

CRISTIAN DUMITRESCU

# A Historical Survey of Healing and Exorcism

## Preamble

The attempt to describe the historical developments regarding spiritual warfare in one short paper presents serious challenges. The time span to be covered is at least two thousand years if limited to the Christian church. The second challenge is the varied assumptions and hermeneutics with which different historians read events. Denominational stance and theological backgrounds decide *a priori* if belief in healing or deliverance is possible. Roman Catholics have been for millennia supporters of the miraculous. Protestants, who initially rejected the reality of miracles seem today to be divided on the topic. Some historical documents contain scarce information that can be interpreted according to one's prior belief.

Spiritual warfare is not a new term for missiological studies. As defined by Scott Moreau, spiritual warfare "encompasses Satan's rebellion against God and the manifestations of that rebellion in the created order" (in Corrie 2007:369). It is an ongoing conflict and war manifested in the creation on planet earth. Its most extreme aspects are the battle against different forms of deadly diseases, often referred to as miraculous healing, and against demonic confrontation through deliverance or exorcism. Not all diseases are caused by demonic forces, and not all problems in life are spiritual warfare. Since the Bible describes the fundamentals of spiritual warfare but does not prescribe a certain way to approach it, there is a continuous need to assess the *modus operandi* of satanic forces. No historical period or particular culture is exempted from demonic influence, but Satan's forces manifest themselves contextually to best fulfill their purposes. This paper will focus on the most common response to spiritual warfare, miraculous healing and exorcism or deliverance. Noting the continuous developments of challenges and responses to spiritual warfare, Amanda Porterfield concludes that "to focus on healing in the history of Christianity . . . is to

attend to important elements of continuity amid the jumble of competing doctrines, innumerable churches, disparate behaviors, and historical developments" (2005:3).

### Old Testament Background

Healing is part of restoring the wholeness of human beings. God created very good human beings. By hoping to become better than God's creation, humans became slaves of Lucifer. Their bodies were affected by sickness and death, their minds became confused regarding right and wrong, and their wills were no longer able to recognize and resist sin. But God stepped in and began the work of restoration. Sarai, Abraham's wife, experienced healing from bareness at an age no one expected such a miracle to happen. Moses tested the power of God when faced with the challenge to liberate Israel. Israel itself experienced God as their healer both in physical healing as well as in providing in a miraculous way for all their needs. God also had to fight "against animism and idolatry among His chosen people" (Kraft 2015:32).

### New Testament Background

Jesus came to restore humanity in all its aspects. He did that through his messenger, the Holy Spirit. Both the Old and the New Testament contain countless numbers of cases where the Holy Spirit, directly or indirectly, brought healing and restoration. Jesus himself included healing as part of his mission when reading the passage from Isaiah in the synagogue. As Christ (the Anointed One), he was supposed to fulfill the messianic prophecies of saving, healing, and restoring human beings. As Christ, he worked in the power of the Spirit and with divine authority. As such he confronted the powers of evil, often by miraculous healings or deliverance from demon possession.

Jesus identified himself as Messiah not so much by claiming it, but by demonstrating he was fulfilling the messianic prophecies through acts of miraculous restoration. "The teachings in the gospel consist not only of what Jesus said but also of what He *did*" (MacNutt 2005:45). Most of his activity was devoted to restoring people by healing their minds, bodies, and emotions. He worked toward restoring people's dignity as human beings and restoring God's image and dominion on earth. He demonstrated the presence of God's kingdom and then explained it through his teachings. "Jesus did things and then commented on them, explained them, challenged people to figure out what they meant" (Wright 1999:39). It is no wonder that the opening act of his ministry was performed by transforming a wedding failure by an act of restoring a family's dignity and

honor. And there should be no surprise that often Jesus healed on Sabbath, reminding people that he created and is the Lord of the Sabbath, restoring both the worshippers and the day of worship. A comprehensive summary and analysis of Jesus' miracles is offered by Michael J. Lovis in *The Gospel Miracles*.

However, Jesus did not perform these miracles all by himself. He delegated authority and power to his disciples to do the same: to proclaim the kingdom of God and to demonstrate its reality by performing miraculous acts—curing the sick, healing lepers, casting out demons, and raising the dead (Matt 10:8). First, he sent the 12, then the 72, and finally the newly established church. The surprise of the disciples was so great to see that the Holy Spirit could manifest himself through human beings and they interpreted the results in the correct way: the power of Satan was broken, the spirits could be overcome. Restoration from sin was not only possible but real.

