

Resurrecting the Wounded Community

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*Fr. Sears gave this presentation at the ACT (Association of Christian Therapists) Conference in Atchison, Kansas, in October, 1993. The presentation explored the path ACT or any Christian community has to travel to fulfill its mission. Jesus models for us the steps to healing and building community. In this way Jesus retraces the journey, in a healed way, that Israel had to walk. It is a spiritual journey, into the Paschal mystery. Published in *Journal of Christian Healing*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Winter, 1994, pp. 3-15.*

"They recognized him in the breaking of the bread." (Lk 24:35 - Emmaus disciples)

What was your dream for ACT¹ when you first joined? What is it today? Does it seem to you that the harvest is ready? What *is* the harvest that we are called to bring to fruition? What is the harvest of each of us as individuals, and of our whole organization?

As I thought about my own dream, my mind went to when I first joined ACT in 1981 (by the invitation of another member). I felt that I had finally found an association that joined my several interests: therapy, theology and prayer for healing. I had taught theology for some nine years, but theology professors and students were more or less indifferent to the depth psychological dimensions of the person or to healing prayer. I had been a member of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal since 1968, but the Renewal seemed suspicious of theology and the need for facing the pain that is part of therapy. The people I met in ACT joined all three. I had come home. Our meetings built me up and instructed me. I was gifted to join specialized groups on intergenerational healing and theological issues in healing. We gave charismatic retreats to Fellow Jesuits. But gradually conflicts began to appear. Our groups got smaller or were disbanded. ACT leadership found itself in conflict with part of the membership over the mission of the organization. Members of other denominations felt excluded and unequal. Leaders were rejected or resigned and felt unappreciated. The dream began to be infested with viruses of anger and division. It seemed, like Jesus' parable, that some enemy had come and sown weeds. I began to wonder if God was still with ACT. Can such a large organization ever become a unified entity when even our small groups were rife with rivalry and hurts? We are still at the beginning of initiatives taken to come to terms with the divisions and work them out. What will help us in this shift?

¹You can substitute your own community's name for ACT and ponder your own experience of that community.

WHAT IS GOD'S DREAM FOR HUMANITY AND ACT?

God's Dream in Genesis

Sometimes we can get caught in our plans and miss the big picture. Just as Jesus "opened the Scriptures" for the disciples, we need to be regrounded in God's dream and see how it compares with ours and how it fared. Genesis is still the clearest story of God's dream, but its vision is repeated throughout Scripture. God created humans in harmony, "to walk familiarly with God," to have man and woman be equal partners and co-founders of the human family, and to live in harmony with the land which would bear fruit abundantly. Each would "serve" the other, and all would "serve" God. That dream is still in the depths of each of our hearts. We long to find God's love in each other, and build a healing place with one another and with God in order to give life to others. Isn't that what we most deeply want? what we struggle for in finding the "right mate," the "right vocation of service," the right place where we can build something substantial and lasting for God and others? ACT'S dedication to the hearts of Jesus and Mary shows that God has placed that dream in the heart of ACT. It is that joint love in God that heals and gives life.

The Human Response to Sin

Yet we are told what happened. Humans turned from God and sought to fulfill this dream in their own way! They doubted God's good will and were fascinated by their own experience and decisions. Symbolically, they ate of the tree of the "knowledge of good and evil" (an indiscriminate experience of good and evil) and turned from the "tree of life" which was God's word. That deep separation from God led them to shame and secrecy, to blame of each other and a competitive domination/clinging rather than equality, and to being cast out of the garden. That is the insight God gave the Yahwist, who wrote in the time of David. The Yahwist saw that the history of that original perversion of truth had continued: Cain envied Abel and killed him; generation after generation were scattered till in their efforts to overcome their insecurity by "being like God" they constructed the Tower of Babel - a perfect symbol of the chaos our efforts at self-salvation produce.

God's Intervention to Save

But Genesis also shows how God intervened to "save" humans. First of all *Abraham* is called out of his "homeland" for a "promised land" that God will give. The dream now has to be awaited from God, and all Abraham can do is trust that God will lead. He's tested in many ways along the journey! He has to leave the land (Canaan) for Egypt because of a famine. He fears to lose Sarah because of Pharaoh and lies about her being his wife. He will be even told to sacrifice his offspring Isaac (God's very promise of fruitfulness)! Yet despite his confusion and sometimes misguided acts, he remains faithful to God, and after releasing all to God, the promise begins to fall into place. Sarah is finally given Isaac, and at the end of his life Abraham purchases a plot of land for his grave. The promised land has a foothold!

