

# **THE HEALING CHRIST – His Destiny in Uncertainty**

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In keeping with our theme, Health and Hope, we began on Tuesday to examine the concept of whole person healing which affirms that we can live out the reality of being created in God's image. As God's image becomes restored in this process, the God-given mental, social and spiritual capacities of our patients become liberated and their physical health renewed. In this way, we can counteract the popular philosophies of material and social determinism which suppress the very notion of God's image in us and thus give licence to a global de-humanisation of persons. Whole person healing involves putting this restoration of God's image into practice through the strategies of multi-disciplinary teamwork, the promotion of healthy lifestyles and building healing communities.

This morning let us turn our thoughts upon Christ who is the great physician behind Whole Person Healing. The proposition that I invite you to explore is that in these troubled times our surest anchor is this Christ because He gives us a destiny of salvation as healing, in the midst of life's uncertainty.

Uncertainty is built into human existence in the form of crises. Crises occur when we are overwhelmed with situations for which there seem to be no proven answers. What are some of the crises produced by the uncertainties of today? Crises result from

uncertainties due to the destructiveness of human injustice and increasing natural disasters. Then there is the crisis of uncertainty of meaning and fulfilment. Disease and death face us all as inevitable crises.

The answer to uncertainty lies in hope – and hope can be defined as the **certainty of a destiny of well-being**. In this way *hope is one of the major factors that establishes the mental and spiritual conditions for Whole Person health and well-being to come about in individuals* in conditions of crisis. Hope has the capacity to transform crisis into opportunity. On the other hand, **hopelessness** leads to despair, demoralisation and a lack of meaning and purpose. These are the very conditions in which disease thrives. For us as health care professionals therefore, hope is vital for health.

What is it that ultimately brings this healing hope, or a destiny of well-being? It is **faith in someone or something** who is a controller of destiny and who or which *has the disposition to determine a destiny of well-being*. Hope becomes fulfilled when someone's faith in a controller of destiny, rather than being merely a blind assumption, is vindicated by **a demonstration in experience** of the controller's reality as well as disposition and power to bring about well-being. For us as Christian health-care professionals *such a controller of destiny is Jesus Christ*.

### **THE FAILED "GODS" OF DESTINY: THE WORLD'S RESPONSE TO UNCERTAINTY**

In response to the many common crises that cause uncertainty, this globalised world has come up with claims and promises with regards to various supposed controllers of

destiny who are then made into gods. Yet uncertainty abounds because these claims and promises are not demonstrated in experience. Thus these “failed gods of destiny” have now become “demons of uncertainty” ultimately leaving many people to face their crises with no sense of hope.

As attempted solutions to the crises of injustice and natural disasters, we have the failed promises of the “gods” of *political and economic systems*. Economic systems have become “the demons of uncertainty” by generating market exploitation. Political systems have too often failed humanity through corruption and the use of state violence. Both these systems have resulted in inequities between developed and underdeveloped countries and within these countries themselves. These inequities are demonstrated by an unnecessary burden of disease, the oppression of women, economic marginalisation of men, rising domestic violence and external migration. All of these undermine the appropriate family socialisation and education of our children and youth and thus foster gang-based violence and even terrorism. Destructiveness of the environment due to economic gain and political opportunism has comprised its integrity. Hence global warming and deforestation have resulted in unprecedented natural disasters.

As the attempted solution to the crisis of meaning and fulfilment, many seek to idolise *culture*. Yet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century culture no longer enhances the dignity of the human being. Being made into a failed “god of destiny” it now expresses itself as the “demon” of materialism and “live for pleasure” hedonism propelled by global market forces. Fast

food, cigarettes, drugs and gaming establishments dominate the world's cultural scene as the "in thing". Pornography, violence and the occult in entertainment now pervade the whole planet through a network of instant "TV satellites" and the "instant internet". The "do as I feel" moral relativism and subjectivism of cultural post-modernism undermine the Biblical understandings of the right to life, gender identity, personal lifestyles and family relationships. Thus instead of meaning and fulfilment come the global obesity epidemic (fuelling diabetes, hypertension and cancer), addictions, family dysfunction and HIV/AIDS.