By identifying himself with the Spirit, Jesus promised the early church that he would continue to be with them and do the restoration miracles. His promise was confirmed when Peter and Silas healed the crippled man begging at the Temple's gate. This was simply the continuation of the restoration worked through the prophets and through Jesus. It was a confirmation of Joel's prophecy that those people without honor and status in Israel would receive the honor of being channels of healing for those in need. Jesus did not bring something new, but revived and continued the restoration process of humanity intended by God. When the Jews refused to offer it to the Gentiles and the nations, God established the church to carry on the healing process.

The Pharisees and the Sanhedrin were scandalized because uneducated men, some fishermen, could perform undeniable miracles. Such events eroded the scholars' status among the Jews and switched the locus of authority. Their motivation was far from the spiritual battle that was taking place under their eyes and which they could no longer recognize. Blinded by the potential of losing face, they tried to shut up the disciples and demanded that no preaching, no healing, and no mentioning of the name of Jesus should ever happen. They did not understand that the work of the Spirit cannot be stopped or contained. The Spirit was working through willing and flexible people.

## Historical Developments

### The Apostolic Church

The early church continued to exhibit and practice powerful manifestations. The baptism by the Holy Spirit was sought together with

the baptism by water. Speaking in tongues, prophesying, miraculous healings, and exorcisms were recorded in the Scripture as proof of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Most of these signs convinced onlookers about the authority behind the church's mission. "Visible and audible signs of the Spirit's presence such as these were obviously important and this expectancy lasted for another three hundred years" (MacNutt 2005:80). Especially "in urban environments, Christians banded together for worship services that incorporated exorcism and healing along with other practices that strengthened individuals through union with Christ and with one another as members of his collective body in this world" (Porterfield 2005:45).

Baptism was considered "an exalted form of healing. It was a rite of initiation in the mystery of Christ that gave people eternal life and fortified them against sickness and sin" (60). Often, baptismal candidates had to go through repeated exorcisms that were designed to cleanse them from the demons acquired during their pagan past. Willard Swartley notes that "those to be baptized would go to the priest or the minister every morning for . . . six weeks [of Lent] to be prayed over" (2006:36). The baptism itself was considered a person's exorcism (Kreider 1999:17). However, Angel Rodriguez notes that this kind of exorcism was different than the traditional understanding of demon possession where a demon was "summarily expelled" (2011:198). In reverse, purification of the body was considered a prerequisite for becoming "fit vessels for the healing power of Christ" (Porterfield 2005:44).

### The Early Church

After experiencing baptism Christians were expected to pray in tongues or manifest themselves in a Pentecost manner. Visions and prophecy were common during the first 300 years. People sought the gifts of the Spirit and considered them as normal manifestation of a baptized Christian. Tertullian encouraged newly baptized people to "ask your Father, ask your Lord, for the special gift of his inheritance, the distribution of charisms," while Cyril of Jerusalem believed that not only hermits and virgins had charisms but also lay people (McDonell & Montague 1991:16, 17). However, Keir Howard warns that "there is certainly no suggestion within the New Testament documents that remarkable cures were happening on a daily basis in the early Christian communities, as is often suggested today" (2013:4). Gary Ferngren concurs that "it was not curing but caring which constituted the chief ministry of the early Christian community to the sick" (1992:3).

The early church continued to heal and cast out demons at a time when literacy was very low and written documents were extremely rare.

Such power manifestations demonstrated the presence of the Kingdom of God. Origen and Tertullian confirmed the commonality of the practices, pointing to the fact that “for the most part, it is the unlettered persons who perform this work,” and at the same time those practicing it enjoy it immensely (MacNutt 2005:83). Origen’s dialogue with Celsus (*Contra Celsum*) reveals his understanding of the miraculous. Although practicing a simple religion, early Christians believed in the manifestation of the supernatural in the natural world in response to sincere and fervent prayer. Justin Martyr notes that pagans were so impressed by the power manifested in the deliverance process that many of them converted to Christianity (Kelsey 1988:108).

Both Greeks and Romans were used to miracles, especially when a new god had to be legitimated or when a sanctuary was established (Garland 2011:79). *Thaumaturgoi* were human miracle workers with magical powers to heal, to be in two places at the same time, or to control natural forces. Pythagoras, for example, is credited even by Christian sources to have taught his disciples in different cities on the same day, predict earthquakes, calm rivers, seas and storms, or protect from epidemics. The original use of *magos* indicated belonging to a cast of Persian priests, but its negative connotation comes from the Greek and Romans’ view of Persian religion as being fraudulent. As a result, astrologers and magicians were expelled from Rome in 139 and 33 BC, and again in 16, 69, and 89 AD (Paget 2011:133).

