

# SALVATION AND HEALING

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**I**F SALVATION BE taken to mean deliverance from the various ills which afflict human existence, and pre-eminently from 'the last enemy, death',<sup>1</sup> it comes as no surprise that this deliverance, so ardently desired by every man in the depths of his being, is central to the radiant promises held out to man by the great world religions. The variegated forms which that promise of deliverance has assumed must, of course, be determined in large measure by the culture of the believer, if the guerdon thus held out is to be relevant to his needs and move him through faith towards its acquisition. When however the religion is historical and not mythical, as with the religion of Israel and christianity, in which faith springs from the conviction that God has acted from within the historical process to reveal himself to man, then the conception of salvation is determined chiefly by the experience of the divine action in history, or more specifically, in the lives of the original followers of that religion – and, though perhaps less dramatically, in the lives of their successors in the faith.

Thus the primordial notion of israelite salvation, evinced by the Old Testament, was the fruit of the hebrews' experience of freedom and nationhood in the exodus from Egypt and of peace and security (chief dream of all nomadic peoples) in being settled upon the land. That meant that for centuries the Old Testament conception of salvation was collective, geographically determined, tied to history: in short, 'this-worldly'. It evolved during the regnal period by being identified with the fortunes of the davidic monarchy, with the result that, at the destruction of the royal house during the babylonian exile, it became, under the impact of the prophetic faith, eschatological after a fashion. That is to say, salvation became rooted in the hope of God's definitive intervention in his people's history. At the same period, salvation was gradually, under the guidance of men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, 'spiritualized',<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor 15, 26.

<sup>2</sup> Isai 43, 3 ff.; 60, 21.

universalized,<sup>3</sup> and related to the individual.<sup>4</sup> Still, it was only in late judaism that the idea of salvation became truly 'other-worldly' with the gradual adoption of the belief (and even then only on the part of some jews like the pharisees) in the resurrection of the body.<sup>5</sup>

The New Testament view of salvation was culturally determined by the semitic vision of reality, of man and his world, and its articulation was influenced by the conceptions and even the terminology found in 'the scriptures'. Most fundamentally, however, the salvation proclaimed in the gospel was created out of the experience of what God had done for man in Jesus Christ,<sup>6</sup> and in particular, through his passion and exaltation. The greatest religious geniuses among the New Testament authors present a very personal, totally coherent picture of this salvation. In the letters of Paul, salvation remains an almost completely eschatological reality, the chief object of the christian hope in 'the redemption of our body',<sup>7</sup> although a certain tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet' is perceptible in Paul's thought. In johannine theology, on the other hand, while indeed one occasionally catches a glimpse of 'Jerusalem, the holy city, coming down out of heaven from God',<sup>8</sup> salvation as 'eternal life' is habitually presented as a reality of the 'now', already in the possession of the christian. In the synoptic tradition and to a lesser degree in the fourth gospel, one senses a certain relation between the conception of salvation and Jesus' work of healing the sick and the possessed. What is the significance of these miracles of Jesus for christian existence which has been discerned by the evangelists and articulated within the general framework of their gospels? In other words, how do the gospel healing narratives reveal to us the idea, which their authors entertained, which in fact they endeavoured to set forth for their readers, of christian salvation?

#### MIRACLES AND THE MODERN MIND

While our chief preoccupation here is indicated by the questions just raised about the relation between the narratives of healing

<sup>3</sup> Isai 2, 2-4.

<sup>4</sup> Jer 31, 29-31; Ezek 18, 1-32; 34, 2-20.

<sup>5</sup> If an initial groping for such a doctrine may possibly be perceptible in texts like Isai 26, 19; Ps 49, 15; Job 19, 25, the clear enunciation of it is only discernible in Dan 12, 2-3 and 2 Macc 12, 43-45, as is the abandonment of the traditional notion of Sheol (2 Macc 15, 12-16).

<sup>6</sup> 2 Cor 5, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Rom 8, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Apoc 21, 10.

in our gospels and the underlying conception of salvation which they presuppose and seek to inculcate, yet the questions raised for the modern mentality by the presence of the miraculous in the gospels cannot be entirely avoided. True enough, the malaise felt since the enlightenment regarding the miracles of Jesus may well not be shared by the believing christian of the present day. For that malaise was the product of a mental construct of the universe fashioned by extrapolating upon the cosmos the notion of the tidily, tightly regulated greek *polis*. The result was a vision of a world structured by inexorable natural laws, proof enough against the incursions of deity, whose inviolability was as axiomatic as the laws of the medes and the persians. Little wonder then that there was no room in such a universe for miracles. Little wonder too that modern science deems such a brittle construct only too patently ingenuous and has substituted its own twentieth-century mental model presided over by the laws of statistical probability. This new vision is admittedly more sophisticated, perhaps more satisfactory to the scientists. Yet it has unveiled a world scarcely more congenial to the miraculous than the nineteenth-century model. For an event which is conceivably an exception to the universal statistical rule is no more significant for christian faith than a 'violation' of the immutable 'laws of nature'.

I believe it must be confessed quite candidly that the contemporary christian, who shares inevitably the vision of reality of the modern mind, has, indeed ought to have, problems, when (as he does) he accepts the testimony of the inspired writers to the event-character of Jesus' acts of healing. For all that he *is* a believer, he cannot accept the (to him naive) *Weltanschauung* readily adopted by the christian of the apostolic age and transmitted without questioning until at least the close of the middle ages. If he has a headache, the religious man of today does not pray for a miracle: he simply takes an aspirin. It is not hard to conjecture his judgment of a fellow christian who would pray God to 'stop the sun' after the manner of Joshua<sup>9</sup> instead of turning on the electric light in order to finish his job. When about to submit to major surgery, today's christian may well pray for a successful outcome of the operation: he scarcely considers it christian prudence to ask God to cure a cancer whilst refusing to accept the surgeon's recommendation. It is not that the modern christian does not believe the gospel testimony

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<sup>9</sup> Jos 10, 12-14.

to the miracles of Jesus, nor perhaps even that he refuses to accept their possibility in the mid-twentieth century. It is rather that the significance, religiously speaking, of the miraculous escapes him, even as he reads the gospels; and so he cannot clearly perceive its relevance for his own religious life or its relation to his conception of salvation.

