
Jesus and the Witch Doctor
by Aylward Shorter
(London: Geoffrey Chapman, and Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985)
258 pages

"Visiting a doctor in the hospital has nothing religious in it, and as such a typical (person from my tribe) would prefer to see a witch doctor who would commune with the spirit world and then tell him what the problem is, to going to a medical doctor who gives some pills and tells him to swallow." So wrote an African student in a paper for a recent course in cultural anthropology. Not only Africans are put off by the mechanical and impersonal character of western medicine, westerners themselves and even doctors are calling for a "medicine of the person", to use the phrase of Dr. Paul Tournier.

In this book, subtitled "An approach to healing and wholeness," Aylward Shorter, a priest of the White Fathers order, deals with illness and healing from the point of view of third world cultures. The author is well equipped for such a task. He has had extensive missionary and teaching experience in three East African countries, including being hospitalized there for an illness of his own, and he has visited other countries, not only in Africa, but in South America and the Pacific. The book has many illustrations of illness and traditional healers and healing practices, most of them witnessed by the author himself.

Under the title of "The darkness of God," Fr. Shorter uses the first part of the book to explore the problems of illness, suffering, death, emotional and psychiatric disturbances, human evil, and demonic power. In the second part, "Light shines in the dark," the author considers various kinds of healing: scientific and pre-scientific medicine, magic, dreaming, divining, spirit-healing, and exorcism. In three closing chapters he gives his own suggestions for an effective healing ministry by the church. An informal essay-type style allows Fr. Shorter to include lively anecdotes and meditative comments which are useful and provocative. The book is not, however, a systematic treatment of the various kinds of illness and healing.

Central to the book is Fr. Shorter's concept of levels or categories of illness and healing: physical, emotional, psychic, social, moral, and religious which interact with one another. "It is important," he says, "not to treat any level in total isolation from the others, but it is also important not to confuse the categories (p. 132)." It is for such confusion of categories that he criticizes both African traditional healing and Pentecostal healing services. He advocates tracing the interaction of the various levels of healing and using them to help one another. "When the religious level is recognized," he adds, "there is an understanding that wholeness is ultimately the consequence of a new dimension of healing (p. 132)." Unfortunately, and this seems the greatest weakness of the book, the author offers little guidance for such tracing of categories.

The author believes in miracles and in the existence of Satan and demons. But the evangelical reader will be disappointed in his willingness to surrender many of the Biblical miracles to the axes of the critics. And there seems to be considerable reluctance in the way Fr. Shorter deals with the question of demon possession. He will allow prayers of exorcism but only in private. He has a concern, and it is a legitimate one, that public attention to the demonic may feed fears and even lead to popular hysteria. Some readers may be startled by his suggestion that in using saliva for several of his healing acts and in

his groans on one occasion, Jesus was adopting the methods of traditional healers of his day.

Evangelical readers will not accept the author's suggestion that the sacraments and pilgrimages may be important channels of healing. But they may be led to reflect that in Protestant churches the sacraments are too often presented only in terms of the individual's relationship to Christ, and that the dimension of community may need greater emphasis. There is merit in Fr. Shorter's thought that healing gifts in the church may best be exercised by basic Christian communities which worship together and visit and pray for the sick. He does not define these communities, but presumably they are composed mostly of lay persons and would correspond to the small groups being developed in some Protestant communions. The final chapter on "Organizing the pastoral care of the sick and disabled" is excellent and contains many practical suggestions.

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The Covenants of Promise
by Dr. Thomas Edward McComiskey
(Inter-Varsity Press, 1987)
pp. 259 7.50

Like many other books published in recent decades, the Covenant of promise takes a theological category and tries to add more "colour" to the original formulations. Covenant Theology is the subject of Dr. McComiskey's book, and in it he provides Covenant theology with a major "face-life" by expanding the description of the covenant of grace.

The major thesis of the book is that God's relationship to His people has a bicovenantal structure. There is a "covenant of promise" which is unconditional and contains God's commitments to His people. This covenant of promise is an enduring covenant that guarantees the inheritance of the saints in every period of history. There are, however, also administrative covenants which are conditional and temporal. These various administrative covenants serve to further define the promises contained in the promise covenant. They also regulate the obedience of God's people at different periods in history.