Since Christians lived in a world full of the miraculous, they did not deny the reality of pagan miracles but attributed them to the demons or spirits. “Miracles were taken for granted, although some skepticism about the phenomenon did exist, related both to the factuality of the miracle/s described, but also to the character of the miraculous act” (131). Christians attributed the supernatural power of their own miracles to the unique Creator God and had to face persecution from emperors who claimed to be semi-gods or the sons of the gods. As a result, such practices continued to be performed underground, with word spreading about such miracles from mouth to mouth. By challenging political and religious authority through healing and exorcism, Christianity became countercultural (Remus 1983:79). Even more, Christian healing was readily available and inexpensive since it did not require money or extra paraphernalia as the pagan healings required.

Justin, Irenaeus, Theophilus of Antioch, and Tertullian mention miracle workers and exorcists but do not offer details about their work. They did not claim to have exercised the gifts themselves or to have witnessed others doing them. Irenaeus speaks about miraculous healings of different diseases by laying on of hands, exorcisms, and also about raising of the

dead. He notes that the majority of those delivered joined the church. "But we might have heard of none of this had it not been for his desire to better the magical feats of the Gnostics, and to give grounds for accepting the miracles attributed to Jesus in his time on earth" (Daunton-Fear 2009:61). Tertullian states that exorcism in his time was free of charge, offered as a public service. He also tells that faith was required for healings, as well as making the sign of the cross, anointing with oil, and invoking the name of Christ (76). The epidemics of the second and third centuries provided opportunities to demonstrate the superiority of Christian healing and the Christian God. "Christians attracted converts through their personalized view of reality that conceptualized epidemics as punishments for sin, offered salvation from sin, and described the Kingdom of God as a stable, just, and healthy realm awaiting the faithful beyond the present world of misery" (Porterfield 2005:50).

Exorcism was considered "an act of discipleship that displayed the power of Christ in a dramatic way. As a means of expelling sin and evil from others and healing them in the name of Christ, it was also a means of Christian outreach" (63). Eusebius, in his *Church History*, refers to a casual letter sent by bishop Cornelius to another bishop, Fabius of Antioch, mentioning "fifty-two exorcists in his church, amidst Presbyters, janitors and readers" (Paget 2011:142).

During the early church period, miracles happened first followed by the baptism of those who accepted Jesus as their Lord. The threat to the young church came not only from external persecution, but also from the open confrontation with demonic powers. Healing and deliverance were visible manifestations of the cosmic war at an earthly level. But such manifestations were not new for the Jewish Christians who remembered similar confrontations between Moses and Aaron and the Egyptian sorcerers. As in most of the non-Western parts of the world today, the people living during the first three centuries of the Christian church were used to supernatural manifestations of the spirits, so miracles performed by Christians were readily accepted but with a different and superior source. MacMullen claims that miracles and exorcisms convinced the Roman emperor Constantine that Christianity was superior to any other religion or god (1984:92). However, "Christianity developed as part of a new world order, as well as an antidote to the dislocation, fear, and suffering produced by Roman imperialism" (Porterfield 2005:46).

## **The Demise of Healing and Exorcism**

### The Constantinian "Revolution"

When Christianity became *religio licita*, it followed other established

religions and developed categories of believers. Miracles and exorcisms became related to saints and holy people, and later to the clergy. As a result, miracles and healings became rare. Another factor that contributed to the diminishing of these gifts was the waning of the baptism by the Holy Spirit because water baptism was administered to infants who were not speaking at all, let alone in tongues, and fewer and fewer adults were manifesting the gifts. Adult baptism was replaced by confirmation. In addition, once Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, it was embraced by or forced upon migratory tribes that invaded Europe. Most of the barbaric tribes became nominal Christians and introduced a strong syncretistic trend making exorcisms and miraculous healing look weird. Since Christianity had no real challenger in the religious realm of the Western world, except for pagan religions which were considered of demonic origin, the need for miracles and visions to prove its superiority disappeared. From being proof of Christian superiority, healings and exorcisms became certification for individual sainthood.

Leadership in the newly established state religion became more interested in political power and possessions and less in spiritual power. Many bishops were former business owners who converted to Christianity and had managerial and leadership skills. They became the model for the young generation and replaced spiritually dedicated martyrs—conditions that weakened spiritual passion and zeal. Canonization rules for sainthood included the condition that the relics of the candidate saint should facilitate miracles. Thus, healings caused by touching relics became the confirmation of individual sainthood. Porterfield contends that “Christian healing expanded in Africa, Asia, and Europe through devotion to the miraculous powers of the saints and their relics” (2005:69). People viewed sickness as God’s challenge for people to seek for miracles, but gradually it was viewed as an opportunity to grow in faith. Suffering and holiness became associated, and healing was sidetracked. Heroic martyrdom was preferred to miraculous healing. Suffering became a blessing instead of healing, and painful penance for oneself and others was the way to become accepted by God.

