

Who stole the healing ministry of the church?

There was a time, not so long ago, when many churches held healing services in addition to, or as part of, regular Sunday services. Now it seems that over the past decade or so this ministry of the church has virtually disappeared. Or at the very least it has become the preserve of some Pentecostal churches with their particular understanding of what it involves.

The loss of the healing ministry from other traditions – including the Uniting Church - means not only the loss of an important, corporate activity of God's people in offering prayer for physical, emotional and spiritual healing but also the loss of a constant, public reminder to Christians and the wider community of the fact that there are dimensions of life which lie outside human control.

One wonders about the reasons behind the loss of this ministry. Does it indicate anything about the confidence of those engaged in public ministry? Is it a more general indicator of a loss of spiritual vitality? Or is it perhaps a concession to the common notion that only that which can be achieved scientifically or technologically and with measurable outcomes is of any real value?

With this in mind it is good to be able to commend the book *Sent to Heal: a handbook on Christian healing* written by Uniting Church minister Harold Taylor. In the interests of openness I declare that he is a friend and former colleague in theological education but that in no way alters the fact that this is one of the most comprehensive and theologically and pastorally helpful books that one could wish for. The fact that the author has been active in the healing ministry for a long time and was formerly Warden of the healing ministry known as the Order of St Luke enhances the value of the book.

There are 14 chapters covering health and healing; healing in the Bible; healing in church history; different approaches to healing; sickness and suffering in the will of God; healing by many means; the prayer of faith; healing of memories; healing and medical science; healing and lifestyle; healing and alternative movements; the ministry of deliverance; what about those who are not healed?; and the wider social dimensions of healing.

This is a book which deals with health and healing in the broadest possible context. It deals with both good health and with suffering; it covers issues related to both prayer and science; and it looks at personal and social dimensions of healing. It is a balanced book which is both biblical and pastoral in approach.

It is also a substantial book in both size (436 pages) and content. It is suitable for use as a text book as well as for individual use and group study and contains many case-studies and discussion questions. It was first published in Australia but its value has been recognised overseas and it has been revised and re-published (2007) by Speedwell Press in the USA where it has already undergone its third printing. It would be great to see comparable interest in this important ministry here. It is available locally from the Order of St Luke (Unit 112, 100 Harold St Wantirna, 3152, Ph. 98375097).

(This review by Professor Brian Edgar first appeared in the March 2008 edition of “**ACCatalyst**” an on-line magazine of the *Assembly of Confessing Congregations in the Uniting Church-Australia* - <http://www.confessingcongregations.com/uploads/March08forweb.pdf>).