The discerning, educated christian will inevitably become aware of the nagging existence of a series of questions as he reads the gospel narratives of healing. He will recognize that they testify to happenings very different in character from those wonders reported by the ancient hagiographers, who composed the legend-cycles of Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament. He will also be aware that those disorders described as 'possession' by an 'impure spirit' in the gospels might well be diagnosed today as epilepsy or some form of mental illness. Our believer may, if he is an attentive reader of Paul, be struck by the lack in those letters of any slightest allusion to Jesus' miracles of healing, despite the fact that Paul does associate 'signs and wonders' with his own apostolic career.<sup>10</sup>

Such questions in the mind of the believing christian demand and deserve an answer. We venture to suggest that the answer lies in discerning the relationship between healing and salvation as it is presented by our four evangelists.

#### THE HEALING NARRATIVES AND THE GOSPEL

We may begin our investigation by recalling the prominence accorded to the healing narratives in the written gospels. Even when allowance is made for the presence of 'doublets' (duplicated narratives of a single incident), the gospel of Mark contains over twenty individual acts of healing by Jesus, as well as several summaries of such events. Indeed, it has been estimated that nearly half of Mark's book is taken up with these narratives. More significant, however, is the attitude displayed towards Jesus' miracles by all the evangelists, who clearly regard them, not as a means of publicizing or accrediting the message of Jesus, but as an integral part of that message itself. That is to say, the evangelists are convinced that these acts of healing possess a profound christological significance far outweighing their 'marvellous' character. One of the lucan summaries in Acts of the apostolic preaching<sup>11</sup> will illustrate this

<sup>10</sup> 2 Cor 12, 12; Rom 15, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Acts 10, 36-38.

viewpoint, common to the authors of the gospels. In describing how God 'sent his Word to the sons of Israel and made known the good news of peace to them through Jesus Christ', Peter cites no saying of Jesus. Instead he is content to narrate 'how, after God anointed him with a holy spirit and power, he (Jesus) went about doing good and healing all those under the power of the devil; for God was with him'.

Mark's first healing narrative, an exorcism,<sup>12</sup> presents the act as Jesus' 'new teaching with authority'.<sup>13</sup> Luke represents Jesus as summing up his entire public ministry as a campaign of exorcism and healing. 'Take note: I cast out demons and I perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I am consummated'.<sup>14</sup> Twice Matthew characterizes Jesus' evangelical activities in Galilee as 'teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every sickness'.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, it ought also to be noted that the evangelists would surely deprecate the inference, from the abundant presence of the miraculous in their accounts of Jesus' public life, that they had any intention of presenting him simply as a wonder worker. One thinks immediately of the celebrated hallmark of the marcan gospel, the 'messianic secret', by which Jesus is represented as repeatedly, if ineffectually, and urgently forbidding his beneficiaries from publicizing their cures.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, one episode recounted by all the evangelists is Jesus' peremptory refusal to provide 'a sign from heaven' in authentication of his mission.<sup>17</sup> The first two evangelists stigmatize this demand by the incredulous religious leaders as a 'temptation',<sup>18</sup> and John, who has omitted the incident recorded by the synoptic writers,<sup>19</sup> relates a similar reaction by Jesus to his unbelieving 'brothers', who suggest that he perform his 'works' in the big city,<sup>20</sup> 'for not even his brothers had any faith in him'.

#### GOSPEL TERMINOLOGY FOR THE MIRACULOUS

The most convincing indication that Jesus' miracles are not intended to impress the reader of the gospels with the merely prodigious is found in the vocabulary employed to designate these actions. There are but two, or at most three, instances of any usage

<sup>12</sup> Mk 1, 21-28.

<sup>13</sup> Mk 1, 27.

<sup>14</sup> Lk 13, 32.

<sup>15</sup> Mt 4, 23; 9, 35.

<sup>16</sup> Mk 1, 43-44; 3, 12; 5, 43; 7, 36; 8, 26; 9, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Mk 8, 11-13; Mt 12, 38-39; 16, 1-4; Lk 11, 29-32.

<sup>18</sup> Mk 8, 11; Mt 16, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Cf however Jn 2, 18.

<sup>20</sup> Jn 7, 1-9.

which approximates to our word 'miracle'. In Matthew, Jesus' cures in the temple area are called 'wonders' (*ta thaumasia*), a word not otherwise employed in the New Testament.<sup>21</sup> According to Luke, the crowd consider the events connected with the cure of the paralytic as 'marvels' (*paradoxa*), another *hapax legomenon*.<sup>22</sup> Luke also describes Jesus' acts of healing as 'all the splendid things (*ta endoxa*) performed by him'.<sup>23</sup>

There is a word *terata*, not used in the gospels indeed, but in Acts, to designate Jesus' miracles, which C. F. D. Moule has censured as 'disconcertingly pagan'.<sup>24</sup> It can be rendered in English as 'portents'. Yet it only occurs in the New Testament in combination with 'signs' – which indicates the use of an Old Testament consecrated phrase for God's acts of self-revelation within the history of Israel. Even so, our evangelists only employ it of questionable or immoral, misleading actions.<sup>25</sup>

Given the discretion with which the evangelists habitually eschew any word in their language approximating to 'miracle', one cannot help but feel surprise at the persistence of such a term in our own christian religious and theological language. If there is one aspect of Jesus' acts of healing which goes unstressed in the gospels, it is their capacity for merely arousing wonder. In the synoptic gospels they are designated as 'acts of power' (*dynameis*), a term which stresses their character as manifestations of the divine power, and hence their aptness, together with his words, as a vehicle of Jesus' proclamation of the coming of God's kingdom. They are presented simply as the good news in action.