So what is the relationship of the covenant of promise and the administrative covenants posited here to the traditional divisions known as covenant of grace, covenant of works, and covenant of redemption? The author reminds us that the original formulation of Covenant Theology only provided two divisions, the covenant of grace and the covenant of works. Then in the progression of theological writing a third covenant was proposed known as the covenant of redemption. This later covenant was between God the Father and Jesus the Son. It provided for the redemptive sacrifice of the Son and comprises the basis then of the covenant of grace which is between God and His people. McComiskey indicates that this division between covenant of grace and covenant of redemption is unnecessary. The covenant of grace should include the relationship of God to Christ as well as to his people. Building upon Galatians 3:15-17 he states that the promises were made to Abraham and Christ.

Both stand in the same relationship to the disposition of the promise; Abraham functioned as both mediator and recipient. Since Christ is principal heir along with Abraham, the two functions must be exercised by him as well. We need not bifurcate the construct. (p. 185)

That makes Christ a party to the covenant of grace. In his system, therefore, there are two basic covenants, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace (pp. 180-188).

The covenant of works is categorized as an administrative covenant. However, it does not function in the same way as the other administrative covenants. Circumcision, the Mosaic Code, and the new Covenant all are administrative covenants; they are related to the overriding covenant of promise. They administer obedience to God in light of His promises. The covenant of works, on the other hand, administers obedience in regard to the special relationship in creation. While the author thus categorizes the covenant of works he then ignores it since it does not relate to the covenant of promise (pp. 213-231).

The bicovenantal structure presented by the author is most related to the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace is itself referred to by the author as a divine decree which establishes the promises found in the covenant of promise.

It is surprising that the importance of the covenant of grace is not universally acknowledged. It is the fundamental concept of redemption: the divine decree that set in operation the promise which spans all of human history. (p. 188)

Everything that comprises the covenant of promise is first stipulated in the covenant of grace. In fact the covenant of promise is in reality the historical expression of the covenant of grace and is not really separate from it.

The covenant of promise is first expressed in Genesis 12. It is the covenant which was made with Abraham. The covenant is restated to Abraham on several occasions in Genesis and then to David in 2 Samuel 7. It is comprised of the promise of offspring which in the first statement would be understood as physical children for Abraham. In its final expression it represents the people of God in every age. The second promise is of blessing for Abraham. The third promise is that Abraham's name would be great. The fourth promise is of blessing for those who favour Abraham and disfavour for those who do not. The fifth promise was that Abraham's descendants would occupy the land of Canaan. The promise of land is eventually expanded to give the people of God the whole earth. The sixth promise is divine blessing for Gentiles as well as Jews. The seventh promise is that the Lord would be God to his people. And the last promise was that kings would be descended from Abraham. Of course, the final application of that promise is the kingship of the Messiah.

The covenant of promise then is the historical expression of the covenant of grace. It is an eternal covenant in which God unconditionally commits Himself to those who trust Him and promises to them an inheritance. Though the basic tenets of the covenant of promise never change, they undergo expansion or amplification in each successive statement of the covenant. It begins with the promise of offspring referring specifically to physical children for Abraham but finds its full expression in all those who share Abraham's faith in God. The inheritance is seen initially as the land of Canaan but finally the whole world.

Obedience is never seen as a condition for the receipt of inheritance found in the covenant of promise. McComiskey stresses that the inheritance is received by faith. However, once acknowledging that a relationship does exist based on faith between God and His people, it becomes necessary for God's people to live in obedience. Obedience becomes the testimony of faith toward God. The obedience expected from God's people is stated in the covenants of administration. The expansion of the covenant of promise through the progress of history necessitates different covenants of administration for each period of history. The administrative covenant of circumcision served a very personal relationship to God. It was first designed to reflect Abraham's faith in God through his personal obedience. It served Abraham and then his immediate descendants. It was family oriented. Then as the offspring of Abraham grew to be a nation, God instituted a new administrative covenant, the Mosaic Code. When the people of God expanded again to become the church, God gave the New Covenant. The new Covenant contains basically the same expectations from the believer as the Mosaic Code, but now God enables the believer to obey by providing the Holy Spirit.

For those who adopt the structure of Covenant Theology, a question might arise concerning the inheritance offered in McComiskey's covenant of promise. Is not the final inheritance a heavenly one rather than an earthly one? If the covenant of promise only offers an earthly inheritance, is it temporal beginning with Abraham and ending with the earthly church? Is land the only part of the believer's inheritance?

