

“These Signs Will Accompany Those Who Believe”: A Response to John M. McDermott, S.J.

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ABSTRACT: This article contends, in response to John M. McDermott, S.J., that healings and other supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit are essential to the Church’s life and mission. Explaining why this is the case entails a reexamination of important questions raised by McDermott’s article: Is love a charism? Does Jesus’ commission to evangelize in Mark 16 belong to the canon of Scripture? Is faith necessary for the recipient of healing? Are death and sickness due to sin? It also entails overcoming false dichotomies, such as the opposition posed between dogma and experience, institution and charism, apologetics and demonstrations of the Spirit’s power. The Church today, as in every age, is called to evangelize with accompanying signs that demonstrate the inbreaking of Christ’s kingdom.

KEYWORDS: Healing, evangelization, sickness, charism, Holy Spirit

Several decades after the close of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II offered this remarkable assessment of the council:

Whenever the Spirit intervenes, he leaves people astonished. He brings about events of amazing newness; he radically changes persons and history. This was the unforgettable experience of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council during which, under the guidance of the same Spirit, the Church

rediscovered the charismatic dimension as one of her constitutive elements.¹

This conviction that the council's teaching on charisms and the charismatic dimension was not a novelty but rather a "rediscovery" of something constitutive of the Church was not unique to John Paul II but has been expressed in various ways by all the postconciliar popes.² In my book *Healing: Bringing the Gift of God's Mercy to the World*, I explore the implications of this rediscovery in regard to one particular gift of the Spirit, healing.³ Through a study of healing in Scripture, theology, and Church history, as well as personal experience, I seek to demonstrate that healings have been and remain an essential part of the Church's evangelizing mission.⁴

In his recent two-part article, "Do Charismatic Healings Promote the New Evangelization?,"⁵ Fr. John M. McDermott, S.J., sets out to examine and criticize my book, and concludes that

1 John Paul II, *Speech at Meeting with Ecclesial Movements and New Communities* (May 30, 1998).

2 In another address John Paul II stated: "I have often had occasion to stress that there is no conflict or opposition in the Church between the institutional dimension and the charismatic dimension. . . . Both are co-essential to the divine constitution of the Church founded by Jesus"; *Message for the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements* (May 27, 1998). Benedict XVI likewise stated, "Hence, both dimensions [institutional and charismatic] originate from the same Holy Spirit for the same Body of Christ, and together they concur to make present the mystery and the salvific work of Christ in the world"; *Address to the Members of Communion and Liberation Movement on the 25th Anniversary of its Pontifical Recognition* (March 24, 2007). See also Francis, *Homily at Holy Mass with the Ecclesial Movements on the Solemnity of Pentecost* (May 19, 2013); Paul VI, *Address to Participants in the III International Congress of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal* (May 19, 1975).

3 Mary Healy, *Healing: Bringing the Gift of God's Mercy to the World* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2015). The book is written for a popular audience and is not intended to be a rigorous theological treatise.

4 This is not to imply that healings are necessary in every individual act of evangelization; rather, they are among the gifts by which the Spirit equips the Church corporately to carry out her evangelizing mission.

5 John M. McDermott, S.J., "Do Charismatic Healings Promote the New Evangelization?" in *Antiphon* 24 (2020) 85–123 (Part I) and 205–242 (Part II). Page references to the book will be given in parentheses in the main text.

although charismatic healings may sometimes accompany the preaching of the gospel, in general they are not effective for evangelization. Several of the positions he criticizes, however, are positions I do not hold and, in some cases, that I explicitly denied. In other cases, his article makes statements as if in rebuttal that are in fact nearly identical to what I wrote. Although space does not allow a detailed response to every part of his critique, here I will point out some of its misinterpretations and explain why Christ's mandate to proclaim the gospel with expectant faith that the Holy Spirit will confirm the word with healings and other signs remains valid today.

IS LOVE A CHARISM?