For Mark, who is consistently more interested in what Jesus did than in his words, Jesus' reputation with his own townsfolk for wisdom springs from his miracles. 'Where did he get all this? What is the wisdom conferred upon him, that even *acts of power* are worked at his hands?'<sup>26</sup> Yet, in his own artless way, Mark reminds his reader of the genuine faith needed to apprehend such manifestations of divine power, and the total self-commitment to the Person of Jesus they are intended to elicit. 'He could not work any act of power there, except that he cured a few sick persons by placing his hands on them. And he wondered at their incredulity'.<sup>27</sup> It should be noted that in this reaction of the nazarenes, like that mentioned

<sup>21</sup> Mt 21, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Lk 5, 26.

<sup>23</sup> Lk 13, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Acts 2, 22. Cf *Miracles*, ed. C. F. D. Moule (London 1965), p 235.

<sup>25</sup> Mk 13, 22; Mt 24, 24; Jn 4, 49; cf 2 Thess 2, 9.

<sup>26</sup> Mk 6, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Mk 6, 5-6.

by Mark a few paragraphs further on, when Herod hears of Jesus' reputation, there is no suggestion of a doubt about the reality of the miracles. 'The rumour was current that John the Baptist had been raised from death, and hence such manifestations of power were worked by him'.<sup>28</sup> Yet Mark is quite aware that, while Jesus' miracles are a challenge to belief in him, they do not however compel such belief; nor are they in their brute factuality an adequate object of christian faith.

Mark can employ the word 'power' in the singular to denote the divine source of Jesus' healing capability, as when he notes that Jesus 'became conscious that power had gone out from him'.<sup>29</sup> The singular also designates a miracle done in Jesus' name by an unknown exorcist: 'No man', Jesus states, 'who will perform *a work of power* in my name, can turn around and slander me'.<sup>30</sup> This usage, as will be seen, is characteristic of Luke.

Matthew has recorded a stern warning by Jesus against confusing thaumaturgy with authentic faith in Jesus, which alone is essential for salvation. 'Many will tell me on that day, Lord, Lord! have we not prophesied in your name; and in your name we have cast out demons; and in your name we have performed many *acts of power*. Then I shall confess to them, I never knew you: depart from me, you performers of lawlessness!' – that is, those who refuse to 'carry out the will of my heavenly Father'.<sup>31</sup> The ambiguity attaching to the miraculous is further illustrated by Matthew. 'Then he (Jesus) began to excoriate those cities in which the majority of his acts of power had occurred, because they had not repented. 'Woe to you, Corozain! woe to you, Bethsaida! Had the acts of power performed among you happened in Tyre and Sidon, they had long ago displayed repentance with sackcloth and ashes'.<sup>32</sup> That radical conversion of men's hearts, which Jesus' gospel was calculated to effect in those who hear his words,<sup>33</sup> is central to the purpose of Jesus' miracles for Matthew.

Luke records this saying of Jesus in the instruction to the seventy-two disciples, as they are sent ahead to prepare the villages for Jesus' visit,<sup>34</sup> and so indicates his awareness that Jesus' miracles are to be regarded as part of his message.<sup>35</sup> These 'acts of power' are associated with the coming of Jesus as king in the lucan account

<sup>28</sup> Mk 6, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Mt 11, 20–21.

<sup>29</sup> Mk 5, 30.

<sup>33</sup> Mt 4, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Mk 9, 39.

<sup>34</sup> Lk 10, 13.

<sup>31</sup> Mt 7, 22–3.

<sup>35</sup> Cf Lk 10, 16.

of the messianic entry into Jerusalem. 'The entire throng of the disciples began joyously to praise God in unmistakable tones for *all the acts of power* they had witnessed, and to declare, Blessed is the king, who comes in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven and glory on high'.<sup>36</sup>

More frequently, Luke prefers to speak, in the singular, of the 'power' which is the source of Jesus' exorcisms and acts of healing, a power he too regards as another medium of Jesus' message. 'What is this Word?' exclaim those witnessing the exorcism in the synagogue of Capharnaum, 'for with *authority* and *power* he commands the unclean spirits, and they depart!'<sup>37</sup> And again, 'Now it happened one day that Jesus himself was teaching, with the pharisees and lawyers, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judaea and from Jerusalem, sitting round. And God's power was enabling him to heal'.<sup>38</sup> The lucan audience for Jesus' 'sermon in the plain' are said 'to have come to hear him and to be cured of their diseases . . . because power went out from him, and cured them all'.<sup>39</sup> Jesus is described as imparting this 'power and authority' to the twelve, when 'he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to cure the sick'.<sup>40</sup> For Luke, this power is that 'power of the Spirit' which provided the dynamic for Jesus' entire public ministry<sup>41</sup> – an echo, perhaps, of Paul's conviction that 'the gospel is God's power unto salvation for the man with faith'.<sup>42</sup>

The fourth gospel does not follow the synoptics in designating Jesus' miracles as 'acts of power', employing instead two new terms, 'works', and 'signs'. Matthew indeed once refers to Jesus' acts of healing as 'the works (achievements) of the Messiah',<sup>43</sup> and Luke characterizes Jesus as 'a prophet mighty in word and work before God and the whole people'.<sup>44</sup> 'Sign', on the other hand, never denotes a miracle of Jesus in the synoptics. Jesus refuses to acquiesce to the demand for 'a sign from heaven'.<sup>45</sup> Luke, after a passing reference to this demand,<sup>46</sup> suggests that, like Jonah, the Son of Man as preacher of repentance is the single sign granted to 'this generation',<sup>47</sup> thereby insinuating that Jesus' miracles must be regarded as one means of preaching repentance. In Matthew, a different construction is put upon this encounter between Jesus and the unbelieving scribes and pharisees: Jesus' death and resurrection,

<sup>36</sup> Lk 19, 37–38.

<sup>39</sup> Lk 6, 17–18; cf 8, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Rom 1, 16.

<sup>45</sup> Mk 8, 11–12.

<sup>37</sup> Lk 4, 36.

<sup>40</sup> Lk 9, 1; cf 10, 19.

<sup>43</sup> Mt 11, 2 ff.