A good number of miracles are reported in relationship to monks. A common sense logic assumed that since a monk devoted his life to God and sacrificed everything for him, God would reward the monk by providing for him in miraculous ways. A plethora of manifestations are reported in letters between the fourth and sixth centuries, both about Western monks as well as Eastern ones.

These accounts are of two kinds: the inner reflection of the monks themselves, and these contain no miracles; and the view of visitors and outsiders, and it is in these that miracles are mentioned. . . . What is not there is

any idea that the monks themselves expected to experience miracles in their lives. . . . The well-known story of a young monk who was told by an elder to plant a dead stick and continually water it, was told among the monks as an outstanding example of obedience and nothing more; but when repeated by an outsider there was the addition that the stick miraculously flourished. (Ward 1999:129–131)

Philosophy both found its equivalent in the church and also influenced the church. Platonic philosophy considered the body and soul separate entities and believed that by punishing the body through suffering and death the soul could be purified and finally liberated. Spiritualization of reality became common and the world of ideas was treated as the spiritual kingdom to be desired. The Stoics denied body pleasures and degraded the senses. The Manicheans declared sexuality sinful, allowed only for procreation. Augustine, a former Manichean, considered that the body needed to be subdued because of its inherent evil nature through original sin. Origen perfected this attitude by willingly castrating himself. It was believed that any pleasure, sexual pleasure in particular, made a person impure and in need of penance.

### The Middle Ages

The ecumenical councils of the first millennia focused more and more on a theological and rational understanding of God and other biblical doctrines. Although the Holy Spirit was on the agenda of councils, the interest focused on the Spirit's origin and nature and less on the spiritual gifts or his visible manifestations. Intellectual truth and the philosophy about God became more important than live manifestations of the truth. The later demythologizing of the Bible drove the final nail into the coffin of belief in the supernatural. It was believed that miracles were for the weak in faith; the giants of faith should believe without expecting supernatural manifestations.

Moreover, the focus shifted from humans as mediums of healing, to shrines, statues, or relics. People began to pray to God for healing invoking the saints at a shrine. A dead body was viewed as more powerful than a living being. Although Christians venerated saints for various reasons, most of them looked to them with an expectation to be healed. Different saints were chosen as protectors and different diseases had patron saints. "It became customary, indeed obligatory, for new churches to contain some relics within their walls, and pilgrimages to the various shrines became popular" (Daunton-Fear 2009:143). "Shrines dedicated to the bones of saints became centers of community life, and local religious authorities built, rebuilt, or redesigned churches and altars to house them"

(Porterfield 2005:70). Although exorcisms were still performed by priests, the power was invoked from sacred objects such as a wooden or silver cross. Soon, priests could perform exorcisms only if their bishops gave the approval. By referring people to shrines and relics, priests were also shifting responsibility for prayers not followed by healing. Dead or living saints were credited with the ability to exorcise demons.

Telling the story of a demonized woman from the ninth century, Julia Smith notes that "by the late ninth century, saints' shrines were common throughout the Christian regions of Europe, many of them the shrines of locally popular figures . . . some of them the churches of famous saints or early Christian martyrs. To travel, whether locally or long distance, in search of a cure for an ailment was extremely common" (2009:225). The demonized woman was delivered through a repeated process of exorcism and pilgrimages and prayers to the local saint, Opportuna. Smith also indicates that "such pilgrimages in search of a cure presumed a mentality in which physical and spiritual health were intimately linked. Demonstrations of devotion to God and his saints might restore physical well-being or . . . the affliction might be attributed to the work of the devil. In cases such as this, the Christian church had had, since its earliest days, a well-developed theory of demonic possession and also efficacious strategies for dealing with it" (225). Smith specifies that exorcisms were entrusted to an officially appointed ecclesiastical exorcist. She also contends that the demonized woman was cured "by Christ through the intervention and help of St. Opportuna," and that the deliverance involved three "potent, reliable means of invoking Christ's presence and defeating the evil: holy water (water with salt added that a priest had blessed), the sign of the cross, and the traditional words of exorcism, conducted in accordance with the ceremony stipulated in surviving ninth-century liturgical books" (225).

Having to compete with the pre-Christian beliefs of European barbaric tribes, Christians started to develop an imaginative and pragmatic side. "Enthusiasm for miracles stimulated material and aesthetic expressions of Christianity, enriching its sights and sounds and contributing to countless and sometimes magnificent productions of religious art" (Porterfield 2005:73). Icons became alternative means of healing in the absence of real saints. Even the style of painting changed in order to reflect the authority of the saint, the naturalistic depictions making room to "flatter and more solemn, austere, and commanding depictions of Christ and his saints," as well as of *Theotokos* or the trinity (2005:77).

