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“The glory of God is a man alive.” St Irenaeus of Lyons.

“When two people are reconciled and one says to the other: ‘Forgive me’, God is present. What now takes place, in this encounter, is more important than all the angels and the trumpets in Paradise.” Ingmar Bergman.

Health and Salvation, through forgiveness and reconciliation.

By Gui Charles

I have been invited by Etienne and Claude Robin, with whom I have enjoyed a long friendship. It is through them that I have been initiated into the writings of Paul Tournier and I am also supported by 32 years in the Catholic Chaplaincy of the CHU in Montpellier. Mindful of your professional competence, my introductory Bible study this morning will suggest to you, who are doctors, ways of going beyond diagnosis on its own to think about what, from a gospel and biblical point of view, I describe as Health as a Parable of Salvation.

I shall, in my paper, examine the texts concerning the mighty works of Jesus but before doing this, I shall raise the question as to where the encounters of Jesus, in the gospels, are leading. Jesus does not heal without listening, without the desire for healing, without a request from the person or from his companions, without gratitude, without pardon, reconciliation, or words of communication (the paralytic, Matthew 9.1-7) He expects participation, or, in spite of the environment he approaches the person in need as with the daughter of Jairus (Matthew 9.18). In every case, he draws people out of isolation (the leper, Matthew 8.22-25), in the instance of the leper, from the isolation of shame. Another example is the woman with an issue of blood that departed from her by “force” and by her faith (Matthew 9.20). Here also we have an example of the faith that loves (Matthew 9.14-30). An interesting case in point is the child considered to be under demonic possession as an epileptic. He was saved by the by the faith of the father (Matthew 17.14-20). The man born blind faces the quasi genetic question, “Who has sinned?” with the attribution of guilt from the people around (John 9.1-34).

In the gospel accounts, there is the case of the social exclusion of the leper who says to Jesus, “If you will. You can cure me!” (Matthew 8.1-5), or the religious exclusion of the blind man whose lack of sight is attributed to sin ((John 9.15), and even the social and quasi political barrier of the Centurion, this foreigner from the occupying power, who, referring to his request for the healing of his servant, says: “When I tell one of my soldiers to do something, he does it” (Matt. 5, Luke 7.7-8). “Only speak the word and let my servant be healed” (Luke 7.6).

Another example is the violent mentally sick man. He is rejected by his fellow countrymen because they think that he is suffering from demonic possession. This man also is about to be brought back into society by Jesus (Mark 5.1-20).

Jesus requires faith, the trust or participation of the sick or afflicted people is necessary. He also asks for a commitment to healing (Matt. 17.19-21) to assist or encourage the taking back of responsibility for one's life. To the paralytic he says, "Stand up, take up your mat and go to your home" (Mark 2.1-12).

In all these encounters of Jesus on the paths of Palestine, the importance of pardon and reconciliation in the healing are clearly evident. I now wish to enquire carefully into the meaning of the treatment.

Introduction to Common Factors in Cases of Health and Salvation.

1. Salvation is described in the New Testament texts, as also in those of the Old Testament, as a process of conversion and interior redirection. In philosophy one could speak of a refining change in an example. Indeed, I remember a definition of health included in a French political plan of health in the 1990s (a definition probably inspired by Yvan Illich):

"Health moves within a framework of adaptation. . . The capacity to adapt to a changing environment, to grow old, sometimes to cure, eventually to suffer and finally to await death in peace" But it is also true that there is an effort of adaptation on the part of the doctor towards the patient and what follows from this for the patient is to adapt his behaviour to advice offered to him.

2. Health and healing, Salvation, the communal aspect, cf. Lambourne. 100-104. (1).

One is not saved all alone but by taking a responsible part in the salvation offered by God. This salvation consists of pardon and reconciliation by recognizing responsibility for the sin of denial of humanity, lack of saving love towards one's fellow beings. Whether sought, or whether given forgiveness is the final stage of an influence upon oneself. Whenever given or received, forgiveness alters the way that one looks at oneself as much as its influence on the other person. The harder element is to reconcile oneself to oneself, to accept this change of life that draws us out of inherited guilt. (See the prayer of Jesus, the Our Father. (Matthew 6.9): "Your kingdom come, . . . Forgive us our sins as we also forgive"

Dr. Lambourne, an English theologian and physician, writes: "Christ's healings show that the men and women, who experienced them, the Raising of Lazarus (John 11. 45), the blind man who received his sight, (John 9.39), experienced the visible presence of God, an encounter with judgement, 'that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind'. In medicine, to quote an expert in mental health, illness is a crisis that affects a group. It is also a time for new possibilities, an opportunity to reach a new equilibrium. A rational understanding, the psychology of the undertaking, achieved by the people involved, will determine the outcome. If the undertaking has been successful, there will be exterior adaptation and internal adjustment. By contrast, there may be a movement in the direction of regression, leading to neurosis or to psychosis.

