but of other religious sects having their origin in Jewish, Christian or pagan beliefs. Some met with considerable success, attracting large followings and maintaining prominence over a comparatively long period. Of particular note are the Gnostic and Montanist movements. Gnosticism, seeing matter as evil, the physical world as imperfect and antagonistic to the spiritual, gave little encouragement to either medicine or the Church's healing ministry. Similarly Montanism, with its hope of an imminent millenium, had little

concern for the material world and, as a movement, brought to a head the tension arising between order and charisma. The development of these movements and their offshoots resulted in tighter controls and definitions of belief, confirming the Church in its need to establish order and discipline. At the same time they encouraged a denigration of the world of matter in favour of an emphasis on other-worldly seeking and experience.

Although people were becoming less influenced by belief in and worship of the classical pagan deities, mystery religions, healing cults, the Isaic religion, and similar religions of subjective experience exercised considerable appeal. There was a renewed interest in certain aspects of Plato's thought brought about by Neo-platonist philosophy in which magic and astrology became more significant.

In considering the social and political climate we note that the development and expansion of the Church took place for the most part within the confines of the Roman Empire. This covered a wide geographical area and embraced peoples of Asia Minor, Southern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East - peoples of different culture, custom and tradition. The spread of Christianity was facilitated by the order and communication system of the empire that sought to silence it. Although persecution was not continuous it did remain a constant threat throughout most of the period.

Moreover the Empire itself was threatened and far from stable. The demands of the economy led to revised systems of taxation which created financial and material hardship. Science and learning were in decline. From the time of Marcus Aurelius the Empire was beset by plague, torn by civil wars and threatened by and subject to invasions by hostile tribes. The climax of this barbarian pressure was symbolised by the fall of Rome in

410. In an uncertain and dangerous world, men inevitably tended to seek consolation and satisfaction in other-worldly religion and these Christianity, as well as other cults, offered them.

The Church and concern for the sick

It is against this background that the healing ministry of the Early Church is set. We have seen that the main features of its faith and practice may be summarised as follows:

(i) The Church accepted the role of the physician in society and the methods and materials he used. Christians themselves were physicians and respected and practised the knowledge and arts of scientific medicine.

(ii) The Church felt an obligation to visit and care for the sick - an activity that was particularly highlighted in times of plague. The continuing concern for the sick and those in need led eventually to the establishment and development of hostels and institutions run by local congregations and monastic communities. These were often founded by wealthy patrons and maintained under clerical supervision.

(iii) The Church saw its own contribution to healing the sick as a response to the need for an effective ministry to combat the power of evil. In this way it continued the work of Jesus Christ whose ministry of healing bore witness to the ultimate triumph of His Kingdom and expressed His love and concern for those in need. In exorcism His Church sought, by the authoritative use of His name, the laying on of hands, the sign of the cross and, later, by use of oil, to evoke her Master's spiritual power against the evil of disease.

### Tendencies and tensions

The growth and development of any movement necessitates decision on the character of its organisation. The Church of the early Patristic period experienced the inevitable tension between the demands of order and formal authority and those of charisma and charismatic authority. Both were necessary and of value, and in one sense the charisma of one generation itself became ordered in the succeeding one. There is, then, in the developing and expanding life of the Church, a tendency to order. This finds expression in the definitions of duties and distinct functions within the Church; in the establishment of formalised patterns of worship; in acts conforming to an accepted norm rather than spontaneous in character. The effect of all this on the healing ministry is evidenced in the emergence of the office of exorcist, in the liturgical form of prayer for healing, and in the sacramental emphasis placed on healing actions such as the laying on of hands. Of particular influence was the closer association of the acts used in seeking supernatural healing with those of the baptismal rite. The effect of this link would tend to reduce the former to symbolic actions rather than effective and dynamic channels of divine intervention and power.

Tension arose, too, between what might be termed the demands of the inner life of the Church and its mission to the world, between exclusiveness and what might be seen as a compromising comprehension. There was on the one hand a need to foster and promote the spiritual growth in faith and practice of the believing member, on the other to convert and inspire faith in the unbeliever. This created tension between the demands of teaching and those of evangelism, the emphasis on

sanctification and that of salvation. The virtues of involvement in and accommodation to contemporary society, emphasised by Christians with social awareness, contrasted with the thought of those who stressed the necessity of remaining outside and apart from society to seek only a heavenly kingdom and of those who looked for an imminent Second Coming and saw no need to adapt and minister to the society in which they found themselves.