Secondly, we find a *continuing pattern of saving and sin*. We see a repeat of the trials and eventual increase with Isaac and his younger son Jacob. And the book of Genesis culminates with the story of Joseph, foreshadowing a kind of fulfillment of God's dream through Joseph's long years of suffering and imprisonment and seeming abandonment. But the pattern is repeated in the

book of Exodus, with Israel in Egypt. They mm from Yahweh in Egypt and get corrupted by Egyptian gods (as we see in their serving the golden calf in the desert), and they again become enslaved under foreign oppressors. When God calls them forth out of Egypt to worship God in the desert, they fall back into grumbling and must remain in the desert 40 years! How hard it is for humans to trust God alone!

When they are finally brought back to the promised Canaan and after 200 years of periodic battles with surrounding nations, David misuses his kingly authority to seduce Bathsheba and have Uriah killed. Such a heinous crime brings a curse on his household, and even though God forgives, the sinful division works out in the split between northern and southern kingdoms and finally the second exile in Babylon. Again, the land is lost because they turned from God and justice.

Even their efforts to be faithful become obstacles! After the Exile they tried extra hard not to leave Yahweh. They increased their laws, strengthened their structures (after the Exile the Bible was finally written down as we have received it), but then these very "good" things became the ground of their trust - their God! If we don't abandon God in one way, we seem to find another! And again they experienced an absence of God's Spirit for many years before Christ.

It seems that all God's efforts to restore the dream are only temporarily successful. We somehow find a way to turn from trust in God, to increase injustice and oppression and end up alienated from forming community and worshipping God in peace. We are very resourceful! If it isn't blatant idolatry (a golden calf of some sort), we find something good (our view of "the law", our view of the perfect community, etc.) and judge each other by it rather than surrendering all to God. It seems to be an almost ever recurring pattern.

Before we look at God's final answer to our dilemma in Jesus, let us look more closely at the recurrent pattern that we see emerging. I was helped to put some graphic names on these stages by the work of Scott Peck in *The Different Drum* (1987). Peck captured the "feel" for four different stages that clarified this recurring pattern. He called them pseudo-community, chaos, emptiness and, finally, community.

STAGES OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

First we need to understand what Peck means by *community*. His term for the *first stage - Pseudocommunity* - is perhaps too negative. It does indicate, however, that what he means by community is not our ordinary use of the term. He does not mean a mere association, nor a neighborhood community, nor even a parish community or a gathering of many families. By community he means a "group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other," whose relationships go deeper than social masks, who are committed "to rejoice together, mourn together" and to "delight in each other, make other's conditions our own." ' They are inclusive (for exclusivity creates cliques, not community) and committed (for if people leave when they don't feel good, they can never form a trusting, sharing community), To reach this open and deep communication, community must be a safe place, where people can fight gracefully while respecting each other, where there is no competition but a "Spirit" of openness, equality, and welcome that truly elicits creative insight and consensual decisions. In the face of much of our experience, we might call such a view a "dream" world, yet Peck has found (and perhaps each of us has

experienced some instances of it) that community repeatedly forms if participants (small groups such as we have formed in recent conferences) communicate honestly with each other. But it doesn't happen without pain!

Most often we begin with *pseudocommunity*, that is, with putting on the face of cohesion without really letting our differences be expressed, or rejecting them when they do surface. A more positive designation might be what I have called "familial faith," or the kind of community that emphasizes law and tradition and in which individual differences are de-emphasized. Negatively, this institutional type of structure may repress or put down individual differences. I find this repression is intensified in religious groups, for there is a moral stricture against "hurting anyone" or "creating a disturbance." Peck himself found that more sophisticated groups (who were aware of dynamics, etc.) often actually had a harder time forming real community. They could "fake it," appear to be vulnerable without really verbalizing their real feelings, hurts, doubts, differences with the dominant view, etc. Don't we feel something of this "shame" when divisions surface in ACT. And we are supposed to be a "healing association!" Then what do we find? People leave because of conflict (i.e. find it difficult to commit to such tensions, even though our families have the same tensions and we don't leave). Or we can pair off with like believers and form cliques (exclusive rather than inclusive). Or we can endlessly "fight" and never go beyond that one or another viewpoint that "ought" to prevail. Or we can become dependent on certain leaders (such as Paul saw in Corinth when "one was Apollo's, another Paul's" "Is Christ divided up?" he exclaimed! 1 Cor 1:12-13). When we finally let down our guards and listen respectfully, we find that people come from many different points of view. The uniformity of familial faith begins to break down and one begins to "search" for one's own experience and convictions. ACT members are committed to Jesus as Lord, but we find we differ in many important ways from one another.