In his discussion of St. Paul's teaching on the *charismata* (charisms of the Holy Spirit), McDermott contends that the apostle includes the theological virtues of faith, hope and love among the charisms. Those who hold otherwise, he argues,

. . . must confront the great difficulty of explaining why 1 Corinthians 13, the paean to charity, is placed between chapter 12, which lists and orders the *charismata*, and chapter 14, which considers at length the relation among prophecy, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Rather than being an intrusion destroying the link between chapters 12 and 14, chapter 13 provides the norm for judging and ordering *charismata*. (91)

This latter assertion is precisely what I wrote in *Healing*: "Far from being a digression, the chapter on love provides the foundational principle that orders all exercise of the charisms" (114). But that fact produces no great difficulty. As many exegetes have noted, these chapters display a typical Pauline response to a pastoral concern: the apostle first raises the issue, then sets forth the foundational principle by which to resolve it, then returns to apply the principle concretely. The fact that love (*agapē*) governs the exercise of charisms does not mean that love is itself a charism. (By analogy, reason orders the passions, but is not itself a passion.) To identify love as a charism is in

fact to downgrade its status, since charisms are by definition gifts distributed *unevenly* among believers by the Holy Spirit, “who apportioned to each one individually as he wills” (1 Cor 12:11).⁶ No individual receives all the charisms, and no one charism is in itself necessary or normative for any individual. But love, as McDermott recognizes, is given to all and necessary to all. This is why Paul does not refer to love as a charism but rather as the “more excellent way” by which charisms are to be properly exercised.⁷

THE FELT EXPERIENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Expectant faith for healings and other signs is often associated with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal [henceforth: CCR], although it is by no means limited to it.⁸ McDermott expresses concern that the CCR “emphasizes felt experience of the Spirit and His extraordinary gifts, tongues, interpretation, prophecy, miracles, and healings, which distinguish it from the more usual gifts” (93). It is true that individuals and groups in the CCR have at times *overemphasized* these. No one would claim that every expression of the Renewal has been pastorally sound or theologically balanced. As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger noted, the new ecclesial movements that have arisen since Vatican II “had their share

6 All biblical quotations are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), unless otherwise noted. It is true that in rare cases (Rom 5:15–16; 6:23) *charisma* (free gift) refers to the grace of justification and eternal life, but this flexible use of terminology is characteristic of the New Testament era, when theological terms had not yet acquired fixed meanings.

7 Paul does list faith (*pistis*) among the charisms, but it is clear from the context that this refers not to the theological virtue of faith, which is necessary for salvation, but to a special charism given to some: an extraordinary, “mountain-moving” faith in God’s action in a specific situation (see 1 Cor 13:2).

8 Many of the ministries and individuals that promote healing in evangelization are not connected with the CCR as a movement; moreover, the CCR is not the subject of my book *Healing*. However, because the CCR promotes openness to the Spirit and his charisms it is, as Pope Francis has said, a “current of grace, a renewing breath of the Spirit for all members of the Church”; *Address to the Renewal in the Holy Spirit Movement* (July 3, 2015).

of childhood diseases. The power of the Spirit could be felt in them, but the Spirit works through human beings and does not simply free them from their weaknesses.”⁹ However, placing a high value on the experience of God and on the full range of spiritual gifts is not in itself an aberration; it is in full accord with the tradition of the Church, as is often evident in the writings of the Fathers and medievals.¹⁰ St. Hilary of Poitiers, for instance, takes for granted that the sacraments of initiation (typically administered to adults in his time) are accompanied by experience of the Spirit and his gifts:

We who have been reborn through the sacrament of baptism experience intense joy when we feel within us the first stirring of the Holy Spirit . . . we are able to prophesy and speak with wisdom. We become steadfast in hope and receive abundant gifts of healing. Demons are made subject to our authority. . . .¹¹

St. Augustine, similarly, has no qualms about extolling the felt experience of the Spirit: “Thanks be to him to whom we have been singing with devoted hearts and mouths . . . because we can feel the holy love of him deeply ensconced in your hearts.”¹² He even exhorts his congregation to seek it: God “has awakened in us a great longing

9 Joseph Ratzinger, “The Ecclesial Movements: A Theological Reflection on Their Place in the Church,” in *Movements in the Church: Proceedings of the World Congress of the Ecclesial Movements, Rome 27–29 May 1998* (Vatican City: Pontificium Consilium pro Laicis, 1999) 23–51, at 24.

10 It was in the early modern era, when “experience” came to be identified with subjective, psychological experience, that it came to be viewed with caution. See Kilian McDonnell, “I Believe That I Might Experience,” in *Continuum* 5 (1968) 673–685; Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Theology and Sanctity,” in *Explorations in Theology, Vol. I: The Word Made Flesh*, trans. Arthur V. Little (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989) 181–209.

