

THE CHRIST OF POWER- Present with us in the Future

Dr. E. Anthony Allen
MDiv, MRC Psych, DM (Psych)
Consultant Psychiatrist
Consultant in Whole Person Health
and Church-based Health Ministries

This is our final day of the Congress of the International Christian Medical and Dental Association. In our plenary sessions, workshops, worship and informal interactions, we have sought to listen to what God is saying to us directly and through each other. We have endeavoured to hear from Him about His mission for us in His world.

How then can we bring health and hope to this world? In this era of dehumanization we have faced the challenge to **affirm God's image** within persons through whole person healing. We have seen that in our identity as whole-person healers, we also are **agents of the Healing Christ** – bringing a destiny of *salvation as wholeness in Christ* amidst the crises of uncertainty. This we do through the “total health care model” with a total vision of salvation providing services for the total person - which have a total scope of health promotion, prevention, cure and rehabilitation and which involves the total community. We have reflected that representing a healing Christ calls for **integrating our proclaiming about Him with ministering His wholeness**. This, we have agreed is best carried out in the context of a healing “three way relationship” between ourselves, the patient and Christ who is present and intervenes. This we do while connecting sensitively with the patient's world of experience and culture. This relationship is the means for satisfying the growing spiritual hunger in the world. Practical principles, possibilities and examples have been shared for all these aspects of bringing hope and health to our world.

I. THE NEED FOR POWER: HAZARDS IN HEALTHCARE MINISTRY

As we examine the scope of these tasks to be fulfilled, roles to be performed and identities to live out, many potential hazards face us in the future.

Within our patients there will be severe *physical* suffering. Many diseases, even though understood, still have no cure today. For when we believe that we have conquered all disease, some new strain of virus or disorder from our toxic environment is inflicted upon us. There is the *psychological* bondage of family abuse, addictions, personality problems, and the emotional pain of anxiety, depression and psychosis. We have also reflected on the obstacles of *spiritual* evil which occur in the form of secularization and misguided spiritual beliefs. Occult practices aid the presence and activity of evil spirits to tempt, oppress and control. Existential despair and loss of meaning and purpose of life are rampant in our post-modern world.

We have examined political injustice and the oppression of materialism and the global market in the *socio-economic* sphere. Apart from these, we will often experience a lack of *management resources* for our whole-person ministries – in the areas of manpower, money, materials, motivation, training and political will. The institutions that we work for, or network with, may also deny adequate resources because they may not fully embrace our vision of ministering to the whole person. Indeed there is also the obstacle closest to home - the fact that in various ways *we are all wounded healers*. Then there is the reality of *violent persecution* that several Christian health professionals face at a global level, perhaps more than at any other time in human history.

As agents of the healing Christ, we need to be constantly aware of all these obstacles. Too often we underrate the hazards that await us in ministry. Consequently, when these come, we are in danger of being spiritually unprepared and thus lacking in faith. Then we fall back on the power of human effort rather than the power of Christ. It is no surprise when we end up becoming disillusioned, burnt-out and, too often, defeated. To be a powerless Christian servant is to be the most severe disappointment to the world in need. This reality is brought into focus in the story of the disciples who at the mountaintop shared with Christ in the glory of His transfiguration, but down in the valley were stopped cold with their own limitations.

When the father of the epileptic boy complained that the disciples could not heal him, Jesus answered, “O unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.” (Matthew 17: 17, NIV)

*To effectively bring hope and whole person health through proclaiming and healing while facing the hazards to come relies on our dependence on **the Christ of power** – always present with us in the future. More than ever in our world of hazards, we will need this power!*

II. THE POSSIBILITIES OF POWER

Our empowerment by Christ as the provider of all health is the most important principle of whole person healing. Indeed it is in the “*salvation power*” of Christ that we are totally healed - coming into wholeness and restored to the fulfillment of living as persons created in His image.

The Ministry of counselling with, praying for and tending to the sick who seem to be treatment resistant can be a very demanding and oftentimes frustrating task. So can working with difficult families, communities and socio-economic systems for health promotion, disease prevention and rehabilitation. Yet despite these hazards that will face us in the future, we are reassured to contemplate that it is not that we “work for Christ” but it is that *His power works through us*. Indeed Jesus saw His healing ministry in the context of the Kingdom of God or God’s reign of liberating power. In Luke 9:1-2, to His disciples, first “he gave them power and *authority* to drive out all demons and to cure diseases,” then He sent them out “to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick.” The Greek word used for Christ’s *supernatural power* is transliterated “*dunamis*,” having the same root as the word “dynamite.” This usage is most apt, for indeed God is a God whose power and might are such that of Him Christ said “with men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible”. Thus the power of Christ was given not only over the supernatural - power over demons, but also over natural evil- the power to cure diseases. Today God gives us the power to transcend the limitations of science in dealing with severe *physical and mental conditions* and the power to heal the *spiritual diseases* of persons whom Satan afflicts. Ultimately it is only God in Christ who has absolute power over all evil. We need this power.