We reach the *second stage: Chaos*, when people begin to express their needs and hurts, and others respond with their own point of view as though it should be the answer for everyone. We each have our "law," and our expectations, and we are upset when others do not find the same truth for themselves! One is conservative and gets upset that another's suggestions seem to go against the norm. Another is liberal and gets upset with what seems to be narrow traditionalism. One is open and "therapeutic," the other is organized and "professional." One speaks of working for ecumenism, the other of being faithful to our traditions. But underneath is a deep anxiety that somehow we will lose our hold on God. We are like post-exilic Israel, multiplying laws that our Temple might not again be destroyed! And in our fear of losing God, we *cause* God to leave. We always cause the very thing we try so hard to avoid. Chaos is when everyone has *the* answer for everyone else and people cannot seem to hear the other person from the other's point of view. It most likely sounds all too familiar. It is actually a necessary stage of community building for each one needs to get in touch with his or her view and not leave everything to the "authority" (the previous stage); but it will go nowhere unless *something* happens to move it further. That *something* may be a strong organizer (a flight into reorganization as the solution) who will make decisions in spite of all the opposition and pluralism. That is what Israel did after the Exile. To choose that route, however, is to say goodbye to community

In Peck's view, and my experience corroborates his, the only alternative (the other *something*) is through a *third stage: Emptiness*. This "desert" experience is typical of what I have called "individuating faith," or the painful breakthrough to an experience of God's

mystery that is graphically portrayed in the Book of Job. By letting go of our expectations, prejudices, ideologies and even theologies and solutions, our need to convert, fix, solve or heal, and especially our need to control, we open to the mystery of God in what simply *is*. When we can express our point of view, but not try to impose it on others but really listen to their point of view, then all our fears of losing control will surface. The organization itself may have to "let go" of structures that do not enable real communication to occur. This move through emptiness is taken for granted by Buddhists. Without an emptying of our egoism and our particular views that separate us from others, we will never find our essential unity with all. Only after a long period in the desert, a letting go of future plans to live each day in response to God's gifts, was Israel prepared to enter the "promised land." And again, Israel was sixty years in Babylonian Exile before Cyrus (a non-Jew - what a humiliation!) was raised up to restore Jerusalem. All their pride had to give way to humiliations and humility if they would ever become the community God intended. When we enter that desert, God can speak again to our hearts - now broken and repentant - and lead us back to intimacy.

The *final stage* that Peck considers, *Community*, itself emerges as a state of peace from this chaos. I think I really have experienced it only in small groups that have gone through difficulties and begun to accept each other just as they are. Like one recent group that has been meeting every year. One member said: "I've noticed this time that I can say anything that is in my heart for the first time. It is so simple as to be almost missed but what a marvelous gift!" When we are received for just who we are, our true selves emerge. Our gifts can be appreciated and shared. Community puts communication and openness to our common Holy Spirit first, and organization second.

But, unfortunately, Jesus did not have weekend groups such as Peck has worked with. Such breakthroughs as Peck describes do not last forever. In our day-to-day life and long term communities, we may touch on topics (especially for ACT it seems, religious topics) that through us back into chaos with people becoming rigid and difficult to move. Would that life were a week-end retreat! What Peck calls "pseudo community" is really what all of us find ourselves in - our institutions - without which there would be no handing on of tradition. Jesus didn't deal with week-end groups, and he didn't substitute a separate growth group for the whole institution. He (and we) had to deal with a whole history of imbedded patterns at the same time as opening it up to a deeper, community building union with God. What he formed I have named "communitarian" and "mission" stages. We need now to consider how God dealt with this issue in Jesus. We need to look more closely at God's way of restoring the dream.