*Modern medicine* has not escaped today's idolatry of man-made solutions for uncertainty. Though essential to preventing the crises of disease and death, to this end, medicine is now also being identified as a "god of destiny". It too can become a "demon of uncertainty". The "god of medicine" as purely "high-technology" and commerce, fails to provide hope through access to care for the majority of disenfranchised and diseased persons in our world. Furthermore, medicine idolised as "high-technology" has undermined hope through a neglect of the patient as "person". Thus the diseases of poverty as well as stress and negative lifestyle behaviour which comprise the majority of causes of disease and death continue to proliferate.

All these failed "gods of destiny" have now become "demons" which have compounded uncertainty, by worsening the very crises of living in our global society that caused such uncertainty! This compounding of uncertainty is undermining Health and Hope.

## **CHRIST THE DIVINE CONTROLLER: HIS DESTINY OF SALVATION IS HEALING**

Where is the answer? A misplaced faith in ordinary human capacity and flawed world systems is a faith based on having *no experience of, or a relationship with the person and work of God in Christ*. In Him we have an experience of one who is the Controller of our destiny. He brings certainty because He has the desire and supernatural power to bring total well-being to all humanity. He brings hope because *His destiny is that of our salvation*, or deliverance from the destruction caused by the very crises that bring human uncertainty – *disease and death, injustice and natural disaster*. *Christ then is our true and only God of destiny!*

### **The meaning of Salvation and Healing**

As Christian health-care professional *it is imperative we understand and live out the connection between Christ's destiny of Salvation and our ministry of bringing health and healing to others*. There has been some semantic confusion with regards to the meaning of the word "Salvation" and "health". This is related to the compartmentalised either/or paradigm where aspects of the person – body, mind and spirit – are seen as separate.

The Biblical view of Salvation is quite different from that conveyed in popular language and practice – even within many Churches. In the Bible, Salvation, or deliverance from evil, is an act of transformation. However, it is not a transformation that is merely a deliverance of our spirits. Neither is it only moral transformation. The concept of Salvation, involves *a transformation of our total being to become whole persons - not only in spirit, but also in body, mind and social relationships*. *Salvation means, a total or whole person change through Christ Jesus*. This also, as we have already seen, is what health and healing are all about! If we utilise a simple equation, then we could either say that total health and healing are an integral part of our Salvation, or put

more radically, simply: *Salvation and whole person healing, through Christ, are really one and the same thing!* In fact the Greek word “sōzō” often used in the New Testament, means both to “save” from evil and sin, and to “make whole”. Jesus is “sōtēr” which means both “Saviour and Healer”.

Human suffering is an indication of disharmony in one or more aspects of our lives. If we accept that *ultimately it is our relationship with God which provides the foundation upon which, all other harmony, both within and without rests*, then we will need to identify the sources of disharmony. *Alienation, or separation from God, which is what sin is, leads to crises of suffering, disease and death.* This separation which occurs through doubt, or the rebellion of being self-willed, leaves us and our relationship to others and the environment unprotected. As a consequence we become vulnerable, both to moral temptations and the devil’s activity. Thus our sins, daily guilt and satanic mental oppression, disrupts the harmony of body, mind and spirit, as well as our harmony with others and the environment. Disease or disintegration in all these dimensions and death are the result (Genesis 3:19).

How does God save us or provide deliverance from these basic problems of human suffering? Christ’s double work on the cross combats alienation and its consequent process of disintegration by *forgiving, redeeming and reconciling*, on the one hand, and *healing* “or re-integration of all our dimensions”, on the other. Thus the prophet Isaiah anticipates the Messiah and tells us that “with his stripes we are healed”. Guilt is met not only by forgiveness but also by the healing of its consequences as in the case of the paralytic (Mark 2:5-12).. The Psalmist speaks of this double work of God in forgiveness and healing with the words “bless the Lord oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases” (Psalm 103:2-3).