11 Hilary, *Tracts on the Psalms*, 64,14–15; translation from Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994) 184, 186.

12 Augustine, *Sermon* 24,1, translation adapted from Edmund Hill, in *Sermons II (20–50) on the Old Testament*, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, III/2 (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1990) 72.

for that sweet experience of His presence within: but it is by daily growth that we acquire it.”¹³

The examples of commendations of “felt experience” could be multiplied. St. Thomas Aquinas, commenting on Ps 35[36]:9, writes,

“They shall be drunk” insofar as desires are fulfilled beyond all measure of merit, for drunkenness is a kind of excess. . . . People who are drunk are not inside but outside themselves. Thus those filled with spiritual gifts have all their attention on God, and they are refreshed not only by these gifts but also by love of God. And so it says . . . “And you shall make them drink of the torrent of your pleasure.” This is the love of the Holy Spirit which causes a force in the soul like a torrent. And it is a torrent of pleasure because it causes pleasure and sweetness in the soul.¹⁴

A conception of Christian life as merely the assent to certain doctrines and the observance of certain practices would be alien to the tradition and to the New Testament, which everywhere bears witness to a *lived, experienced relationship with Jesus and with the Father*. It is not a matter of “esteem[ing] the experience of God over the God purportedly experienced” (94), but of entering into such a personal relationship. McDermott (94) quotes Joseph Ratzinger as warning that “[t]he reality of God is greater than all our experiences, even our experience of God.” Charismatic Catholics heartily agree. But this is the same Ratzinger who also warned, “A dogmatic faith unsupported by personal experience remains empty.”¹⁵ Could it be that one reason God has raised up the CCR is to remind the Church of these experiential, affective and charismatic dimensions of Christian life that have been largely neglected in the modern era? Of course, to bring attention to certain gifts that have been neglected

13 Augustine, *Tractates in the Gospel of John*, 54.8, trans. John Gibb, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. I.7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 299.

14 Thomas Aquinas, *Super Psalmo* 35, n. 4; translation adapted from Fr. Joseph Komonchak, “*In verbo veritatis*” (2 Cor 6:7), at <https://jakomonchak.wordpress.com/2012/02/24/drunken-in-gods-house/>.

15 Joseph Ratzinger, “Foreword,” in Léon-Joseph Suenens, *Renewal and the Powers of Darkness* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1983) x.

is not to claim that these are preeminent or necessarily more important than other gifts.

CATHOLIC CHARISMATICS LEAVING THE CHURCH

McDermott states that “it is troubling that Catholics, even group leaders as well as priests and religious in the CCR, have left the Church to join Protestant churches or sects promoting the charismatic experience” (93). Certainly it is troubling, but McDermott says nothing about the wider context: the fact that many thousands, even millions, of Catholics left the Church in the turbulent decades after Vatican II. Is there any evidence that charismatics did so *in greater proportion* to other Catholics? I know of none, and anecdotal evidence suggests quite the opposite.¹⁶ I know of countless charismatics who testify that the Renewal is what saved their faith in Christ and kept them in the Church during difficult days. As many bishops around the world have recognized, particularly in Latin America and Africa, it is in regions where the CCR is strong and vibrant that the exodus of Catholics to Pentecostal and neo-charismatic churches is being stemmed.¹⁷

IS MARK 16:9–20 CANONICAL?

At the end of the Gospel of Mark the risen Lord commands his disciples,

16 Oddly, McDermott (93–94) cites with consternation a boast by a Pentecostal minister that turned out to be wildly inaccurate: “If you are involved in a Charismatic service today, in ten years’ time—inevitably—you are going to end up in one of my churches.” McDermott cites the *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, published in 2002, for this claim. Obviously, it has not materialized.

17 See Mathias Thelen, “The Explosive Growth of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in the Global South, and Its Implications for Catholic Evangelization,” in *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, June 28, 2017, at <https://www.hprweb.com/2017/06/the-explosive-growth-of-pentecostal-charismatic-christianity-in-the-global-south-and-its-implications-for-catholic-evangelization/>.

Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. . . . And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover. (Mark 16:15, 17–18)

This passage is among those I cited to ground my contention that Jesus extends to all believers, at least in principle, the authority to heal and cast out demons.¹⁸ So anxious is McDermott to diminish the authority of this biblical mandate that he makes the rather surprising claim that the canonicity of the ending of Mark is in doubt.¹⁹ He argues that since the Council of Trent did not explicitly discuss Mark 16:9–20 (the so-called “long ending”) and other disputed texts like John 7:53–8:11 (the woman caught in adultery), the Church has not recognized them as canonical. But this seems to assume that the canon was invented by the Council of Trent. Rather, the council merely reaffirmed and defined what the Church had already believed and taught through the liturgy from time immemorial. These texts are proclaimed in the liturgy, followed by the acclamation “The Gospel of the Lord.” In fact, parts of Mark 16:9–20 are read on the Ascension of the Lord (Year B), the feast of St. Mark, the Conversion of St. Paul, and Easter Saturday.²⁰ Trent, as McDermott admits, affirmed the canonicity of all 73 books of the Bible “with all their parts” (97–98). Even if the council fathers undoubtedly had in mind primarily the deuterocanonical books which Protestants were rejecting, the affirmation stands. Moreover, the council

18 This text is not my “proof-text” as McDermott claims (99), but one of several texts cited (e.g., Lk 10:1–17; 1 Cor 12:31; Gal 3:5) that communicate a truth integral to the gospel.

19 As I note in *Healing*, Mark 16:9–20, the so-called “long ending” does not appear in the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel, and most scholars hold that it was added by a late first-century or early second-century editor. As in the case of numerous other biblical books and passages of disputed authorship, the question of authorship is distinct from the question of canonicity.

20 It is also indicated for the memorials of St. Blaise, St. Gregory VII, and St. Francis Xavier.

established the Vulgate (now the *Nova Vulgata*) as the point of reference for delineating the canonical text, a point reaffirmed in numerous subsequent magisterial texts, most recently in *Liturgiam Authenticam*.²¹ The “long ending” of Mark is in the Vulgate.

McDermott further argues that accepting the canonicity of these verses leads to absurdity, since they “promise that believers will handle snakes and drink poison without harm. . . . Where did the early Christians make a habit of drinking poison or playing with snakes?” (98). But taking Scripture at face value does not mean interpreting figures of speech literalistically. The Gospels, in Semitic fashion, frequently mingle literal and figurative speech.²² In this case, picking up snakes without harm refers by synecdoche to protection from mortal danger, probably alluding to Paul’s escapade in Malta (Acts 28:2–5).²³ Drinking poison without harm conveys a similar idea, perhaps with reference to an unrecorded event in the life of an apostle.²⁴ On the other hand, there is no reason to interpret the laying on of hands, healing the sick, casting out of demons, or speaking in new tongues as nonliteral, since these are clearly reported as regular occurrences in the Gospels and Acts.

21 Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Fifth Instruction for the Right Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Liturgiam Authenticam* (28 March 2001) no. 37.

22 For example, Mt 5:22 uses synecdoche and metaphor as well as literal speech: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ [i.e., any harsh word] will be answerable to the Sanhedrin [i.e., God’s judgment], and whoever says, ‘You fool’ [i.e., any insult] will be liable to fiery Gehenna [i.e., hell].”

23 There is also a likely allusion to Isaiah’s prophecy of the Spirit-filled Messiah bringing about the eschatological restoration of the original harmony of Eden: “the sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den” (Isa 11:8). A similar allusion is in Mk 1:13.

24 This may be another reference to God’s original intention for creation: “the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them” (Wis 1:14). The author’s point is not to imply that Christians will *always* be protected from mortal danger (see Lk 21:16, 18). As reported in Acts, sometimes believers are miraculously rescued, sometimes they are beaten or martyred. But Jesus’ words do imply that nothing will cause us ultimate harm (see Lk 10:19), so Christians need never be afraid.

IS FAITH NECESSARY FOR HEALING?

Do healings depend on Christ, or do they depend on faith? In this matter as in others, the Gospels present us with a paradox. Faith is not in any absolute sense necessary for healing; nevertheless, the Lord often makes it a condition for healing. With remarkable frequency Jesus asks his petitioners, “Do you believe that I can do this?” or exhorts “Do not fear, only believe”; “According to your faith let it be done to you.” “Your faith has made you well.”²⁵ Where the Gospels present a paradox, McDermott seems to see only a contradiction: “if Healy’s interpretation . . . were valid, one wonders why Jesus did not demand faith in all his healings” (108). But to show that Jesus often *chooses* to make faith a condition of his healings is not to create a metaphysical necessity. There are also numerous Gospel healing accounts that neither mention nor imply faith on the part of the recipient. The dead son of the widow of Nain, for instance, certainly had no faith! McDermott seems perplexed that I advise people to pray for healing with confident faith, while leaving the outcome entirely in the Lord’s hands. But I am seeking to uphold a tension inherent in the Gospel accounts themselves, which do not allow a one-sided reduction, “Healings depend on God alone” or “Healings depend on faith alone.” Healings are an encounter between divine and human freedom. They are entirely subject to God’s will, yet God very often seeks the sufferer’s participation in His work of healing, precisely through faith.