Although a believer in cessationism, Augustine followed the same practice of sending sick people to pray at shrines, but was convinced that miracles happened when people returned from the shrines praising God

for their healing. Apparently, Augustine changed his mind before death and wrote *Retractions* in which he repudiated his early belief of cessationism. But the general trend continued in the church with a fading belief in the power of the Holy Spirit. Illiteracy, the division of clergy from laity, and the struggle for religious and political survival occupied the minds and lives of people during the Middle Ages, contributing to the demise of healing, exorcism, and miracles. Reformation of the leaders became more important than prayer for healing.

From the time of Augustine to Aquinas, miracles were seen as part of a redeemed creation. Christ, the second Adam, would recreate the world in a new form, with new relationships between humans and the created world. "Miracles were signs that God was able to work uniquely through them [miracle workers] and such signs would be seen in their lives and also affect their death" (Ward 2011:150). Augustine, in the *City of God* (22.8), recorded the miracles and healings that took place when the relics of St. Stephen were moved from Jerusalem to Hippo in 416 AD, as well as a list of twenty-one other miracles (Daunton-Fear 2009:143–144). These records became the first miracle book of the Middle Ages focusing on *what* can be defined as a miracle. Next, Venerable Bede compiled detailed records of supernatural events and looked for their inner or spiritual significance. He was interested in the cause of miracles, not only in the external purpose of miracles; he was interested in the why of miracles. Bernard de Clairvaux later moved the interest about miracles into the mechanics of events until they became a "science" seeking to know how miracles took place.

Even the anointing of the sick with oil became a privilege for the dying, no longer for the living. Only the priest was allowed to perform it and anointing with oil gradually became a sacrament that was supposed to have immediate effect. "'Unction' . . . became corrupted into a sacrament for the remission of sins" (Dickinson 1995:148). Since healing did not always happen, it was avoided as much as possible. Mystery was supposed to be controlled by the sacerdotes. Progressively the ones to administer the sacraments became solely the priests, and the laypeople were kept uninformed, unprepared, and ignorant about the way spiritual realities and forces should be faced. Most of the priests were not educated, so healings were performed mainly by bishops.

The prayers for healing and exorcisms were written in books and formalized, with indications about the gestures and the rituals to be performed. Sacramentalism ruled. MacNutt indicates that Jerome's translation of the *Vulgate* replaced physical healing with salvation in James 5:14–16, thus misleading even those who were able to read the sacred text that the prayer for healing was intended for the soul, not for the body (2005:125). The common translation of the Bible was the *Vulgate*, written in

Latin, so even the priests who were able to read did not have access to the biblical texts related to spiritual realities. Most of their knowledge came from oral tradition. With the sacralization of the prayer for the sick and its change into the last unction, nobody really expected a miracle to happen. The prayer became the pretended absolution of sin just before death.

However, tradition claims that a few people, such as St. Bernard, the reformer of monastic orders, were known as healers, although simply by making the sign of the cross and not necessarily by praying. Such people were revered and considered holy. To the sick and dying, any prayer said by such people was seen as having miraculous powers. Hagiography contributed to the spread of the news and the popular tradition is difficult to refute today. Competition between scientific medicine and religious healing resulted in a blending between the two with the monks gradually abandoning miraculous healings in favor of building infirmaries and hospitals inside cloisters and monasteries. The widespread practice of penance was believed to be not only an antidote for sin, but also for its physical consequences. "As a form of discipline that covered almost anything, the penitential system had a regulating effect on medieval religious and social life" (Porterfield 2005:83).

During the Middle Ages exorcisms became less frequent. However, such events were described in detail. The human victims and their specific manifestations were recorded and compared in order to learn more about the identity of the demons who were possessing them. Evil began to be personalized and anthropomorphized. "Along with the penitential system, with its classifications of sin and calibrations of remedies, fascination with the personal relationships between demons and their victims opened human subjectivity to new inspection and analysis and perhaps laid some of the preliminary ground-work for modern psychological thinking" (Porterfield 2005:85).

Tradition claimed that royals had the gift of healing as part of their divine calling. Their healing touch was requested during the plagues of a tuberculosis strain in England and France, and several times a year monarchs held mass healing services where they touched every sick person. Miracles performed during such occasions reinforced the concept that royal authority comes from above, the "kings' consecration was equal in spiritual power to that of a bishop" (MacNutt 2005:135). Politics became mixed with religious ritual and the latter was made subservient to the former. Both King Louis XIV of France and Charles II of England prayed for several thousand people, the latter having prayed for 100,000 people during his 25 years rulership (Bloch 1989:204, 212). "The monarch . . . was purporting to act in the name of God with prayer and the laying on of hands" (Dickinson 1995:147).