Alienation or disintegration will occur.” This led me to think of something that happened in the hospital Centre when a member from a gypsy family became a patient. The whole family arrived as a body, and one could say were cured together.

3. The healings of Jesus were signs of the presence of the Kingdom.

We may take, as an example, the discourse in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4.16f. citing Isaiah 61.11), “Good news to the poor, release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the captives go free”. The same message was given to the people sent by John the Baptist (Luke 7.22): “The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them”.

These deeds always require the participation of the person, a freedom to practise them. They also call for a change in the person’s environment. The folk who are cured become witnesses (the person born blind, the Gerasene, paralysed folk, people like the Samaritan, almost a prostitute, and so banished, who becomes a witness to her fellow countrymen). Confrontation with the illness and the healing action set aside, it was a matter of restoring to the person the ability to work; to come out of social exclusion and guilt springing from the environment and to restore the capacity for relationship, self-respect. It is a kind of gratitude. Cf. the Gerasene demoniac and the paralytic from Capernaum; cited above.

It is also revealed that health is not to be idolised. Jesus, by the resurrection, discloses the “otherness” of man alive. He showed this clearly at the moment when the serious illness of Lazarus was brought to his attention. “This illness does not lead to death.” Jesus thus opened the window into the abandonment of fatalism. He would be the “first born” (John 11.4).

What does the school of Resilience tell us, through the treatment of pain, palliative care?

The problem is to get back on one’s feet through the trial, *but one must be supported and experience compassion.* Boris Cyrulnick (3). “Following a severe shock, a dramatic change is possible when one knows that it is acknowledged (recognized). This is what gives birth to resilience. One cannot reclaim one’s life all alone after a severe test.”

Martin Siffert, a pioneer in palliative care, and the management of patients with HIV, writes: “We help by restoring a positive image to these people through the new understanding of the matters confided to us in their lives, and giving a signal, by the time devoted to them, of the value that they hold in our sight.”

J. P. Benezech writes: “May our prayer of friendship be directed towards a real welcome, involve forgiveness for ourselves and for other people, accept the unconditional love that comes to us from God” and R. A. Lambourne will say, “What counts between us and our patients is a communion of hope and of faith.” We find here the old adage passed between doctors: “Medicine is a trust that addresses the conscience”.

Edouard Z. Arifian (2) wrote: "The people that we are springs from the never ending exchanges that we have with other human beings and when they do not occur, we are dehumanised. . . . On the other hand, love, in the widest sense of the word, and functioning through many different expressions, is the type of encounter that is most necessary and the most creative of the bond that occurs between people. "

What do the theologians, who are also psychologists, say?

Simone Pacot. For this Catholic, who practises deeply gospel cures, forgiveness is really difficult, either to give or to receive, for the person who carries longstanding wounds in his life. He has to learn to "recognize" them, in order to ameliorate, if not cure, them. A person, from childhood, for example, who has had to learn to disentangle himself alone from a life marked by insufficient parental support and who develops the following emotional base: "I do not count as a person", is imprisoned in an all powerful disaster that breaks any cure based in the area of relationships, emotions, fears or life choices. (4).

According to the view of the Protestant pastor, Lytta Basset, (5) as I understand her writings ("Sainte Colere" p.86), demoniacs, who were calmed by Jesus, refused to be confined within a role assigned by their culture. People like Jacob at the Jabbok, who are younger sons, low born, black or aboriginal, and who experience conflict, struggle or confrontation, can rely on "the Other". They need no longer comply with the situation and experience displacement. For them there is a new birth clearly identifiable by the change seen in them. For my part, I can say of the One, whose enemies derided him and mocked him on the cross and threw the slander,, "Doctor, heal yourself!", Christ, after the Resurrection, carries the marks of the nails as people, wounded in war, proudly exhibit the scars of their wounds. The doctor, through his vocation, is the witness of a new entry into life by the person whom he has helped to come through the ordeal.

A Catholic priest and thereby charged, by my ecclesiastical community, to be a minister of reconciliation and spiritual healing, thank you for the invitation to your proceedings but I also thank you for obliging me to think anew about my practice. It is not enough to proclaim the forgiveness of God. One must enable people to receive it. One must bring it into being.

Bibliography.

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 (2) Edouard Zarifian. *Le gout de vivre.* Odile Jacob.
 (3) Boris Cyrulnick. *Parler d'amour au bord du gouffre* Odile Jacob/Martime Siffert.
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 Sarmant. Ed. Du jubilee.
 (4) Simone Pacot. *L'Evangelisation des profondeurs.* Le Cerf.
 (5) Lytta Basset. *Sainte colere.* Labor et fides.
Le pouvoir de pardonner. Albin Michel.