IS A CHARISM OF HEALING NECESSARY FOR HEALING?

McDermott asks, “If every baptized believer has the power to effect miracles, why is a special charism required?” (101). However, I explicitly denied that a charism is required for healing (123). Divine healings in response to our prayer are in principle possible for all baptized believers (and, in fact, happen far more often than many people assume), which is why Jesus repeatedly exhorts us to pray with great

²⁵ Mt 8:13; 9:22, 28–29; 15:28; 17:20; Mk 5:34, 36; 9:22–23; 10:52; Lk 8:25, 48; 17:19; 18:42.

faith and perseverance. To have the *charism* of healing is simply to have more frequent and greater healings occur in response to one's prayer. Although charisms are free gifts, one can ask for them and grow in them. Paul's exhortations, "Strive eagerly for the greatest charisms. . . . Strive eagerly for the spiritual gifts" (1 Cor 12:31; 14:1),²⁶ imply that, provided our motives are pure, we can and should ask for charisms we do not yet have if they would serve the mission of the Church.

McDermott warns that "God may prefer certain persons as instruments or channels of His healing . . . but the gift is always God's to give freely" (103). It is unclear how he intends to differ from what I stated in *Healing*: "A charism like healing is not something you 'possess' or can pull out of your pocket at will. You cannot heal someone whenever you feel like it. Rather, you are a musical instrument on which the Holy Spirit plays according to his will and his timing."²⁷ Since I explicitly denied that one can "possess" a charism, it is strange that McDermott would claim that "Healy's understanding of [the charism of healing] as a possessed power seemingly involves metaphysical difficulties" (107).

VERIFYING THE SOURCE OF HEALINGS

McDermott raises the valid and important question of verifying the source of alleged miracles. But he seems to preclude the possibility that such a verification can take place in charismatic settings today: "How can anyone certify these miracles as manifestations of divine power? The devil as well as God can effect wonders. . ." (115). He cites Jesus' warnings against false signs and wonders, apparently unaware that I quoted the same warning and noted the "sobering truth . . . that it is possible to exercise supernatural gifts and yet have a heart hardened against the Lord."²⁸ The fact that Scripture calls for such discernment indicates that discernment is indeed possible. Jesus taught, "You will know them by their fruits" (Mt 7:16). Where a heal-

26 Author's translation.

27 Healy, *Healing*, 115.

28 *Ibid.*, 113.

ing service or similar event brings about conversions, strengthened faith, long lines for confession, renewed love for the Lord, spiritual consolation, joy and thanksgiving to God, among both those physically healed and those not healed (as I have often witnessed), it is not difficult to discern the source. As St. Paul cautioned, the Church should be wary of the tendency to make the existence of false charismatic phenomena a reason to reject all charismatic phenomena.”²⁹

HEALING AND DOCTRINE

Like many critics of the CCR, McDermott cites Ronald Knox’s book *Enthusiasm* (published in 1950, seventeen years before the CCR began) to warn that adhering to the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit brings the danger of doctrinal indifferentism. He cautions that “[h]istory is replete with examples of ‘spiritual movements’ which went off the rails while claiming direct guidance by the Spirit” (116), citing Montanists, *Alumbrados*, and Jansenists as examples. What he fails to mention is that, in contrast to the CCR, these movements were *not* approved by the Church but were explicitly condemned by it. Moreover, the CCR has from the beginning been strongly committed to doctrinal orthodoxy and communion with the Church. As Fr. (now Cardinal) Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher to the papal household, notes,

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal does not fall into the category of “enlightened and charismatic” as Knox defines it in his book. From its beginnings, the Renewal has been animated by a strong desire for communion with the hierarchy and the rest of the Church, and it has never entertained the temptation of being established as a “church within the Church.” It was these grounds that most helped me overcome the initial reservations that I had towards the charismatic experience. As we know, the hierarchy