In the healing ministry tension exists between the priority placed on spiritual wholeness and the value of suffering in promoting spiritual development and insight, on the one hand, and the growth and adoption of customs designed to alleviate suffering and the emphasis on the value of miraculous cures in convincing the unbeliever on the other. This is illustrated in the concept of Jesus Christ as the Physician both of body and soul. He demands that His patients follow the spiritual path of love, obedience and sacrifice but continues to aid them through the relics of saints who have followed that way of suffering.

The paradoxical position of the Church's healing ministry is seen in the monastic movement. The early ascetics often deliberately neglected their own physical needs, mortifying the flesh in pursuit of spiritual wholeness, yet they attracted those seeking physical healing and became associated with miracles of healing. The remoteness, awe and sense of mystery surrounding some of the early hermits, drew those seeking supernatural aid. A conviction arose that the miracle-working power of God demands not ordinary but extra-ordinary channels, and that men 'set apart' and separated from the world were likely to be the most effective ministers. Perhaps the greatest failing of the Church's ministry in respect of healing was precisely this tendency - one of relegating the power of God to the extra-

ordinary, the paranormal, the particularly holy and failing to appreciate that it is active too in the ordinary and everyday events, affairs, relationships of life.

However the Church's ministry of healing is indebted to monasticism in many ways. The monastic orders originally provided the pattern for hospitals and developed the principles of care for all in need. In the Middle Ages they preserved medical knowledge within their cloistered libraries. Later rules propounded regimes of life in terms of moderation and balanced occupation that were health promoting, together with those emphasising the priority of spiritual over physical wholeness. Thus monasticism promoted practical care for the sick and some medical understanding whilst at the same time continuing to appeal to supernatural means of healing.

#### The pattern of the healing ministry in the established Church

The rise of monasticism coincided with the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine. This led to the incorporation into membership of the Church of large numbers of people still conditioned by the mentality of paganism. It is easy to be critical at this point and condemn the loss of faith, ideals and charismatic powers consequent on the influx of a body of nominal or marginal believers; but Establishment was a storm the ship of the Church had to weather and in some ways it emerged stronger for the experience.

Although lowering its standards of admission into membership, the Church in its established form heralded a feeling of assurance and confidence with regard to the purposes of God in the world. Some accommodation to pagan customs and the

Christianisation of what were originally pagan deities and festivals need not necessarily be seen as a policy of weakness. Such a policy might prove an effective pastoral means of assisting the growth in faith of nominal Christians while maintaining the basic overriding truth of the teaching and person of Christ. The temptations facing newly-converted Christians were not new ones. Some had succumbed to them long before the Church became established. They were perennial problems of the conflict with 'the world, the flesh and the devil' to which the Church is pledged.

So we leave the consideration of the Early Church in respect of its healing ministry. It developed a pattern that was to serve it for many years in the society to which it ministered. It evidenced a concern for the practical care of those who suffered and a recognition of the value and place of scientific medicine. It was to include a greater place for, unction as a sacrament of healing within a liturgical framework. It saw Jesus Christ as the physician of the soul as well as the body and therefore demanded the priority of the soul's health. It sought to embrace the spiritual levels of all members, some of whom saw Christianity mainly in terms of a faith from which they could gain physical healing, comfort and benefit, others who saw it in terms of self-giving and sacrifice.

A pattern evolved which retained under a Christian guise some (but by no means all) superstitious beliefs and remedies for sickness while at the same time setting forth a higher ideal of service and suffering. If its achievements seem inconsiderable and its compromises a distortion of the truth, we need perhaps to attempt some kind of empathy or identification with a different type of credulity from our own. It is I think undeniable that the pattern of the healing ministry developed

within the Church over the period concerned mediated to many those attributes of Christian faith, hope and love which they would have sought in vain elsewhere.