JESUS: GOD'S WAY OF RESTORING GOD'S DREAM COMMUNITY

"God so loved the world that he sent his only son, that whosoever believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life, " (Jn. 3:16)

Jesus is both Son of God and fully human. He not only shows us what God is like, he reveals what humans are and are meant to be. He doesn't just save us, as

though from outside, he models for us the Way of salvation for all of us. As St. Irenaeus put it, Jesus "recapitulated"(or lived through in a healed way) every stage of human life that he might redeem each stage. As he said, "I am the Way, me Truth and the Life." (Jn 14:6) What is this way and what is the Word we are to hear today?

In the first place, it is a *hidden* way. Jesus arose from the back hills of Nazareth (like one said to me during the 1993 Conference: "Can anything good come from Atchison?").* He attended no great schools. After early exile to Egypt (like the patriarchs), he settled down in Nazareth and we hear nothing about him except for his time in Jerusalem at twelve until he responds to the call of John the Baptist at about 30. What was he doing when he was a carpenter? When did Joseph die (it seems between 12 and 30)? He waited! He waited until the time was right. Like Amos, he was called to be an ordinary laborer until his call to public ministry. He was "about his Father's business" at 12, so his Father's business must have been to wait! That is an essential ingredient in our call to community: to wait on the Lord, and in the meantime to look for God in every aspect of life as Jesus must have done to get the insights of his parables! So the basis of all spiritual and communal growth is trust in God's care and love (which undoes the distrust and disobedience of our first parents). Without this basic trust, no community is possible.

Secondly, his first major action was one of *repentance!* Despite the scandal it brought his disciples, each Gospel affirms that Jesus went first to John the Baptist. Matthew has John say to Jesus: "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" And what did Jesus reply? "Let it be so to fulfill all that is right (all justice or righteousness, Mt. 3:15)." What was right? Jews did not have a Baptism, only non-Jews were Baptized at that time, so it meant that *all people*, Jews as well, needed to repent and be purified by God to enter the coming rule of God. Jesus stood in solidarity with all the people, even though he himself was sinless. We are a community of sinners or we are not the community of Jesus Christ! We cannot be renewed unless we become a deeply repentant people and each of us admit our sin and blindness. If we fail to see our own sin and blindness, we will continue to hurl stones at one another (see Jn. 8:1-11).

Thirdly, as Jesus came from the water, *the Holy Spirit* came down on him like a dove. John's was a baptism of repentance, God alone baptizes with the Spirit! Jesus hears the words "You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!" We also must hear those words anew! Individually! We must each experience that we are loved by God (and others are too) if we are to gain the inner trust necessary to let go and trust God in ourselves and others.

Fourthly, the first action of the Spirit was to lead him into the desert to be *tempted!* He re-traced Israel's steps on the basis of his new experience of God's special love! Like Jesus, we need to reinterpret our own tradition and customs in light of God's call to love. He was 40 days in the desert for their 40 years! There God spoke to *his* heart, and whenever God acts the Evil One counterattacks. We need to know that! Whenever God moves strongly in ACT, we will be attacked by Evil. *We have to learn discernment and follow only God's voice.* Jesus' temptations were programmatic for his whole ministry as King, Priest and Prophet. He was tempted to use his Word to turn stones into bread (his "prophetic word," as Ezekiel was told to prophesy to the dry bones that they might rise, Ez

37). But he surrenders that power and initiative to God: "We do not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from God's mouth." Then as Priest and mediator between God and us he was tempted to show forth his spiritual power by jumping down from the Temple. It would be like making healing a test for God. Do you love me? Heal me! Get me that job! Lift my depression! Make ACT popular! How we can even take control through our spiritual gifts! And Jesus said: "You shall not put the Lord Your God to the Test." And then his Kingly role is challenged by the devil, who took him to a very high mountain "I will give you all this if you will bow down and worship me." Luke adds in his version of the scene "For this power has been given to me." Who gave Satan that power? I used to implicitly think God gave it till that question was asked in a little book on intercession by Kenneth Hagen (1991).³ He pointed out that *we humans* gave Satan that power! It had been given to humans to have dominion over all creation on God's behalf (Gn 1:28-9), and by our sin we gave it to Satan. Jesus replied: "Begone Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him alone." Jesus returns the authority to God by submitting himself to God's authority. And Satan went, and angels came to minister to him (Mt.4:11). The first action of the Spirit was to test his commitment to serve only God, not the ministry, not ACT, not his own plans, only God! God always acts the same way. The primary goal of ACT is not ministry, but service of God's glory. This is the deepest meaning of "individuating faith."