Let us thank God that the “*dunamis*” that Christ gave to His disciples is available to all of us who serve the sick and oppressed. Christ’s atoning death and His triumphal resurrection are supreme examples of this power. How does this power reveal itself in our work as healers? Christ’s power is manifested in us through His *daily spiritual guidance* and through the *exercise of His supernatural spiritual gifts* (or skills beyond our natural abilities), such as healing, wisdom and discerning These are ours when we submit daily to the Holy Spirit of God (I Corinthians 12).

We can heal in His Kingdom Authority through the power of His indwelling Spirit. His transforming miraculous power can operate through us, His treasure in “earthen vessels”. His strength is made perfect in our weakness as we acknowledge our weaknesses as wounded healers and depend on this strength (II Corinthians 12:9). Indeed we become transformed and renewed into the full image of God as contained in Christ, our example, teacher and Saviour. We then become more suited to be His instruments as we face a future that seems uncertain and full of obstacles:

Thus:

It is the Healing Christ of Power that *enables* ministry to the whole person.

It is the Healing Christ of Power that *guides* as we proclaim Him while healing.

It is the Healing Christ of Power that *intervenes* in the “three way” healing relationship.

It is the Healing Christ of Power that *heals and transforms* our patients in mind, body, spirit and relationship during life and ultimately after death.

It is the Healing Christ of Power that *equips* us with all the resources we need as Christian healthcare professionals in the most difficult of circumstances.

All of this calls for us to live out our identity of being disciples as we seek to be strengthened by the Christ of Power in our healing. In doing so:

we seek to be disciples who are *obedient* to the Christ of Power who transforms us in our ethics;

we seek to be disciples who are *courageous* amidst risk and opposition as we enjoy the victory of the Christ of Power;

we seek to be disciples who are *trusting* upon the faithfulness of this Christ of Power.

Indeed the Christ of Power is present with us in the future. We ourselves cannot guarantee the future, but *we know who is in the future. We may not know what the future holds but we know who*

holds the future. Christ's power is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He is the author and finisher of our faith, (Hebrews 12:2) the creator and soon coming King. We need to remove all barriers of limitation in our expectations of what Christ can do through us and with us in the future.

III. PREPARATION FOR POWER

How then does this power become possible? This begins with *a vision that the power to transcend natural and spiritual evil and suffering is a possibility in our experience.* We need to reconsider our doctrinal separatism between the different arms of the church that has denied a universal place for supernatural power in the Body of Christ today. We need to go beyond this historical separatism and seek the *integrated spirituality* of the Bible. This will allow for combining the social action of mainline churches, the focus on the sacraments within Catholicism and the Orthodox movement, the passion for spreading the Word of the Gospel within Evangelical churches, with the emphasis on the expressions of God's supernatural power over disease and demons within Pentecostalism. Most importantly, we need to *submit ourselves constantly to be continuously empowered by Christ.* This calls for a Christ-dependent lifestyle of nurturing certain specific Christian disciplines.

Disciplines of Loving and Receiving

At the risk of sounding mystical, I venture to state that *the way of being a healer of the whole person in a total healthcare ministry is the way of contemplative spirituality in the midst of activism.* As we seek to be active in obeying God's mandate to preach the kingdom and heal the sick, we need to be engaged in receiving spiritually from God as we contemplate upon Him in silence.

Like anything else, this receiving aspect of spirituality involves specific steps. These steps can be seen as disciplines, inasmuch as they require persistent and constant application - daily, if possible.

We also are free to develop our own steps.

The suggested steps are as follows:

L- Loving God with our whole person

B- Believing in God and in His power, operating through the Holy Spirit

S- Surrendering to Him

L- Listening to Him

Loving God with our whole person means, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” (Deuteronomy 6:5, NIV). This is a daily act of adoration, thanksgiving and self-giving in absolute loyalty. It is saying to God, “All I am and all that I have are yours.” This is similar to, yet even more profound than the total devotion of one human being to another. It is moving from being self-centred to become God-centred. It is the giving of our possessions and our time as well as of ourselves (Luke 14:33).