Therefore, today, through submission to God and through prayer, disrupted relationships which cause human injustice can experience the healing touch of God. Persons can become inspired and empowered by Christ to be better stewards of the natural environment. New meaning and fulfilment is found for our minds and spirits and diseases of the body can receive Christ's miraculous healing or health-giving harmony. This how Christ the Divine Controller becomes our destiny in uncertainty. As the true and only "God of Destiny" He gives us this destiny of salvation which brings well-being. Thus the saving Christ is the healing Christ. This is the health that brings hope in our time.

### **III AGENTS OF THE HEALING CHRIST: PROVIDING TOTAL HEALTH CARE**

Today, when many are despairing, as He did with the original twelve disciples, the Healing Christ is calling and sending us into the world as His agents of healing. St. Luke chapter 9 verses 1 -2 (NIV) summarizes very well the challenge to commitment to Christ's healing ministry: "When Jesus had called the twelve together, He gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and He sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick". Thus we are challenged to replace the uncertainty of well-being in our present world with the certainty of *acts* of Christ's whole person healing. Indeed, *these healing acts are the signs or demonstrations which, if experienced, can vindicate the faith of persons in the Good News* that Christ is the effective Controller of "Kingdom Destiny" of our well-being or salvation.

#### **The Total Healthcare Model**

We need to work out exactly how we will carry out these acts of healing. This calls for a ministry of salvation as healing through a "Total Healthcare Model". This model can be practised in our workplaces, congregations and communities.

What exactly is this model? It involves a *total vision of salvation*, ministry to the *total person*, providing a *total scope of services* including promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative activities, and it allows for *total community involvement*. It is a model of care such as this that brings about the destiny of Christ's salvation as well-being to meet the very crises that our failed god's of destiny have made worse. Also, here it is then that especially the idolatry of medicine as mainly commerce or technology will be radically counteracted.

As an example of the Total Healthcare Model, let me briefly share an illustrative study of a Healing Ministry that has been developed by a Baptist Church in Kingston, Jamaica to which I belong.

#### **Illustrative Case Study: The Bethel Baptist Church Healing Ministry**

The Bethel Healing Ministry which began in 1974 was started out of a deep concern by the Pastor, health professionals and the Church Council about the lack of integration of healing, and spirituality. There was a particular burden for the many persons who, despite the richness of our natural beauty, lacked quality access to health and community services. After prayerful planning, a "Total Healthcare Model" was developed.

Within this model, services are provided by church members and other Christians who believe in the TOTAL VISION of the integration of salvation and wholeness. The link between the Total Healthcare Model and the feature of services provided by the Bethel Healing Ministry is shown in Table 1.

## Features of the Bethel Healing Ministry

1. Total Vision
  - Salvation as Wholeness
2. Total Person
  - Whole person approach
3. Total Scope
  - Promotive, Preventive, Curative, Rehabilitative
4. Total Community involved
  - Community-based activities:
    - Underserved communities
    - Surrounding region
    - Congregation as Healing community
  - Multi-level in expertise

Table 1

A systems based schematization of the services is shown below in Figure 1.