Fifthly, only then did Jesus *go out to minister*. Only as guided by God's call and in the power of the Spirit did he announce: "*Repent, and believe the Good News.*" His ministry of love was in the power of the Spirit, a reflection of God's own ministry. His healing the outcast, the sinner, and the prostitute revealed God's care for the poor, as did his openness to those of "importance" as when he accepted invitations from the leaders like Simon the Pharisee. "God lets his sun shine on good and bad alike" (Mt 5:45). His service of love was open to all. His forgiveness of sinners revealed God's universal call to "be reconciled." This "forgiveness of enemies" is the key element of what I have termed "communitarian faith," It is more active and committed than Peck's "community," and it ultimately led Jesus to his death. For far from meeting universal acceptance, Jesus' life of living God's love ultimately brought him into conflict with the institutional leaders who accused him of various things: *-working on the Sabbath* (Jesus chose that time to heal, as a sign of God's healing love!); *eating with tax-collectors and sinners* (because they needed reconciliation and Jesus was not accepting the prevailing selective view of the leadership of who God wanted them to love); *teaching without proper education* (but there was precedent in some prophets of the OT like Amos, Gideon, etc.); *ministering to non-Jews* like the Centurion and the Syro-Phoenician woman (a call to universal love that we see already in the Book of Jonah, etc.) In other words, Jesus commits to community for what God has given him to give rather than for what he receives. Nothing can break that sort of commitment!

Jesus taught with authority, but *his message was not "power" but humility, and love for all people, especially the poor*. His Beatitudes were the reverse of what Jews of his day would expect. In the OT riches were a sign of God's blessing, like Abraham's many possessions. This is the mark of "familial faith." The good are rewarded, the bad punished. But Jesus affirmed it is the poor who are "blessed." Individuating faith presupposes a deep surrender to God that continues to ground communitarian faith. As St. Ignatius says, Jesus' strategy is "poverty, humiliations and humility and from that to every other good! He learned

well from Jesus. Yet not even Jesus' disciples understood! They delighted in the great works of power they performed in Jesus' name, but he said: "Rather, rejoice that your names are written in heaven (Lk 10:20)!" They saw the great crowds that Jesus had healed and taught. They didn't understand the great self-emptying that grounded Jesus' ministry. *We also have experienced the great works, yet -we seem scandalized -when we get attacked, even by our fellow ministers (as did Jesus). God has only one Way of renewal. We must enter that way or miss the path.*

Thus, sixthly, the *second part of Jesus' ministry foreshadows his passion and death*. He predicts his passion, and his disciples do not understand. Some leave when he speaks such "hard words" (Jn 6:56). He confronts the leaders and they seek to stone him (Jn 8:59). The blind man speaks truth to them and they remove him from the synagogue. Healing is sometimes a messy business, and we may find ourselves fighting institutions as well as being advocates for our clients. To turn away from this, as Peter tried to turn Jesus away (Mk 8:32f) is to do the work of Satan. "Get behind me, you Satan," Jesus said in one of the most shocking words in Scripture, "you do not speak the words of God, but those of men" (Mk 8:33). Whatever is worth doing is worth suffering for, seems to be the message.

Seventhly, it all comes to a head in Jesus' *passion and death*. Scripture scholars tell us that the Gospels are like commentaries on the Passion Narratives. We have domesticated them by seeing them as referring only to Jesus, not to us. We need to repeat that Jesus is our model, not just an external savior. What he has done, we are called to follow: not just individually, but as a Christian organization. Here the great mystery of God's plan is revealed. Jesus sacrifices each of his gifts to God that the power of God's Spirit might communicate those gifts to us. His agony reveals the struggle he went through to accomplish this: "Not my will but thine be done." Then he clearly incriminates himself: "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Living God?" "I AM." This is no unwilling victim! It is God's Power working in Jesus' human weakness yet willingness that reveals the ultimate deliverance and healing. Every one of his prerogatives is ridiculed and blasphemed. He is blindfolded and told to "prophecy, who it is that struck you." His prophetic teaching is ridiculed. He is robed in scarlet like the emperor and mocked: "Hail King of the Jews." They ridiculed his Lordship. And on the cross they scream: "He saved others, himself he cannot save." They ridicule his priesthood. Jesus' whole reason for coming is thrown back in his face, and in perhaps the most awful word in Scripture, Jesus cries out: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" He lovingly experienced the depth of our human sin - our abandonment of God and God's seeming abandonment of us.