The belief in the royal healing touch became so popular that it was very difficult to stop. It took 150 years for monarchs to give up their privileges. In England, Calvinist reformers persuaded Protestant kings to stop touching and praying for people. By 1688, the king was the only one who could pray for the sick people. In France, the atheistic reformers during the French Revolution decapitated King Louis XVI and put an end to the healing by royal touch. Religious leaders were no longer practicing healing by prayer and touch.

Concluding her study on miracles during the Middle Ages, Ward notes that “miracles in the Middle Ages were seen as facts: they were spiritualized, theologized and criticized, but they continued to be recorded as events about people in detail” (2011:162). Anna Maria Luiselli Fadda points to the fact that

according to the Anglo-Saxon perception of the Gregorian tradition, it was not the sensible effect of a miracle that was important so much as the promise of salvation conveyed by the miraculous deeds worked by God. . . . Thus, by pointing to miracles as *signs*, as celestial manifestations of God’s power and love for humanity, the audience would be allowed not only to read the story of Salvation as an open text written in created things, but to jump—as Robert Markus put it—“straight to the ‘something else,’ *aliud aliquid*, signified, not by the word, but by the thing signified by the word.” (2005:65–66)

### The Reformation

Reformers played an important role in abandoning praying for the sick and demon possessed. Although the opposite was expected, the return to the Scriptures took place during this time in a different context than the one experienced by the early church. Platonist philosophy with the separation of body and soul impacted medieval theology. The renaissance emphasized the human being and naturalism to the detriment of miracles and the supernatural.

Luther did not address the issue of miraculous healing in his writings, but he prayed for Melanchthon who was healed. He rejected prayers addressed to saints for healing and condemned such attempts to manipulate God. He protested against the materialistic practices of the Catholic priests that often extorted money from people who desperately sought healing or deliverance. But Luther acknowledged the possibility that Christ might manifest himself at the human level due to his immanence. As a result, Luther did not reject miracles but condemned the church’s use of them.

Following in the early steps of Augustine, Calvin embraced cessationism and made it a doctrine. Cessationism asserts that all miracles stopped with the last disciple of Jesus. However,

the doctrine of the cessation of miracles . . . developed not so much from some abstract distaste for, or even hatred of, miracles but rather out of the particular context of the sixteen-century conflict between Protestants and Roman Catholics, a conflict that was about who was teaching the truth and where the authority resided. While Roman Catholics challenged Protestants to produce miracles in order to prove the truth of their message, the Protestants in turn tried to discredit Roman Catholicism by pointing to the potentially false or even evil origin of their miracles. (Shaw 2006:23).

Calvin claimed that since demons were restricted to a different world after the cross, there is no need for deliverance or miraculous healing. But Calvin was reacting to the healing as practiced by Catholics: visiting and praying at shrines for healing, anointing the dying, and the Royal Touch. The healing shrines were made into a revenue source for the church and the idea of healing was abused. The ceremony for extreme unction was not intended to produce healing. And the Royal Touch was suspended by the Protestant monarchs in England, while in France Enlightenment and the Revolution put an end to spiritual power rituals.

Although Calvin did not agree with the Catholic practices, he never questioned the biblical record on healings and exorcisms. However, he believed that the role of miracles is only to confirm doctrine or truth, so miraculous manifestations were secondary. Faith in the miraculous became inferior to intellectual faith. As a result, Calvin did not consider healing as relevant, placing it in a different category of extraordinary gifts “bestowed on Christ’s earliest followers to reflect the momentous events of his actual appearance on earth” (Porterfield 2005:95). He believed that stories about saints having miraculous powers crept into medieval Christianity and were not credible. Porterfield concludes that

like Jews and Christians in the ancient world, Calvin and other Protestant reformers rejected magical forms of healing while asserting the therapeutic power of true religious faith. . . . In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, skepticism about the existence of magic coincided with skepticism about miracles, and these tendencies to disbelief invited skepticism about the spirit world, and even about the existence of God. (Porterfield 2005:105)

### The Enlightenment

During the Enlightenment, the relationship between magic and medicine continued, but healers who attempted to invoke supernatural powers were accused of witchcraft. Medical practice became regulated, so miraculous interventions were rejected. Supernatural healing was relegated to folk remedies. Naturalistic theories about the causes of disease excluded most attempts to explain healing through supernatural intervention.