Believing in God is to believe in His power and love operating through Christ and the Holy Spirit. This will naturally flow from our love and adoration of God. We are told that whoever comes to God must believe that God is a real person, one who rewards those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:1-6). Believing can indeed lead to the miraculous power of the Spirit working within us. As Christ said:

“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing.

He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And

I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the

Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. If you love me, you will obey what I command. and I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.” (John 14:12-16 NIV).

When we have this vision of wholeness and becoming healers transcending natural and spiritual suffering and evil, we are in the realm of spiritual warfare. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Ephesians 6:12,NIV).

Faith in God should be our main focus for effective whole person healing - not depending only on our efforts but also on the miraculous power or “*dunamis*” of the Spirit in us (Galatians 3:5) – or on God acting person-to-person within the *Kairos* (or “appointed time”) of ones’ moment of crisis. Matthew 21:22 tells us that whatever we ask for in prayer, if we have faith, we will receive. When the disciples were powerless to cast out the demon in the epileptic boy, they asked Jesus, “Why couldn’t we drive it (the demon) out?” “Because you have so little faith “, answered Jesus. “I tell you the truth, if you have faith *as small* as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matthew 17:20, 21, NIV). Today, Christ is still saying to us, His disciples, that if we would only believe, “all things are possible” (Mark 9:23). Here, as we seek new horizons in our medical and dental work for Christ, those who are adventurous will not ask “why” but we will ask “why not”?

Surrendering to God is the conscious action we take to demonstrate our love for and belief in this all-powerful God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Surrendering is “letting go and letting God.” It is a recognition that while we are limited, God is limitless (Mark 10:27). It is surrendering our efforts and frustrations. Also, surrendering is a confession of where we have failed God, others and self.

Let go and let God. It is like exhaling and inhaling. Think of that when you think of surrendering, letting go of, or “exhaling”, the burdens (Matthew 11:28), of the defeatist mentality; letting go living unto self (Galatians 2:20) and its pride, lack of forgiveness, self deceit, and addictions of desire. And as we let go, let us “inhale” and “let God,” so that our burdens become light, so that His Holy Spirit can fill us and transform us with His “fruit” or emotional and interpersonal maturity in our living (Galatians 5:22-23) and with His gifts in our service (1 Corinthians 12:7-10). Jesus Christ invites us:

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?!” (Luke 11:9-13 NIV).

Finally, *as a healer of the whole person in community, if we are to experience this Christ of power through contemplative spirituality in the midst of activism*, we ought to *listen* to God. In love, faith and surrender to an all-powerful God, our natural response would be “Lord, what do you have to say to me?” This is the most vital aspect of our ministry of healing.

During much of my earlier adult life I had thought of prayer as just talking, talking, talking. It is only in the more recent decades that I have come to learn that prayer also involves listening and more listening. “Lord, what do you have to say to me?” As we listen, *the Spirit will impress upon*

our hearts and minds when to and how to minister proclaiming while healing, even in the middle of a disaster, how to manage our work and our relationship with others, how to manage ourselves.

But we also need to carve out time to listen to God through the words of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:15-17). God speaks to us directly through our *meditating on the Word*, listening in the silence for that “still, small voice” (1 Kings 19:11, 12). Moreover, as the Lord used Ananias and sent him to Paul, who had just had his conversion experience (Acts 9:17), so God speaks to us *through the words of others*. He spoke to Peter through a vision to go to the Gentiles (Acts 10:19). God may speak to us also through *dreams and visions*. Hebrews 2:4 mentions that God spoke through Jesus, with words confirmed by the words of the disciples and demonstrated by “signs and wonders.” Thus the miraculous unfolding of circumstances, the *miraculous action of God in our lives*, is yet another way in which He speaks to us. God also speaks to us *through angels*. Let us not limit the ways in which we can experience listening to God. Let us be open to the many channels God can use, to reveal his will and purposes to us.

If we are therefore to experience this Christ of power – present with us both now and in the future, then God in Christ is calling us to a life of contemplative spirituality in the midst of activism – a life of love, faith, surrender and being in tune with His heart, mind and will as we listen for the direction of our ministry of whole person healing.

Practical Aids

What are some practical aids to help us enrich our life of contemplative spirituality in the midst of activism?