Finally, in that awful sense of dereliction, *the Dream of God is restored!* His heart is broken, and he pours out his Spirit on the faithful who stand with him in this ordeal: his Mother and the beloved disciple and all those who stand with them. "From that moment he took her into his *own*." The community of God's love is restored, and the whole earth is brought under Jesus' Lordship, to be servant of God's people as they are of Jesus. The resurrection is an event in God, a bringing of humanity into God's own life through the power of the Spirit. It is permanently at the root of every individual and every community, but we tap its "new life" only if we remain faithful to God despite the suffering. This is "mission faith," the beginning of the renewal of all creation. ACT is ultimately to be a sign for all people, and the entire healthcare establishment, not simply as "business as usual" (a

kind of "familial faith") but as a sign of the Good News being preached to the poor - a continuation of Jesus' own ministry. Only such an outreach reveals God's active, compassionate love.

LIFE ACCORDING TO GOD'S DREAM COMMUNITY

I have come to see that Jesus' salvific action is not just a once and for all event, it is also a process that we individually and communally have to go through daily, weekly, yearly.

Only after Jesus ministered to individuals after the resurrection could they get beyond their shock and consequent fragmentation and return to community. That is precisely what the story of the Emmaus disciples tells us. It was written in 80 AD, so Luke's community especially needed to relearn its message. The two disciples (very much like Peter earlier) were scandalized by Jesus' suffering and were walking away from the community in Jerusalem. This was Luke's community experience, no doubt, as it often is our experience. Jesus had to teach them to see suffering and conflict as transition to glory rather than failure. As their dream was rekindled, "their hearts burned within them." They "recognized him in the breaking of the bread" (and in their broken hearts), and they returned to community. I believe Jesus wants to walk with us today and reveal the meaning of our conflicts and renew our dream. Each of us still has hopes, I am sure, but their realization may seem far off. somehow, we may be feeling much like the disciples going away from community to their home in Emmaus, dejected because their "dream" had seemingly been shattered. They had experienced the exciting healings of Jesus, the great crowds, the brilliant teachings, but all had collapsed. Only when they could see meaning in that, could they return renewed to community, having become united with Jesus.

Like Jesus and the disciples, ACT has also experienced exciting healings through the anointing of the Spirit, but more recently has been brought into the stage of diminishment. Wounds have appeared in our gifts of kingship (leadership), priesthood and prophecy. Hopefully our passion will lead to purification. Our kingly ministry has been deeply wounded ever since the loss of our early leader. That crisis seemed to intensify the split between those who wanted closer Catholic ties and those who wanted more openness to other denominations. Our Executive Directors were let go, and we have vacillated from place to place, it seems, ever since. In light of community stages, we have experienced a kind of chaos, a variety of voices that will tear us apart if we do not get beyond that divisiveness. Our kingly authority has had to be sacrificed, willy-nilly, and hopefully that will turn us to God alone for leadership. If the greatest King who ever lived had to die "so the Holy Spirit could be sent," our kings must so die, over and over again, till God alone is King. Our very embarrassment may be a weakness that releases God's power.

Similarly, our *prophetic ministry* has been wounded. *The Journal of Christian Healing*, which our Association started to evangelize the health-care professions, had to be sacrificed because of lack of finances. Doug Schoeninger picked it up for the Institute for Christian Healing in Philadelphia and developed it beautifully, but with the daily and yearly sacrifice of trusting God for financial help, and always carrying the burden of differing views on Christian healing. What are we to teach? How can we speak a healing

word to our Churches that seem so wounded and yet seem so closed to prophetic challenge? If we don't speak that word, will we not be abandoning Jesus' call, and rendering fruitless his witness of healing in spite of persecution? The *Journal* has now been returned to ACT sponsorship, but the challenge it represents for ACT as a whole remains. Whatever we choose to do with the *Journal*, we have a prophetic ministry for the healing professions. As Jesus was no professional, this ministry will come not so much from our expertise (as important as that is), but from God's power in our woundedness and our courage to stand up for the heart of Jesus. It is not our ideas we are to speak, but Jesus. We need to sacrifice the idolatry of our ideas, however good they might be, and even our professionalism, to speak the foolishness of the cross which is the true power of God to heal.