Under the influence of the Enlightenment, Protestants, both conservative and liberal, rejected the possibility of healings and exorcism as something that could happen during their time. Benedict Spinoza, in the seventeenth century claimed that it is too easy to attribute to God something one does not understand. He blamed ignorance as the main factor for such popular belief and claimed that people assume that God works only in the extraordinary looking always for the bizarre and the outlandish without paying attention to the wonders of nature. Spinoza stated that the belief underlying these ideas portrays God as a

capricious monarch, who every now and then gets it in his head to intervene in the normal course of events. But to Spinoza the laws of nature were divine decrees. They were perfect and simply could not be broken. To suggest that God broke his own decrees from time to time was unthinkable. It would be like suggesting that God was acting against his own nature, or that his wisdom needed correction. (Brown 1985:9)

Reading the Scripture through his “enlightened” hermeneutic, David Hume questioned the biblical texts that talked about miracles declaring that miracles never occurred because they do not happen today. He declared miracles scientifically impossible. He claimed that “it is virtually impossible to prove the occurrence of a miracle on the basis of testimony” (Brown 1985:20). He also questioned the credibility of the witnesses of miracles, noting the gossiping and exaggerating habit of people living in villages. He never mentioned biblical miracles, but indirectly undermined their credibility. As a result, liberal Protestant scholars decided that miracles were simply myths. All miracles and exorcisms were to be interpreted spiritually. Leprosy was in fact the spiritual leprosy of sin. Miraculous feedings were interpreted as surplus feeding determined by the love Jesus triggered through his preaching. Conservative Protestants still believed in the validity of miracles, but claimed they ceased after the apostolic era. John Nelson Darby’s teaching on dispensationalism reinforced conservative Protestants’ view of cessationism which was taken further by Dwight L. Moody and later by Charles Scofield in his prominent Reference Bible.

Rudolf Bultmann went beyond cessationism and influenced liberal Protestants, suggesting that Jesus’ resurrection or his miracles never happened. He claimed that God had no supernatural business in the world. For people educated during the Enlightenment’s scientific worldview, rationalism, and scientific materialism, miraculous healing or deliverance were simply remnants of a primitive religion or anachronisms, and as William Barclay indicated were only perceived as miraculous under Jesus’ power of suggestion (Barclay 1975:35). Such conclusions were only

normal for “Jesus Seminars” where the search for the historical Jesus was done from an Enlightenment assumption that the supernatural is only a suggestion.

### The Revival of Healing and Exorcism

Although attitudes regarding healing and exorcism varied, two factors remained constant: first, people’s need to be healed as well as to be liberated from demon possession; and second, God’s desire to restore humans. As Ronald Kydd observed, “The restoration of health through the direct intervention of God has continued throughout history of the church, and at no point has it been any more widely seen than it is now” (1998:xxi). Protestants cut off direct responses in supernatural forms, but people’s needs found an audience with the Catholic tradition of miracles performed by the saints (particularly the Dominican order). MacNutt offers a long list of saints who performed miracles not only during past centuries, such as St. Patrick of Ireland, St. Dominic, St. Vincent Ferrer, Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine of Siena, Joan of Arc, St. Francis Xavier, St. John Bosco, St. Salvator of Orta, but also modern stories such as Padre Pio of Pietrelcina and the shrine at Lourdes in the twentieth and twenty-first century. He claims that most of these saints were “accidental healers,” not having intended or planned such miracles (2005:161). Although scholars and scientists could not explain miracles and rejected them, common people had less trouble in accepting and expecting the supernatural. In fact, their credulity was exploited regardless of the fact that such miracles were true or not. For some people miracles were still needed to believe.

In spite of the Reformers’ negative reaction toward healing and exorcism, Protestantism had a comeback in the arena of the supernatural beginning with the nineteenth century. Peter Wagner, one of the main promoters of signs and wonder among Evangelicals in the twentieth century, wrote in 1988 that

throughout the twentieth century the most prominent new feature to appear on the Christian landscape worldwide has been the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. . . . In the closing years of this century [twentieth], however, we see a different picture . . . . It is impossible for any active observer of God’s work in the world today not to acknowledge that there is a certain vitality, an excitement about God, a spiritual energy among Pentecostals and charismatics that we wish we could see more of in our churches. (1988:7–8)

He concludes his assessment noting on one hand that “theologically the framework for healing has been laid, it is preached from the pulpit, but

the experience is minimal" (9), and on the other hand that "the most vigorous church growth of Christian churches is accompanied by the characteristic signs and wonders of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement" (14).

Evangelicals have seen three waves of reviving the miracles and supernatural: the Pentecostal, the Charismatic, and the Third Wave. Mark Wagner states that the last two movements have "reestablished the need and place of signs and wonders in the evangelism process" (2000:875). However, not only Protestants or Evangelicals noticed this particular movement. Morris Maddocks, the catholic Bishop of Selby, concluded in 1981 that the healing movement was the first sign of a renewal of the Christian movement in the twentieth century (1981:99–100). The Second Vatican Council played a role in the revival of miracles.