<sup>46</sup> Lk 11, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Lk 5, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Lk 4, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Lk 24, 19.

<sup>47</sup> Lk 11, 29–30.



typified by the wondrous voyage of Jonah in the belly of the mammal, is the sign that will be offered to excite Jesus' contemporaries to christian faith in him.<sup>48</sup> Luke, the only evangelist to describe Jesus' appearance before Herod Antipas in his passion narrative, observes that that petty kinglet 'was hoping to see some sign performed by him', but Jesus refused even a word to Herod.<sup>49</sup>

The author of the fourth gospel, when making his personal comments, always refers to Jesus' miracles as 'signs', while he represents Jesus alone<sup>50</sup> as calling them 'works'. The evangelist alerts the reader to the impropriety of the phrase 'signs and wonders' as a designation of Jesus' acts of healing,<sup>51</sup> and deprecates a faith based upon mere marvels. Two of the three cures recorded in this gospel are termed a 'work' by Jesus: the healing of the cripple at the pool,<sup>52</sup> and the restoration of the blind man's sight.<sup>53</sup> In the discussion ensuing after the narrative of the first of these, Jesus declares these 'works' to be testimony to his own identity as 'the Son', and to the authenticity of his mission from the Father,<sup>54</sup> in imitation of whose 'works' they are performed.<sup>55</sup> Jesus lists the healing of the blind man among 'the works of God';<sup>56</sup> it is one of 'those many fine works I have shown you from my Father'.<sup>57</sup> Thus, on John's view, these cures point to Jesus' unique relationship to the Father, thereby demanding of men a personal submission in faith to Jesus. 'If I do not perform the works of my Father, do not put faith in me. But if I do, then even though you may not put faith in me, put faith in these works, in order that you may gradually become aware that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father'.<sup>58</sup> This is one of the many johannine sayings which only make sense in the context of christian faith in Jesus as the Son of God, the awakening and preservation of which is the purpose of the evangelist's whole narrative. John, too, has his own manner of evincing the conviction, already seen in the synoptics, that the purpose of Jesus' miracles is one with his teaching. 'Do you not believe', Jesus will say to Philip after the last supper, 'that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The *words* I utter to you, I do not utter of myself. But the Father, who abides in me, is performing his *works*. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Yet if you do not, then believe because of the works themselves'.<sup>59</sup> John considers

<sup>48</sup> Mt 12, 38-40.

<sup>51</sup> Jn 4, 48.

<sup>54</sup> Jn 5, 36.

<sup>57</sup> Jn 10, 32.

<sup>49</sup> Lk 23, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Jn 7, 21.

<sup>55</sup> Jn 5, 20.

<sup>58</sup> Jn 10, 37-38.

<sup>50</sup> The single exception is Jn 7, 3.

<sup>53</sup> Jn 9, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Jn 9, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Jn 14, 10-11.

the refusal to commit oneself to Jesus as the supreme sin: it is to hate him and his Father. 'If I had not done the works in their presence which no other ever performed, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they both saw and have hated both me and my Father'.<sup>60</sup>

Thus we begin to grasp the reason which led this evangelist to call Jesus' miracles 'signs' – for christian faith. With considerable self-discipline John has limited the number of these sign-narratives to seven, from 'the many other signs which Jesus performed in the presence of his disciples'<sup>61</sup> – and this precisely with his christian reader in mind. 'These however have been written in order that you may grow in belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your belief you may possess life in his name'.<sup>62</sup> If in the historical context of his own public ministry, Jesus designated his miracles as 'works of God', inviting those who witnessed them to commit themselves to him, the evangelist, writing from within the context of the christian community intends to induce his reader to contemplate his narratives of those miracles, in order that he may deepen his attachment to the risen Lord Jesus present in the Church, whom he has acknowledged as the Son of God in the fullest sense. Indeed, such is the transcendent value of these narratives as 'signs' that John employs them to shed further light upon those christian signs or symbols, which are the sacraments of baptism (as with the narrative of the man born blind) and of the eucharist (as with the account of the feeding of the crowd across the lake). Thus it is in the fourth gospel that the symbolic significance of Jesus' miracles, occasionally glimpsed in the synoptic narratives, is exploited to the full.

#### MARK'S VIEW OF JESUS' ACTS OF HEALING

While we are chiefly concerned with the relation between Jesus' acts of healing and the conception of salvation in the gospels, we should recall that the distinction, however useful in 'form criticism', between these and the other miracles would not hold any meaning for the evangelists. Nor, in fact, does such a distinction, made simply for purposes of classification, shed any light upon the historical character or even the theological meaning of the miracles of Jesus.

For Mark, the cures wrought by Jesus constitute the initial, frontal attack upon the 'kingdom' of satan. Jesus has come to inaugurate

<sup>60</sup> Jn 15, 24.

<sup>61</sup> Jn 20, 30.

<sup>62</sup> Jn 20, 31.

the establishment of the kingdom of God in history; and he must begin by breaking the hold of evil upon the world, liberating men from the thrall of 'the strong man', satan.<sup>63</sup> Endowed at his baptism with the Spirit,<sup>64</sup> Jesus is dispatched 'immediately' to join battle with the devil.<sup>65</sup> Thus we see Mark's real point in having the baptist characterize Jesus as 'the stronger one': Jesus is not only stronger than John, he is by the power of the Spirit, stronger than 'the strong man'.

It is no surprise, then, that Jesus' first cure is an exorcism.<sup>66</sup> The devil's question, 'Have you come to destroy us',<sup>67</sup> is an apposite one. Indeed, as Mark narrates Jesus' healing of diseases, he assimilates those accounts to the exorcism narratives. This explains Jesus' puzzling reaction to the leper whom he has cleansed: 'He drove him away with a stern reproof...' <sup>68</sup> One reading of the text here, which may well be the original one, describes Jesus as 'becoming angry', instead of 'being moved to pity'.<sup>69</sup> He is aware that he is confronting his opponent, Satan. This same context throws light upon the cure of the paralytic, which is intended as a symbol of Jesus' power 'upon earth' to forgive sin.<sup>70</sup> Mark introduces the story of the healing of the man with the withered hand in a synagogue on the sabbath<sup>71</sup> to show that as 'Son of Man', Jesus is 'master even of the sabbath'.<sup>72</sup> Mark's observation that Jesus 'cast a glance of anger round the circle' (of his adversaries) in the synagogue, 'stung by their obstinacy', tells us that this cure is also part of the combat against evil.