And thirdly, our very *priestly ministry of healing* seems deeply wounded. People leave the Association from wounds received. As they shouted at Jesus "He saved others, himself he cannot save," people might also say the same about ACT. What a painful taunt. And yet is there not a truth there? God is the healer, not ACT, and God's ways are mysterious. Bill Carr, one of our founding members, died of cancer despite the many prayers of Association members. Yet in a mysterious way healing did occur - the ultimate healing of union with God, reconciliation with family and friends, the growing surrender of Bill's power that the love and gifts of others might be called forth. That *is* the healing we are called to! That same mystery is experienced in Mabel Kamp and others. As they go, others become empowered. Perhaps they are now powerful intercessors for the Association. As many saints (like Therese of Liseux, Jean Vianney, etc.) experienced themselves with great sickness especially at the end of their lives when their intercessory power was at its height, so we need to see the mystery of spiritual healing. As Paul said: "Death is at work in us, but life in you." (2 Cor 4:12) In dying and leaving, Jesus empowers us with his Spirit.

Through this very sacrifice of our giftedness - kingly, prophetic and priestly - we are beginning to harvest divine kingship, prophecy and priestly care. "Unless the grain of wheat fall to the ground and die, it remain a single grain, but if it die, it bears much fruit." Unless we are willing to let our plans and expectations for ACT die, we cannot receive them back renewed. God raises the dead, not the half dead! But as we are brought through that emptying process, we begin to see the beauty of all our members - from the least to the greatest. Women and men become equal partners, because we look not to the person but to God who gifts each for the good of the whole community. We can build a place of healing in ACT because we have not taken possession of it as our own, but receive it always as God's trust. And all this because our hearts have been "circumcised" by suffering and are humbly "waiting" for God's Spirit. God's Dream is restored through Jesus' death/resurrection - the ongoing mystery of divine transformation in love - which continues on in *our* death/resurrection.

OUR NEED FOR DISCERNMENT

How are we to cooperate with this Pascal mystery? We need to learn discernment. Discernment is not something that can simply be "taught" - as an academic course. It is more like "wisdom," learned through long life experience and spiritual growth. In the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, life decisions are not to be the focus of attention. Rather, the focus is on God and the Spirit at work in Jesus' life; and on the retreatant's

desire only to give God glory. As the retreatant faces his or her own biases and fears and grows in spiritual freedom and the desire to be with Jesus whether in joy or suffering (especially in suffering, since this is what we are biased against), the retreatant grows in a kind of inner freedom and detachment and love of God. When our whole desire is that God be glorified, then we "make an election," that is, decide the course that opens us most fully to God and humble love. What helps one to discern is thus *Conversion*. That is not difficult to see: it is the person open to love who can tell what is loving and what is not. It is the person gifted and trained to "know truth" who can tell when reasoning is faulty or true. It is the person free from greed that can see the needs of the poor, and the person free from fear who can respond courageously. So also, the more we have experienced human and spiritual growth, the more we can help others grow.

At each stage of development there is need for a different sort of discernment. In the "familial" stage, we need to learn virtue and discover our moral sinfulness (the traditional "purgative stage"). We begin to see our deception, our greed, our infidelity in relationships, our control, our manipulation of others and God, our self-righteousness and judgments of others. John the Baptist's call for repentance preceded Jesus--God's Spirit cannot build on immorality. But neither does our "morality" save us. More is needed.

The individuating stage, experienced as a self-emptying or a "dark night of the soul" is the one most open to confusion. Now the guide is no longer simply the law or what we have always done, but God's living presence in each individual. Respect for the God-given law must still hold, but ultimately God's spirit and God's love becomes the guide. This was clearly Jesus' criterion when he chose to heal on the Sabbath - "to do good rather than evil" he says in Mark's Gospel (3:4) - and when he chose to forgive sinners rather than condemn them (as familial stage believers condemn "thinking they were serving God"). Here we have to accept the responsibility of discerning what the most loving thing to do is, at the same time as respecting God-given tradition. One can err by holding too slavishly to former custom and law, but also by rejecting it in excessive individualism. God's Spirit always respects both the individual and the whole community.