29 1 Thess 5:20–21; 1 Cor 14:39–40; see Healy, *Healing*, 76. In a different book, *The Spiritual Gifts Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen books, 2017), co-author Randy Clark and I provide detailed criteria for discernment of charisms, including their correspondence with truth, love, good order, and a focus of attention on Jesus.

jumped at this difference, welcoming the Charismatic Renewal into its heart and calling it a “chance for the whole church” [Paul VI]. Even though the Charismatic Renewal, as with the more general Pentecostal phenomenon, can be seen as an expression of “religious enthusiasm,” it is a biblical brand of enthusiasm, based on the cross, where “the cross” indicates assent, humility, love, purity—in a word, the whole of the gospel.³⁰

McDermott seems not to recognize the complementarity of charism and institution. The New Testament makes clear that Christian life involves openness to the Holy Spirit and his direct guidance. The book of Acts is replete with examples of such guidance, both for apostles and for ordinary Christians.³¹ But adhering to the guidance of the Holy Spirit is not in itself contrary to submission to the authority of the pastors of the Church; the two go hand-in-hand.³² As I wrote in *Healing*, quoting John Paul II: “No one is the owner of his or her charism; ‘no charism dispenses a person from reference and submission to the Pastors of the Church.’”³³ It is difficult to see, then, how McDermott can label my book or the CCR with such indifferentism, other than by citing decades-old criticisms of the Renewal by disaffected charismatics.

HEALING AND SALVATION

Another major difficulty for McDermott is my supposed identification of healing with salvation. However, I did not make such an identification. What I did write is that

30 Raniero Cantalamessa, “Charisms and Charismatic Renewal: An Historical Approach,” in *Charisms and the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church* (Rome: International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services, 2015), 43–52.

31 See also Lk 12:12; Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18.

32 Acts is filled with examples of the complementarity of the institutional and charismatic; for example, Philip’s mission in Samaria and Peter’s remarkable new step of incorporating uncircumcised Gentiles into the Church are initiated by the Spirit but then discerned and approved by the Church’s leaders.

33 Healy, *Healing*, 121; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World *Christifideles Laici* (December 30, 1988) no. 24.

In the biblical understanding, the human person is an inseparable unity of body and soul. Christ came not just to “save souls” but to *save human beings*—to raise us up, body and soul, to the fullness of divine life in communion with God and all the redeemed forever. The body therefore has inestimable significance in God’s plan. It will one day be radiant with divine life (1 Cor 15:42–49). Jesus’ healings of bodily sickness and infirmity are a foreshadowing of the glorious destiny of the human body.³⁴

I also quoted Pope Benedict XVI:

Healing is an essential dimension of the apostolic mission and of Christian faith in general. . . . Christianity [is] a “therapeutic religion”—a religion of healing. . . . When understood at a sufficiently deep level, this expresses the entire content of “redemption.”³⁵

According to McDermott, “F. Sullivan previously recognized the flaw in Healy’s identification of healing with salvation. . . : ‘If the healing of illness were an integral part of the salvation wrought for us by Christ, it would follow that God must will the healing of the sick in the same way as he wills their salvation’” (121).³⁶ But the conclusion does not follow from the premise. The doctrine of the resurrection of the body teaches us that bodily healing is indeed an integral part of Christ’s work of salvation (Rom 8:23; 1 Cor 15:52), even though it does not always take place in this life.

A related concern is that identifying healing with salvation implies that “when sick people are not healed, it must be through their own fault,” which places an “intolerable burden of guilt” on

34 Healy, *Healing*, 26.

35 Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007) 176, quoting Eugen Biser. See Healy, *Healing*, 30.

36 The citation is from Francis Sullivan, S.J., *Charisms and Charismatic Renewal: A Biblical and Theological Study* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1982) 161. McDermott implies that Sullivan is directly addressing my views, but Sullivan’s book was published 33 years before mine.

the sufferer (121). McDermott seems to have missed my statement that “Scripture does not say that the Lord will always heal in response to our prayer if only we have enough faith” (34).³⁷ Moreover, my chapter on the value of redemptive suffering offers examples of people who, though not healed, have embraced their afflictions with joy.