In this early section of his book, the evangelist is concerned to present the nature of the authority possessed by Jesus. His acts of healing, no less than his words, reveal Jesus' message as 'a new teaching with authority';<sup>73</sup> which includes the forgiving of men's sins 'upon earth'.<sup>74</sup> When that authority is questioned and Jesus himself is calumniated with the malicious insinuation that his authority over demons comes from Beelzebub,<sup>75</sup> Jesus replies to the charge and excoriates it as unforgivable blasphemy against the holy Spirit,<sup>76</sup> from whom his authority derives.

Here we are given an important insight into Mark's view of Jesus' miracles. Like the words of Jesus, these acts of healing only constitute a part of the gospel inasmuch as they come to man

<sup>63</sup> Mk 3, 27.<sup>64</sup> Mk 1, 10.<sup>65</sup> Mk 1, 12.<sup>66</sup> Mk 1, 23-27.<sup>67</sup> Mk 1, 24.<sup>68</sup> Mk 1, 43.<sup>69</sup> Mk 1, 41.<sup>70</sup> Mk 2, 1-12.<sup>71</sup> Mk 3, 1-5.<sup>72</sup> Mk 2, 28.<sup>73</sup> Mk 1, 27.<sup>74</sup> Mk 2, 10.<sup>75</sup> Mk 3, 22.<sup>76</sup> Mk 3, 29.

invested by the power and authority of the Spirit. Presented in their nude historicity they are not good news, that is, they do not convey that 'saving truth' which is the essence of the gospel.<sup>77</sup> The converse is also true, *viz.*, that the reality of Jesus' miracles can only be truly comprehended by christian faith. Like Jesus' resurrection, the supreme 'act of power' by God, these healing 'acts of power' cannot be successfully fitted into the category of 'historical event', a happening that can be handled by the historical method without requiring faith in any proper sense. To put it another way: the 'Jesus of history' can never constitute the adequate reason for the christian's personal commitment of himself, but only the Christ revealed as Son of God by his resurrection. Throughout the pages of his gospel it is characteristic of Mark to insist (the *motif* of the 'messianic secret') that the mystery surrounding the person of Jesus, his words and his 'works' was never pierced by even his closest disciples: it could be comprehended only in the light of his resurrection. Thus what Jesus said and did on earth was not the gospel, but simply '*the beginning of the gospel of Jesus, the messiah, the Son of God*'.<sup>78</sup> The peculiar force of this title of the marcan gospel should not be missed: it enunciates the chief scope of his entire work.

Mark has seen a second function of Jesus' miracles in their relevance for acquiring a grasp of the meaning of faith. In at least six of his healing narratives, the evangelist draws attention to faith. In the historical situation, of course, the petitioners exhibit faith in the power and condescension of the God of Israel. Yet in the context of the marcan gospel, these episodes of healing are intended to convey something of the nature of christian faith. Admittedly, Mark remains singularly faithful to the original historical setting. This probably accounts for the fact that, while the evangelist wishes the christian reader to recognize that his faith is an act of self-commitment to the risen Christ, only once does he imply that the person cured became a disciple of Jesus. The single exception is the blind man of Jericho, depicted after his cure as 'following him (Jesus) on the road'.<sup>79</sup> When, on the other hand, the liberated demoniac in Gerasa 'begs him that he may remain with him', Jesus refuses flatly.<sup>80</sup>

The early marcan cures do not expressly mention faith on the part of the sufferers, although attention is drawn to the faith of the

<sup>77</sup> Cf Rom 1, 16.

<sup>78</sup> Mk 1, 1.

<sup>79</sup> Mk 10, 52; cf 10, 32, they were on the road going up to Jerusalem.

<sup>80</sup> Mk 5, 17-18.

friends of the paralytic.<sup>81</sup> This may be Mark's way of implying the imperfect nature of such faith, or at least the great distance lying between it and christian faith. The woman with haemorrhages is the first depicted as having faith in Jesus. 'If I can touch even his garments, I shall be saved'.<sup>82</sup> Later Jesus tells her, 'Daughter, your faith has saved you: go in peace, and be healed of your affliction'.<sup>83</sup> The repetition of the term 'save', calculated to catch the eye of the believing reader, recalls the necessity of faith for salvation, illustrated by this cure. At the report, a few lines further on, of the death of Jairus' daughter,<sup>84</sup> Jesus reassures the anxious father, 'Stop being afraid: continue to have faith'. Mark knows that in the face of death, only christian faith is capable of piercing the absurdity of human existence.

Jesus' galilean ministry terminates in Mark with Jesus' denunciation of the lack of real faith in contemporary judaism.<sup>85</sup> Attention is also drawn to the incomprehension of the disciples,<sup>86</sup> which stands in sharp contrast with the faith of the syro-phenician woman,<sup>87</sup> although, unlike Matthew,<sup>88</sup> Mark does not mention faith expressly in speaking of this pagan. Jesus' elaborate ritual in the cure of the deaf-mute<sup>89</sup> may be intended to suggest the effort he has expended in eliciting a proper response of faith from the twelve, whose spiritual obtuseness even at this late stage is roundly criticized.<sup>90</sup> The healing by stages of the blind man at Bethsaida is possibly a further comment upon the slowness of the disciples.<sup>91</sup> All this permits Mark to present Peter's confession of Jesus' messianic character<sup>92</sup> as a dramatic surprise to the reader. Even so, Mark hastens to emphasize the gross misunderstanding of Jesus as messiah through Peter's reaction of horror at Jesus' suggestion that he is called to be a suffering messiah.<sup>93</sup> The narrative of the transfiguration, a privileged yet most mysterious experience for the three chosen disciples, permits Mark to insist upon the impossibility of christian faith before Jesus' resurrection.<sup>94</sup> The episode following this incident, the story of the epileptic boy, illustrates the need of true faith in Jesus.<sup>95</sup> It also is the first occasion in this gospel, in which the *Pater noster* and Jesus' sayings on prayer do not appear, when attention is drawn to the prayer of faith.<sup>96</sup> The short episode of the unknown exorcist<sup>97</sup> shows

<sup>81</sup> Mk 2, 5.