What happens in this stage also is that the sides of ourselves that are wounded or repressed in the "law" stage resurface. We may experience a need for more play, not just work, or a need to respect ourselves and not just sacrifice for others. Men may find their inner feminine and women their inner masculine. Women in the community will discover their gifts which raises the issue of equal access to ministry. Since these areas were not included in the "law" stage, it can seem like disrespect for the law to even bring them up. The issue of true and false "guilt" comes up, and how to discern what God is truly calling one to, when and how. Discernment concerns timing as well as content. We may be called to take more care for leisure and play, but not yet; more care for relationships, but not yet; more care for equal ministry; but not yet. How to wait for God's time? God gives both the vision and the fulfillment. It is "self-salvation" to take the vision (however true) and think I am responsible to carry it out.

In the next stages of "communitarian" and "mission" faith, we can be tempted under the guise of good to "do" too much. Here we find issues of "redemptive suffering," a mysterious suffering that seems to be life-giving for others. When am I called to "intercede," and how can I discern whether my intercession is "burning me

out" or "grounded in God?" And what ultimately *is* our mission. If modeled on Jesus, it is not simply to serve and heal for on the cross Jesus healed no one! The saints were often the most persecuted and seemingly abandoned at the end, and yet in some mysterious way their very hiddenness was most empowering. Rather, our ultimate mission, as Jesus', is to reveal God's love, and no persecution or trial can stand in the way of that, for persecution only serves to highlight the love even more. Our guide, then, is God's Spirit. We experience "consolation" (that is, an increase of hope, faith and charity and an interior joy attracting the soul to its Creator and Lord) when we are in tune with God's call and tuning. We experience "desolation" (or lack of faith, hope and charity ...) when we are out of tune with God. A movement may begin with "consolation," such as a new vision for ACT, but end in "desolation" if we start putting our own human ideas and projects on a God-given inspiration. In desolation, Ignatius says, do not change any decision made in consolation, for one is guided by a wrong spirit and no good can result. The good spirit will move us in the way of the Beatitudes; from poverty through humiliations to humility and a simple trust in God. The more attuned we are to God, the more discerning we will become and ultimately the more trusting of God in ourselves and others. It is this deep trust and commitment, even in the midst of trials and persecutions, that will ultimately confirm ACT in its mission to live out God's healing love in each member and in community for the healing of healthcare professions. For at the base God *has already* fulfilled God's dream through Jesus' death and resurrection and through the Spirit-empowered response of Mary and the Church. God's new family of love is already at work in our hearts renewing our faith, hope and love and healing our wounds. We have but to "stay tuned in" - that in our "weakness" God's power may be made manifest.

CONCLUSION

In 1991 Don Williams spoke two powerful talks to the Fishnet Conference on the centrality of the cross in Christian ministry, and our on-going need to die in order for the power of Jesus' Spirit to work in and through us. The church is comatose, he remarked, because it has reversed Jesus' word. Instead of seeing power at work in weakness, it sees power in power - in alliances with cultural power, in rhetorical and intellectual power, in great buildings and political power. Isn't that a danger with ACT? Have we forgotten that power is made manifest in weakness? That Paul fell flat in Athens when he wanted to speak intellectually to them of the "unknown God" they honored. Then "in fear and trembling" he went to Corinth, determined to preach only Christ "and him crucified," folly to the Gen-tiles (and likely to our professions), a scandal to the Jews (and to our Churches, I'm afraid), but to believers, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Are we not called that same way? Is there any other way? Our very promise and dream - to be a healing community for the healthcare professions - is what needs to be offered up to God in order that through our inability and powerlessness God's power to heal (both us and others) might be manifest. As Paul said, "Death is at work in us, but life in you." (Cor 4:7-12) The suffering we have experienced can lead to the break-up of community either by splitting or by reemphasizing a top down leadership, or to its deepening and transformation by finding God in our brokenness and emptiness. It all depends on how willing we are to unite it (and ourselves) with

Jesus' own dying, that we might experience his resurrection Spirit and be reborn in God's love

Reference Notes

1. Peck, Scott. *The Different Drum*. N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1987, p. 59.
2. See Robert T. Sears, "Healing and Family Spiritual/Emotional Systems," *Journal of Christian Healing*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1983). 10-23, esp. pp. 10-12. References in the present text to familial, individuating, communitarian and mission stages and faith refer to the content of the 1983 article.
3. Hagen, Kenneth, *The Interceding Christian*. Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagen Ministries, 1991.