Prayer and Fasting: Prayer is the most important activity in the discipline of contemplative spirituality. As St. Paul encourages:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
(Philippians 4:6-7 NIV).

Prayer needs to be comprehensive. It should involve adoration, thanksgiving, confession, intercession and supplication-waiting on God and listening, if we are to hear Him.

Fasting is a valuable discipline to accompany prayer. Indeed as Christ spoke to His disciples of the faith and power they needed to overcome evil, He said of particularly difficult challenges in healing that, “this kind [of demon] goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:21, KJV).

Bible study: Alongside prayer and fasting, comes Bible study, involving a daily listening to God through his Word. Also, there is silent meditation- finding a quiet place, as Christ himself went “apart” to be alone.

Journaling: Another form of support is writing a journal, putting down on paper our burdens, what God says to us, and what we say to God in our prayers. We can come back from week to week and month to month and review the journal and be inspired and reminded of God’s power and grace.

Sharing: Community is the greatest human agent of healing and spiritual growth. Therefore we need a prayer partner and/or a small group of brethren with whom we can share. In a small group, the gifts of the Spirit, such as prophecy and healing, can be used. In inspirational retreats our teams can come apart for a while to listen to God.

Obedience: Obeying God as we listen to Him is the pathway to effective ministry because it offers us the challenge of following through on what we hear from him when we listen. Obedience is an

expression of love which leads to a greater presence of God within us. Where there is obedience, we find our new selves in Christ, a new direction and new effectiveness in ministry.

Out of the disciplines of loving, believing, surrendering and listening with these accompanying aids, there comes transformation, commitment, renewed motivation and empowerment. Then both ourselves and our patients will experience the fulfilment of the prayer of St. Paul for the Ephesian Christians, “I ask that your minds may be opened to see his light, so that you will know what is the hope to which he has called you, how rich are the wonderful blessings he promises his people, and how very great is his power at work in us who believe. This power working in us is the same as the mighty strength which He used when He raised Christ from death and seated him at his right side in the heavenly world. Christ rules there above all heavenly rulers, authorities, powers, and lords; he has a title superior to all titles of authority in this world and in the next. God put all things under Christ’s feet and gave him to the church as supreme Lord over all things” (Ephesians 1:18-22). Indeed, although the task ahead with all its hazards may seem impossible; with God all things will now become possible. We can be delivered from violent persecution. Even if our time comes to die, like St. Paul we can say “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). It is only through this power in us that whole person health in Christ and salvation- which are the same –shall be revealed to the world. How willing are we to seek the path of preparing for power through the disciplines of contemplative spirituality, and being filled by Christ’s Spirit as we face obstacles in our ministry?

CONCLUSION

We need to recognize the scope of the obstacles to our ministry of being agents of the Healing Christ. We thus need to realize that in our strength alone we are powerless. We are in need of

power. Thanks to God, we are reassured that through Christ the possibilities of power will be present with us at all times in the future. This power comes by accepting the *identity of being disciples of Christ* who are willing to sit at his feet in contemplative spirituality being faithful to the related spiritual disciplines, as we prepare for power.

- As we face our impossible seeming obstacles, how willing are we to challenge ourselves, all other Christian health professionals and the Church as a whole to receive this power that transcends physical and mental suffering, spiritual evil, social injustice, management frustrations and even death!? As we seek to heal the whole person, avoid patchwork medicine and affirm God's image amidst dehumanization, let us seek to do so in the Power of the Christ present with us in the future.
- As we seek to be agents of Christ's healing in all our countries, ethnic groups, cultures, political, economic and religious climates and various clinical settings, we seek to bring the destiny of Christ's healing salvation amidst uncertainty and even persecution. Let us seek to do this therefore in the power of the Christ present with us in the future,
- As we seek to integrate proclaiming the Gospel of Christ's salvation with the demonstration of His healing salvation in the context of a healing three way relationship let us seek to do so in the Power of the Christ present with us in the future.
- As we seek to heal in the power of Christ in the future:

Let us be convicted about the pressing need for power!

Let us be convinced the possibilities of power!

Let us be fully committed to preparation for power!

We need *to minister wholeness in Christ as health and hope for the future, or face a world*

of despair!

Yet in order to do these, we must *revive through the Christ of power* – present with us in the future to bring health and hope to all!

As Christ's healing disciples are we in any doubt as we face the future! The context and words of Christ's Great Commission are very instructive, "When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age'" (Matthew 28:17-20 NIV).

The Christ of Power – present with us in the future!