<sup>85</sup> Mk 7, 1-15.

<sup>89</sup> Mk 7, 31-37.

<sup>93</sup> Mk 8, 31-33.

<sup>97</sup> Mk 9, 38 ff.

<sup>82</sup> Mk 5, 27.

<sup>86</sup> Mk 7, 18.

<sup>90</sup> Mk 8, 17-21.

<sup>94</sup> Cf Mk 9, 9-10.

<sup>83</sup> Mk 5, 34.

<sup>87</sup> Mk 7, 24-30.

<sup>91</sup> Mk 8, 21-26.

<sup>95</sup> Mk 9, 19, 22-23.

<sup>84</sup> Mk 5, 36.

<sup>88</sup> Mt 15, 28.

<sup>92</sup> Mk 8, 29.

<sup>96</sup> Mk 9, 29.

union with Jesus, devotion to his 'Name', to be essential for christian existence. The function of faith in the following of Jesus, as has been noted, is illustrated by the cure of the blind Bartimaeus.<sup>98</sup> The bizarre character of Jesus' last 'act of power' in his public life, the withering of the fig tree,<sup>99</sup> is a symbolic act, which provides Mark with the opportunity of introducing his longest treatment of the place of the prayer of faith in christian life. It is also probably significant for Mark as an act of authority by Jesus, serving to introduce the scene where that authority is questioned for the last time in the gospel.<sup>100</sup>

#### JESUS' ACTS OF HEALING IN MATTHEW

Matthew relates most of the cures which he has found in Mark; but he employs the terms for healing far more frequently – sixteen times as compared with but five in his predecessor. More significantly, Matthew – as Mark never does – associates healing with preaching as Jesus' two most characteristic activities in the galilean phase of his public life. 'He traversed the whole of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every illness among the people'.<sup>101</sup> This evangelist's stylized presentation of ten miracle stories in succession (chapters 8 and 9) should not cause us to forget that Matthew is actually describing Jesus' evangelical activities at the height of his popularity in Galilee. These he summarizes in terms almost identical with those which introduced the galilean ministry. 'Jesus traversed all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every illness'.<sup>102</sup>

Matthew heartily endorses Mark's view of Jesus' work of healing as an important element in his campaign to destroy Satan's 'kingdom' upon earth. Yet he does so by referring these 'acts of power' more explicitly to Jesus' death and resurrection. One notes the matthean addition to the demoniacs' cries in Gadara, 'Have you come to torture us *before the time*?'<sup>103</sup> Matthew follows Mark in drawing attention to the necessity of faith, but he twice remarks upon the faith in Jesus exhibited by pagans.<sup>104</sup>

Matthew's particular contribution to the christian understanding of Jesus' miracles of healing is to make explicit and underline what

<sup>98</sup> Mk 10, 46–52.

<sup>101</sup> Mt 4, 33.

<sup>104</sup> Mt 8, 10–12; 15, 28.

<sup>99</sup> Mk 11, 12–14, 21 ff.

<sup>102</sup> Mt 9, 35.

<sup>100</sup> Mk 11, 27–33.

<sup>103</sup> Mt 9, 29.

was no more than implicit (if present at all) in Mark: their function as fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, and hence their reference to the salvation promised through the prophets by the God of Israel. Our evangelist places the whole of Jesus' galilean ministry, which for him consists in the work of preaching and healing, under the sign of the isaian prediction of God's definitive act of salvation.<sup>105</sup> 'Land of Zabulon and land of Nephthalim along the road by the sea; land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles! the people dwelling in darkness have beheld a great light, and over the dwellers in the land overshadowed by death, light has arisen'.<sup>106</sup> Matthew pauses, in his recital of Jesus' miracles of healing, to observe how they disclose Jesus' mission as the deutero-isaian servant of God. 'He drove out the (evil) spirits with a command and healed all those who were ill, in order that the oracle announced through Isaiah might be fulfilled, He himself has taken our weaknesses and has borne our diseases'.<sup>107</sup>

Jesus' work of healing and preaching the gospel are presented as signs of his messianic character in the episode where the imprisoned Baptist sends his followers to inquire, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to look for someone else?'.<sup>108</sup> Matthew explains John's query by remarking that 'John had, from his prison, heard of the achievements of *the Messiah*, – a title given here for the first time since the infancy narratives'.<sup>109</sup> Matthew couches the reply of Jesus, containing an enumeration of his miracles (recounted for the reader's convenience in chapters 8 and 9), in terms that allude to several isaian prophecies of God's salvation.<sup>110</sup> These 'achievements of the Messiah' indicate that by his 'acts of power' Jesus presents himself as the answer to the messianic hopes of Israel. Moreover, they enable Matthew in this same chapter to present Jesus as divine Wisdom,<sup>111</sup> since he concludes this discussion by the remark, 'and Wisdom is justified by her achievements'.<sup>112</sup> The reader is again reminded<sup>113</sup> that Jesus' acts of healing are evidence of his vocation as the servant of God, where these miracles are claimed to fulfil the characterization in the first servant song.<sup>114</sup> Finally, if Matthew follows Mark in citing Isaiah to explain the rejection of Jesus' parabolic teaching by the galilean crowds,<sup>115</sup> he

<sup>105</sup> Isai 8, 23; 9, 1.

<sup>108</sup> Mt 11, 2 ff.

<sup>110</sup> Cf Isai 29, 19; 35, 5-6; 42, 18; 61, 1.

<sup>112</sup> Mt 11, 19.

<sup>115</sup> Isai 6, 9-10.