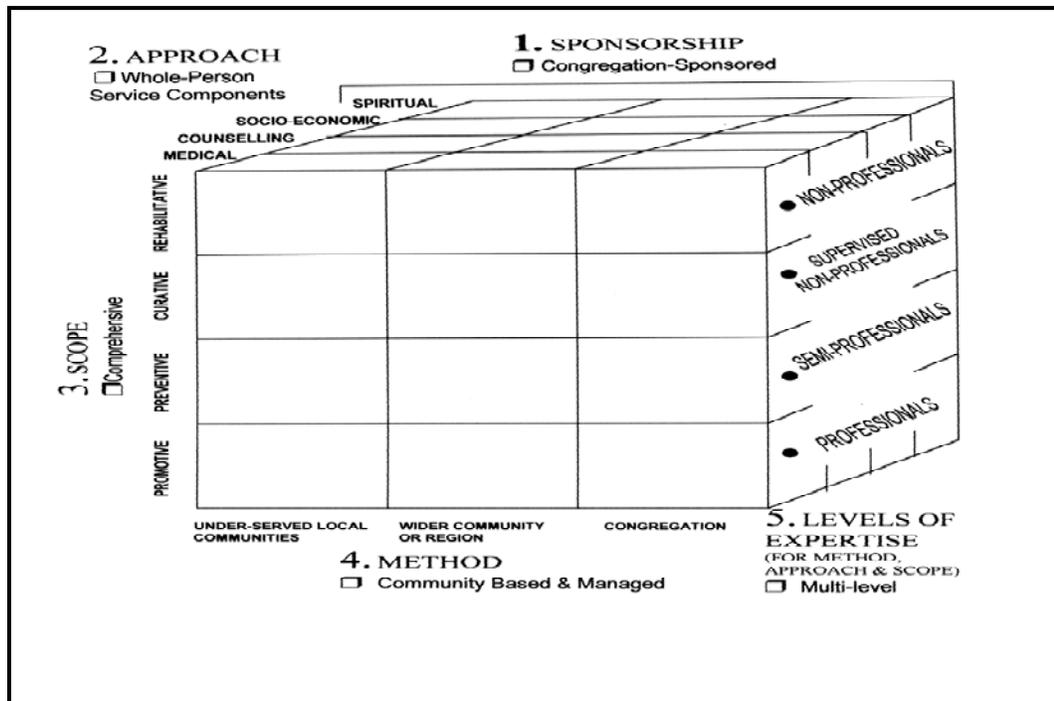


Figure 1. The Bethel Healing Ministry Model: A Systems Description

### Intramural Services

Services within our whole person clinic or “Healing Centre” are provided for the TOTAL PERSON and are delivered by a multidisciplinary team. New clients are screened by the counsellor, who, with the aid of a “Wholistic Questionnaire” notes their mental, spiritual, social and physiological concerns. They are then referred, as is appropriate, to the Healing Centre’s medical doctors, psychological counsellors, prayer counsellors and the Church’s social worker. The Church also runs a pharmacy. Referrals are made to other services outside the Centre as is appropriate. A flowchart of these services is shown in the figure below:

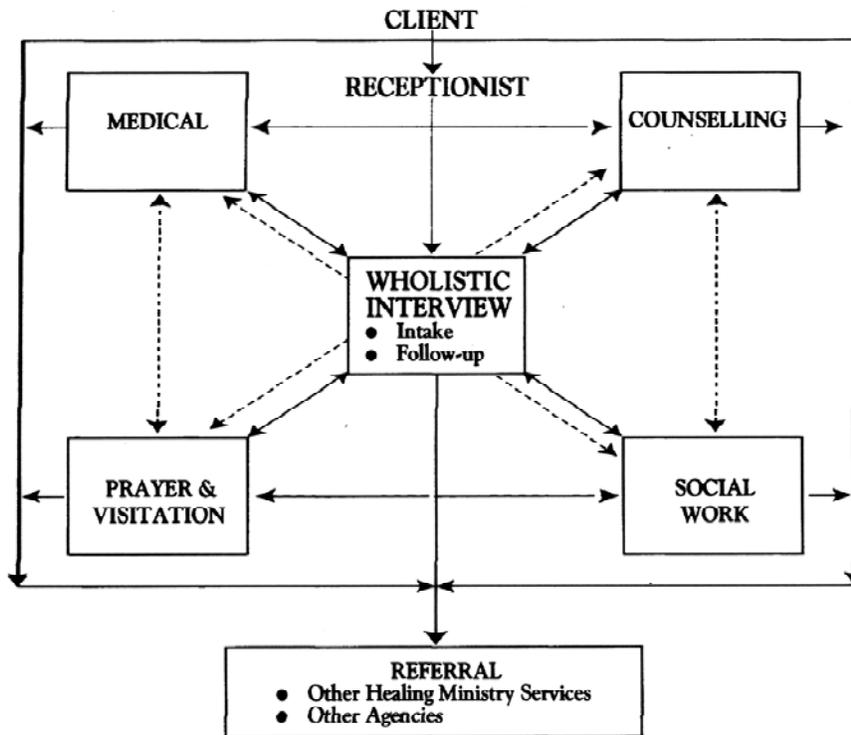


Figure 2

## **Outreach Services**

Outreach services are TOTAL IN SCOPE.