The Healing Ministry in the life of the Church today

Finally a brief look at the healing ministry of the Church today in the light of Early Church faith, practice and experience.

The last century has, like the early period under consideration, been one of rapid expansion of the Church; growth and development of sectarian movements; and continued secular scepticism. Great missionary enterprise has resulted in a Church whose members embrace many cultures and customs and whose numerical and spiritual strength lies largely outside the culture of its cradle, the Roman Empire. The more recent establishment of indigenous churches will effect far-reaching changes only just becoming apparent. The development and change within conventional church life has been accompanied by the growth of heretical movements, some well established and respected, exhibiting similar tendencies to those of their counterparts in earlier centuries. In the Western world unprecedented scientific and industrial progress has contributed to a decline in Christian practice and belief in the mass of the population, whilst not a few individuals are attracted to occult and oriental religions.

Many of the tensions apparent in the early centuries are not far below the surface in Church life today. There is the controversial issue of the demands of order and charisma in all its forms; the balance to be maintained between the demands

of the Church's inner life in terms of spiritual vitality and intellectual challenge and its mission to the world in terms of evangelism and social action. Its many denominations and branches testify to the tension between the demands of exclusiveness and those of more embracing and comprehensive claims.

Against this background the basic pattern of the Early Church in the field of ministry to the sick still holds.

(i) The Church needs to have a continuing respect for scientific medicine and practice, and an awareness of the issues involved in new knowledge in medicine and especially in the more recent fields of psychology. The growth of interdisciplinary organisations concerned with co-operation and discussion between doctors, members of associated therapeutic professions, and clergy is to be welcomed. So, too, is the growing interest in the fields of Clinical Theology and Pastoral Counselling.

(ii) The Church needs to put a particular emphasis on the practical care of those in need. In many respects the pioneering work of the Church has been taken over by the secular society, so far as the provision of medical care and hospitals is concerned. Individual Christians are however very active within the changing social structure and the Church continues its pioneering work overseas in developing countries, through voluntary organisations and by being alive to the emergence of new needs and initiating practical care and concern when these arise.

(iii) The Church needs to encourage the continued application of the spiritual resources of counsel, prayer and sacrament to cure and comfort in times of sickness. This requires it to hold in accepting balance, the needs, outlooks, beliefs and practices of those who constitute the diverse membership of the body of

Christ. This involves allowing controlled outlets for popular hopes and beliefs centred upon gifted individuals, sacred places or objects of veneration, from the work of a charismatic healer to the work of a shrine as at Lourdes. It involves the continued and increasing use of the sacraments of healing as a normal part of the liturgical framework.

Above all perhaps the Church, as it exercises its healing ministry, needs an awareness that miracle is a work of transformation through the action of God of a diseased body, a deranged mind, a disturbed soul. It needs to recognise that the power of God is not limited to certain rites, places or people, though God may use them in the fulfilment of His purposes but that He can use ordinary as well as extraordinary channels, and that, in the end, He confronts us with the paradox of Christ, whose Kingdom of love, peace and wholeness was achieved through acceptance of suffering and death.

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sign is in mind. The use of a cross as a symbol is  
found in pre-Christian Jewish circles. Both the 'T'  
sign and the 'X' sign were ways of writing 'tau' the  
last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and as such, like  
omega, symbolised God. It is generally accepted that  
some form of a cross was used as the symbol of  
protection from eschatological woes employed in  
apocalyptic circles (Ezekiel 9:4) and as the sign of  
the Son of Man (Matthew 24:30). Like the branding of

## 64 (continued)

slaves it could also convey the sense of being the property of God.

One of the earliest Christian symbols was the Chi-Rho sign and it may be that early references to the cross sign are to this symbol. The Chi-Rho symbolised the name of Christ and the chi also signified, at least for Jewish Christians, the Lord God, so that it could have been regarded as a double symbol. This is perhaps the case in Revelation 14:1 which refers to those who had the name of the Lamb and the Father's name written on their foreheads.

In healing, the sign of the cross could therefore be taken as a manual representation of healing in the name of Christ, and also, retaining some of its apocalyptic significance, was regarded as giving special protection against demonic powers.

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91 (continued)

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