Dispensationalists will marvel at the author's construction of administrative covenants (or dispensations?) within Covenant Theology. After all the basis of Dispensationalism is that there exist different and distinguishable administrations in God's dealing with man. (see Dispensationalism today, by Charles Ryrie, Moody Press, p. 29) McComiskey does give a warning in his introduction. "It is not intended to set forth a moderating position between dispensationalism and covenant theology." (P. 12) It is true that while he adopts at least four administrations (including the pre-Abrahamic period), he rejects other major tenets of Dispensationalism. For instance he does not maintain the separating of the church and Israel in God's dealings.

This work is intended as the first of three books to be written by McComiskey. These three are seen as foundational to a future theology of the Old Testament. It will be interesting to see him develop his concept more fully and relate it to other theological issues. It is hoped that future works, however, will be easier to read. The style and format employed in his first book make it difficult to follow his reasoning. His thesis should be better presented and explained before launching into detailed arguments and exegesis in support of it. The style is often repetitive and difficult.

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Ripening Harvest, Gathering Storm
by Maurice Sinclair
MARC/STL 1988

The early chapters of this book present a telescopic account of God's missionary activity in the Old Testament, through the birth and growth of the early church, and to the (western-initiated) missionary periods up to the present day. This remarkable feat was achieved in two chapters.

Chapter 4 provides a potted history of the remarkable growth of the church in the six continents - Africa, Asia, Europe, Oceania, North America and South America - together with the cultural dimensions and missionary challenges they bring to enrich the catholic church. This is a "marathon" chapter, covering 63 pages, full of useful statistical information and the riches of the unity and diversity of the world-wide church. His concluding remark about the six continents is right on:

The world, as an arena of mission, includes all six continents: each vast, complex and different. In four, Europe, Northern and Latin America, and Oceania the overriding priority is re-evangelisation. With the gospel Europe needs a humble confidence, Northern America a healing unity, Latin America an intergral freedom and Oceania a reaffirmed identity. Africa, to a lesser extent now, but Asia still on a massive scale contain communities that have never been evangelised even superficially. Mission in Africa confronts almost every challenge simultaneously. page 156.

In Chapter 5, the reader is introduced to the writer as the missionary pastor with a deep passion for salvation and sanctification. The Christian reader is challenged to face up to the demands of the great commission. Whether he or she lies in a shanty town, a modern sector of a developing country, inner city or suburbia of a western country, or in a First/Third world village, he or she cannot get away from his or her God-given responsibility to be 'salt' and 'light' in that community. It is a most edifying (disturbing!) chapter which makes one feel like going out to help make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). This chapter is a beautiful commentary of the words of our Lord in John 15:16 - each Christian is born again to reproduce. There is a missionary opportunity in every situation a Christian finds himself in.

How can we truly be partners when one side is so strong and wealthy and the other is so poor and weak?

Sinclair quoted the question posed by a Mennonite missionary leader together with his reply, on page 212:

We need to take off our cultural blinkers and then we will discover how much our Third World brothers and sisters have to offer and how fully their gifts match our needs.

The essential message of chapter 6 is that partnership has to do with a change of attitude.

There is a call for new categories of missionaries on pages 224-227 in chapter 7: global locals, passport missionaries, mission partners, underground missionaries, missionary apprentices, unconscious missionaries. If you want to know who these are, you will have to buy the book!

The book ends on a note of apocalyptic realism:

If disaster must come, let it come only when men and women have done all they could to avert it (page 239).

There is a call to repentance and a renewed determination to allow the word of God to guide us.

CONCLUSION

Although the writer's target audience is the western church, certain parts of the book (especially chapters 4 - 5) will be of great interest and help to the church in the Two-Thirds World. The prospect of missionaries from the Two-Thirds World coming to assist the church in Europe to reach their large "fringe population of 300 million" (pages 133-134) sounds most exciting. Chapter 6 on Partnership, however, is weak because it fails to address structural and operational defects in Western missionary societies which make genuine partnership with the church in the Two Thirds world an elusive goal. Also, there is precious little in the book (apart from passing references to Bishop Ayayi Crowther on page 79 and Keshub Chandra Sen on page 118), to educate the Western church of the active role played by African, Asian, and Latin American pioneer missionaries in the growth of the church in their continents.

Maurice Sinclair has produced a useful handbook which I hope will inspire many to become active participants (instead of passive observers) in world mission. The book is worth a lot more than the tag price!

Yemi Ladipo