**Health Promotion** activities include education, exercise and other forms of physical recreation, a family life programme and counselling for couples living together in common-law relationships.

**Preventive Services** include maternal and child health care, dental and medical screening, mentorship for youth at risk and a bereavement support group and premarital counselling.

**Outreach Curative Services** include first aid, basic nursing and lay counselling in the home, church and community. A special prayer ministry for God's direct intervention in healing is carried out in the congregation, in homes, hospitals and in our related communities. Laying on of hands can take place spontaneously as the Spirit leads. Recoveries from illness which are outside medical explanation may occur.

**Rehabilitative Services** are carried out for the elderly, shut-ins, the mentally ill, diabetics and persons and families living with HIV/AIDS. This includes wholistic care, support groups and involvement in all aspects of church life.

## **Community Service**

The TOTAL COMMUNITY is involved in outreach services offered to violence-prone housing settlements. These include the promotion of self-help development efforts in education, sports, economic projects, employment-seeking, health and environment care and conflict mediation. A Sunday school, community worship services and special crusades form part of our evangelism programme.

We at Bethel seek to minister as a true healing community. Here, our paid staff are assisted by over 50 volunteers who are largely non-health professionals. All of our church departments are involved in whole person healing activities. The project is largely self-financed through the

giving of members and friends, provision of free buildings and utilities, and income-generation through our pharmacy.

Hopefully, the description of this ministry has demonstrated the basic principles of the Total Healthcare Model and provides a menu of possibilities, some of which you may find useful.

We believe this model is replicable. Most denominations in Jamaica now have various elements of a “total healing ministry” in at least some of their congregations. As Christian health professionals who are agents of the Healing Christ, we can apply the Total Healthcare model wherever we are. That is the most strategic location! As we all seek to minister the salvation destiny of Christ amidst today’s crises of uncertainty, we can develop relevant, innovative activities within this model that are adaptable to our respective contexts. We can start small. All of us can carry out basic health promotion, counselling, social advice and prayer.

Within our local congregations, as healing communities, each Christian health professional can find a role as an educator and as a trainer of non-professionals. As our work extends beyond our local churches into more difficult circumstances, we can ask our fellow members to pray for us and support any mission agencies with which some of us may be involved. Let us always ally ourselves to our healing communities.

## **CONCLUSION**

In today’s world, uncertainty manifests itself as certain crises of living. To counteract these crises, human beings have set up economic and political systems, culture, and medicine as commerce and technology as the created “gods of destiny” of our age. Yet, having failed us, these idolized solutions have ironically served to heighten the crises of living that they were meant to alleviate.

The Healing Christ as the true and only God and Controller of destiny brings salvation as whole person healing within a world of uncertainty and false hopes! Thus it is the task of us Christian health professionals as agents of the Healing Christ to bring our patients and others in our communities into a saving relationship with this Christ through “Total Healthcare”.

Let us work to provide this “Total Healthcare” with a total vision, ministering to the total person with a total scope of services and total community involvement. This Healing Christ, through the power of His cross and His Spirit and in the context of His community, can bring salvation by defeating all evil. He can supply all the needs of the whole person by transforming all human crises into opportunities. Let love motivate us to share Him. It is our radical commitment as His agents to “working out” this salvation as His “Total Healthcare” that bring health and hope in our time.

The counselor at the Bethel Baptist Healing Centre shares that “forgiveness of self and others is an issue that several clients have to grapple with. “I have had clients who have returned to report that the prayer of forgiveness works, they feel more focused and can move on with their lives”. Marion (not her real name) states; “Church brothers and sisters shared with me. Hands were laid on me during prayer. It took a few weeks for their prayers to be answered, during which time I had major brain surgery. Yet I had no doubt that I would receive God’s healing. I remember feeling thankful and happy when the prayers were answered. Surprisingly, I can now speak fluently and I have no problems with movement. The neurosurgeon said that my degree of recovery is a miracle. “Indeed” states Marion “God still heals today!”