<sup>106</sup> Mt 4, 14-16.

<sup>109</sup> Mt 2, 4.

<sup>113</sup> Mt 12, 15-21.

<sup>107</sup> Mt 8, 16-17.

<sup>111</sup> Mt 11, 25-30.

<sup>114</sup> Isai 42, 1 ff.

adds a remark indicating that the miracles like the parables are the fulfilment of the prophetic hope of Israel. 'Happy are your eyes that see and your ears that hear. I assure you, many prophets and holy men desired to see what you see, yet they did not see, to hear what you hear, yet they did not hear'.<sup>116</sup> Matthew's insight into the symbolic character of Jesus' acts of healing as the realization of the Old Testament promises of salvation will be taken up by the author of the fourth gospel, who gives such 'signs' a new orientation towards the christian sacraments.

#### LUKE'S PRESENTATION OF JESUS' WORK OF HEALING

We have already remarked upon Luke's interest in that divine *power*, communicated to Jesus by the holy Spirit to fit him for his public ministry,<sup>117</sup> as the source of Jesus' miracles. Like Matthew, Luke considers these cures an essential feature of Jesus' proclamation of 'the Word'.<sup>118</sup> Unlike Matthew, Luke does not advert to the fulfilment function of these acts of healing.<sup>119</sup> Such omission of references back to 'the scriptures' is characteristic of the lucan narrative of Jesus' public life. Indeed, it is particularly striking in his passion account. The practice is consistent with a properly lucan view, according to which it is the office of the *risen* Jesus to point out the accomplishment of the Old Testament.<sup>120</sup> For Luke, the age of fulfilment arrives only with Jesus' assumption.<sup>121</sup>

Accordingly, to grasp the peculiarly lucan view of Jesus' acts of healing, it will be helpful to recall the precise manner in which this evangelist has worded his description of the dominant theme of his first volume. His gospel is an 'account of all that Jesus began to do and to teach'.<sup>122</sup> Thus Jesus' curing of disease and his proclamation of the gospel are viewed by Luke as an anticipation of the era of fulfilment, the time of Jesus' exaltation as Lord. A singular theological mannerism provides an indication of this personal point of view: Luke's proleptic use of the title, 'the Lord', properly predicated only of the risen Christ, for the Jesus of the public ministry. The usage occurs at least twelve times in this gospel.<sup>123</sup> In Luke's eyes, Jesus' 'acts of power' in healing the sick are chiefly significant

<sup>116</sup> Mt 12, 16-17.

<sup>118</sup> Lk 4, 36; 5, 17; 6, 17-18; 8, 46.

<sup>120</sup> Lk 24, 25-27, 32, 44-49.

<sup>122</sup> Acts 1, 1.

<sup>123</sup> Lk 7, 3, 19; 10, 1, 41; 11, 39; 12, 42; 13, 15; 17, 5, 6; 18, 6; 19, 8; 22, 61, - and possibly also 19, 31, 34.

<sup>117</sup> Lk 4, 14-21.

<sup>119</sup> Lk 7, 19-23.

<sup>121</sup> Cf Lk 9, 51; 24, 51; Acts 1, 2, 9-11.



as pointers to his future lordship of the universe.

Thus these miracles of healing are more explicitly connected with the reality of christian salvation in the third gospel than in the other synoptic gospels. In fact, they are a prominent feature of the characterization of Jesus, especially dear to Luke, as Saviour and Lord.<sup>124</sup> Luke employs the term 'to save' in his narratives of Jesus' cures more consistently and probably in a more theologically technical sense than either Mark or Matthew.<sup>125</sup> In particular, it may be noted, among the texts just listed, that Luke has made a kind of refrain of the remark, 'Your faith has saved you'. It appears but once in Matthew, only twice in Mark.

Jesus' miracles for Luke are primarily symbols of that salvation which 'the Lord' will confer upon men. This evangelist has taken over the view of Mark, adopted also by Matthew, that these works of curing illness are an anticipatory attack upon Satan – even though, at the conclusion of the temptation scene, the devil is said to have 'left him alone until the hour'.<sup>126</sup> Luke however presents the marcan theology of miracles in an original manner. At the triumphant return of the seventy-two disciples, who announce 'Lord, even the demons were subject to us in your name',<sup>127</sup> Jesus sees in these cures the preliminary defeat of evil. 'I saw Satan falling like lightning from heaven'.<sup>128</sup> Similarly, Jesus refers to the old woman he has cured of arthritis as 'this daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has held in bondage these past eighteen years'.<sup>129</sup> Jesus can also state this view of his healing acts in a positive fashion: 'If I, by the finger of God, cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has overtaken you'.<sup>130</sup> At the same time, Luke is careful to warn the reader that the coming of the kingdom must not be regarded as a merely historical happening, and hence Jesus' cures are not to be considered simply as 'proofs' of its arrival. 'The coming of the kingdom of God is not a matter of watching; nor will men be able to say, look, here it is, or there it is; for the kingdom of God is within you'.<sup>131</sup> One might paraphrase this lucan text in more contemporary language to clarify the evangelist's attitude to Jesus' miracles. The coming of God's kingdom with Jesus' resurrection cannot be diagnosed by any application of the historical method, since christian

<sup>124</sup> Cf Lk 2, 11, 36; 3, 6; 19, 9.

<sup>125</sup> Cf Lk 7, 50; 8, 36, 48, 50; 17, 19; 18, 42; 19, 9.

<sup>126</sup> Lk 4, 13, which belongs to 'the power of darkness' Lk 22, 53.

<sup>127</sup> Lk 10, 17.

<sup>128</sup> Lk 10, 18.

<sup>129</sup> Lk 13, 16.

<sup>130</sup> Lk 11, 20.

<sup>131</sup> Lk 17, 20–21.

faith is required for the discernment of its event-character; and the same is true of Jesus' miracles of healing, which are fully comprehensible as the anticipation of that salvation only by the same faith. Since for Luke Jesus' acts of healing bear a transcendent relation to his lordship, acquired by his 'exodus'<sup>132</sup> or his 'assumption' through death and resurrection,<sup>133</sup> their true character as saving events cannot be grasped except by the commitment of oneself to Jesus as lord, which is christian faith.