A special note should be made of Fuller Theological Seminary where under the direction of John Wimber, Charles Kraft, and Peter Wagner the MC510 Signs and Wonders and Church Growth course was introduced in 1982 as part of the curriculum in the School of World Mission. One year later MC511 was added as an advanced course. Due to concerns recorded by David Allan Hubbard at "conducting healing services in an academic rather than church setting" the course was later suspended (Smedes 1987:15–16). The editors of *Christian Life Magazine* compiled a series of testimonies from both faculty and students at Fuller, concluding with Peter Wagner's chapter on the Wave of the Future ("Signs and Wonders" 1983:78).

Today, in many parts of the world people fulfill their desire to be healed by going to a shaman, a traditional healer, or a witch doctor. They also go to Pentecostal or charismatic Christians of different traditions who pray for their healing and cast out demons. Common people perceive these forms of Christianity as providing for their current needs while the rest of Christianity is seen as having no power, and thus not relevant. As mentioned at the beginning of this historical survey, not all Christians agree with the idea that healings and exorcisms are valid manifestations of today's Christian church. Doctrinal statements and hermeneutical assumptions influence how one reads the Bible and history. But people's perception does not follow doctrinal conviction.

The initial questions of what, why, and how to do exorcism and miraculous healing are still debated and with many still looking for an answer. I have included in this paper two approaches for understanding how healing was practiced during history and as an explanation for today's manifestations. How should one understand the multiple voices that claim today to perform miracles and exorcisms in the name of God although the differences between such ministries are obvious? Is there any difference between miracles performed by Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, or Protestants/Evangelicals?

The first approach, proposed by Ronald Kydd, offers six models of understanding healing and the miraculous. Kydd looked at how the miracles were practiced and at the theology on which they are built. He noticed a dominant idea in each model, supported by other concepts. He also recognized that sincere reports of healers and supporters are overstated. He factored in the unavoidable enthusiasm. Kydd places the early church and John Wimber in the same category, sharing the confrontational model, with a basic belief in the church triumphant. The intercessory model seems to be based on the belief in the saints and monks, as well as shrines such as the shrine of Mary of Medjugorje where appearances of the Virgin are supported by healings. The reliquarial model was and is practiced by the Eastern Orthodox churches. The incubational model is found at Mannedorf and Morija, where persevering prayer is practiced. The revelational model is attributed to William Branham and Kathryn Kuhlman, while the soteriological model seems to be claimed by Oral Roberts and his followers (Kydd 1998). Above all these various methods is Jesus, the supreme healer.

The second approach comes from David Atkinson, a pastoral theologian and ethicist who also taught Psychology of Religion, and who had a background in chemistry. Writing about pastoral care in the contemporary church, Atkinson lists six models of Christian pastoral care that have a relationship with the ministry of healing: proclamation and teaching, nurture, service, therapy, Charismatic/Pentecostal, and sacramental. The last three include prayers for inner healing, spiritual direction, miraculous physical healing, and the special Eucharist for family history healing (2011:19–24). Atkinson believes that spiritual gifts are not supposed to be claimed by individuals as they belong to communities. “It is rather that the whole church is gifted by the Holy Spirit for certain situations, as need arises and prayerful faith is exercised” (94). When dealing with deliverance, he believes that

very occasionally it may be appropriate to speak of someone being “possessed” by evil, and there are procedures in most churches, under appropriate authority and in consultation with psychiatric and medical services, for a careful rite of exorcism. But that is very rare. Somewhat more common are those who feel oppressed by a force outside them, or who have experienced something strange about their environment—feeling cold, aware of a “presence,” or conscious of a compulsion to do something they would rather not do. In such cases prayer for deliverance may be appropriate. This is most helpfully undertaken by a group of praying friends, and needs to be quiet and unobtrusive, resting on the petition in the Lord’s Prayer, “Deliver us from evil.” (2011:94–95)

## Conclusion

As expected, the major attitudes and responses to healings and exorcisms, as extreme forms of spiritual warfare were acceptance and rejection. But such generic responses would neglect the development and existence of different historical contexts. If for the apostolic church miraculous healings and exorcisms were natural, these became more and more problematic with the institutionalization of the church after the Constantinian revolution. The role of the miraculous gradually changed from validation of divine authority and sending of the Church to the validation of individual holiness and to the validation of sacred objects and rituals. A critical evaluation of current miraculous healings and exorcisms is necessary in order to identify where the Holy Spirit is really present and where the force behind the miraculous is different. The answer to the what? who? why? and how? remains to be found in each particular context, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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