#### THE JOHANNINE 'SIGNS'

Of the seven 'signs' which are miracles in the fourth gospel, three are cures: the ruler's son,<sup>134</sup> the cripple,<sup>135</sup> the man born blind.<sup>136</sup> And the climax of all the 'signs' of Jesus' public life is the raising of Lazarus.<sup>137</sup> The restoration of the boy 'at the point of death'<sup>138</sup> and the restoration of the cripple from 'weakness'<sup>139</sup> to 'health', which is stressed,<sup>140</sup> portray Jesus as the source of life, the equivalent for John of salvation. The boy's father puts his faith in Jesus' 'word',<sup>141</sup> and the evangelist shortly reports that 'He with his entire household *became a believer*',<sup>142</sup> later a technical term meaning 'to become a christian'. Our author however makes it clear that genuine faith does not repose merely upon miracles,<sup>143</sup> but upon the personal acceptance of Jesus' 'word'.<sup>144</sup> The narrative of the cure of the cripple indicates how faith in Jesus' word by obedience to his command<sup>145</sup> can develop into that faith that perceives Jesus' true identity.<sup>146</sup> Although the man recognizes Jesus' authority and obeys him in violation of the sabbath, he 'did not know who he was',<sup>147</sup> until at their second encounter Jesus says, 'Do not sin any more, lest something worse befall you'.<sup>148</sup> At once the man realizes that 'the one who restored him to health was *Jesus*, whose name indicates that 'he will save his people from their sins'.<sup>149</sup> John, by implying that Jesus has also forgiven the cripple's sins, lets his reader see that the word 'health', so frequently repeated in the story, has a close relationship with life, or salvation.

With the gift of sight to the man *born blind*, the reader becomes aware of the carefully graduated presentation of Jesus' acts of healing in the fourth gospel, which lead to the raising of Lazarus. The

<sup>132</sup> Lk 9, 31.

<sup>136</sup> Jn 9, 1-34.

<sup>140</sup> Jn 5, 6, 9, 11, 14, 15.

<sup>143</sup> Jn 4, 48.

<sup>147</sup> Jn 5, 13.

<sup>133</sup> Lk 9, 51.

<sup>137</sup> Jn 11, 1-44.

<sup>144</sup> Jn 4, 50.

<sup>148</sup> Jn 5, 14.

<sup>134</sup> Jn 4, 43-54.

<sup>138</sup> Jn 4, 47.

<sup>141</sup> Jn 4, 50.

<sup>145</sup> Jn 5, 8-9.

<sup>149</sup> Cf Mt 1, 21.

<sup>135</sup> Jn 5, 1-15.

<sup>139</sup> Jn 5, 5.

<sup>142</sup> Jn 4, 53.

<sup>146</sup> Jn 5, 13-15.

cure of a man crippled for thirty-eight years reveals Jesus as source of life more profoundly than the healing of a boy gravely ill. 'And that life was the light of men'.<sup>150</sup> Jesus has announced to the Jews, 'I am the light of the world: the man who follows me does not walk in the darkness, but will possess the light of life'.<sup>151</sup> The sacred writer now illustrates this statement by the second last 'sign', in which he presents Jesus as judge, since his very coming into the world provokes men to faith in him or to the sin of unbelief.<sup>152</sup>

Attention to the care John has taken in his detailed presentation of this 'sign' discloses a deeper purpose: to relate this symbolic action of Jesus to the christian sacrament of baptism. The 'anointing',<sup>153</sup> and the washing in the pool<sup>154</sup> bearing the name of 'the one sent' (Christ) make the christian reader aware of a new dimension in the significance of Jesus' acts of healing. The long interrogation by the pharisees suggests an evolution in the *miraculé's* personal attachment to Jesus, which reaches a climax with a full-fledged profession of faith.<sup>155</sup> With this 'sign' John unveils for the believing reader the most profound relation between Jesus' acts of healing during his public ministry and the reality of christian salvation. They are 'signs' disclosing the efficacious symbolism of those gestures of the risen Christ within the Church, which are the sacraments.

The raising of Lazarus is the ultimate 'sign', revealing Jesus' victory over death through his own death and resurrection. The evangelist suggests the relation between the two events by presenting this episode as a cause of Jesus' own death,<sup>156</sup> by making it the occasion for Jesus' supreme self-revelation, 'I am the resurrection and the life',<sup>157</sup> and by dwelling upon Jesus' deeply emotional reaction to death<sup>158</sup> - 'the last enemy'.<sup>159</sup> If christian faith is necessary, John indicates to his believing reader, in order to comprehend the resurrection of Jesus *as event*, it is equally necessary to discern the event-character of Jesus' acts of healing and raising the dead. 'And I rejoice for your sakes', Jesus says to the disciples as he departs for Bethany, 'that I was not there, in order that you might *begin to believe*'!<sup>160</sup> The miracles wrought by Jesus, no less than his teaching, are a series of messages from God. All the evangelists testify, each in his own way, that the message was not grasped by the disciples until after Jesus' resurrection, when he communicated to them the

<sup>150</sup> Jn 1, 4.

<sup>154</sup> Jn 9, 6.

<sup>158</sup> Jn 11, 33-43.

<sup>151</sup> Jn 8, 12.

<sup>155</sup> Jn 9, 35-38.

<sup>159</sup> I Cor 15, 26.

<sup>152</sup> Jn 9, 39-41.

<sup>156</sup> Jn 11, 45-47.

<sup>160</sup> Jn 11, 15.

<sup>153</sup> Jn 9, 6.

<sup>157</sup> Jn 11, 25.

holy Spirit, the source of christian faith. Only then, through christian faith, could the connection between Jesus' acts of healing and salvation be perceived. The fourth evangelist has, perhaps, stated this truth more clearly than his colleagues by calling attention to the nature of those acts of healing as 'signs' – for christian faith.