McDermott also claims that I put healings “on the same level as preaching and sacramental ministry.” What I actually wrote is that “healings are part of the normal equipment that believers are given for evangelization, since evangelizing is not just passing on information about Jesus but communicating his divine life and power” (57). To say that something is necessary (and neglected), as I hold charismatic healing to be, is not to claim that it is sufficient, nor that it is primary. McDermott writes that “St. Paul is not so concerned with the necessity of healing. Instead he insists that salvation comes through faith . . . and newness of life through forgiveness of sins in baptism” (122). But this is a false dichotomy. I know of no one who claims that salvation comes through healing. Rather, healings and miracles are important as a way in which the Lord confirms the gospel message and arouses faith in the hearers. Only by citing texts very selectively can McDermott say that “to the Gentiles [Paul] is preacher and teacher, not healer” (122). One has to leave out large sections of Acts, as well as 2 Corinthians 12:12, “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you . . . signs and wonders and mighty works”; and Romans 15:18–19, “I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.”³⁸

As my book makes clear, the goal of physical healing is always salvation in Christ, that is, conversion leading to faith and baptism (or, for the baptized, deeper conversion):

37 Elsewhere (112) McDermott cites my caution that when a healing does not occur, we must never assume that it is due to a person’s fault or lack of faith; see Healy, *Healing*, 181, 184.

38 See also 1 Cor 2:4; Gal 3:5; Acts 14:8–10; 19:11–12; 20:9–10; 28:8.

Bartimaeus' sight was restored, but even more, the eyes of his heart were enlightened. He demonstrated the perfect response to a healing: he followed Jesus *on the way* (Mark 10:52), the way of discipleship, a whole new life of following the Master wherever he leads. Bartimaeus' healing is an image of what happens to every Christian at conversion and baptism: our hearts are enlightened and through faith we are enabled to truly "see" what is invisible (Eph 1:18; Heb 11:1). . . . Physical healings, then, are always meant to lead to something much greater . . . an encounter with Jesus.³⁹

ARE DEATH AND SICKNESS DUE TO SIN?

In Part II of his article, Fr. McDermott takes aim against my view that suffering and death are "ultimately due to original sin" (98). Although that assertion is not a central thesis of my book, McDermott uses it as a foil for expounding his own unusual thesis that suffering and death are "natural and good" (215; see also 219).

According to McDermott, death existed before the Fall, but "would not have been feared" (206). He warns that "to deny that death is natural to humanity runs the risk of heresy" (209), citing the Church's condemnation of the error of the Jansenists that immortality "is natural to humanity, and death unnatural."⁴⁰ But my book contains no such denial, nor any remote suggestion that eternal life is not a gratuitous gift of God. Rather, I take for granted the commonplace of Catholic teaching that "death entered the world on account of man's sin,"⁴¹ a truth affirmed repeatedly in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.⁴²

39 Healy, *Healing*, 159.

40 McDermott (209) cites magisterial documents by Pius V, Clement XI, and Pius VI.

41 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000) [henceforth: CCC] no. 1008.

42 CCC, nos. 376, 400, 402, 1018. Given these repeated affirmations, it is implausible for McDermott to claim that my interpretation of death as due to sin "might have been influenced by a mistranslation" of paragraph 1008 of the *Catechism* (213). I did not cite that paragraph, and my book in no way depends on it.

According to McDermott, “The notion that all illness and disability were caused by the Fall goes back at least to St. Augustine” (206). In fact, it goes back to the Old Testament. The book of Wisdom, alluding to the account of creation and the Fall in Genesis, teaches that “God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil’s envy death entered the world” (Wis 2:23–24).⁴³ “Incorruption” implies freedom from every form of bodily disease and debility as well as death itself. Scripture frequently describes both sickness and death as not neutral, natural realities but devastating consequences of sin.⁴⁴

McDermott does raise important questions regarding the tension between the Christian understanding of human origins and the scientific account of evolution, in which humans inherited the cycle of life and death from their pre-human forebears. These questions are worthy of serious theological exploration, although a critique of *Healing* is not the ideal setting for it, since the book does not address these issues. McDermott cautions that “the first chapters of Genesis were never meant to be taken literally” (207), an observation with which I readily concur. But that fact does not invalidate the foundational Christian doctrines concerning sin, sickness and death that are largely drawn from these texts. If McDermott can claim that “Healy’s presuppositions about sickness and disability [as

43 Some exegetes interpret “death” here as referring to spiritual death only. But this fails to recognize the writer’s deliberately analogous use of the same term to refer to *both* bodily death and spiritual death (separation from God), which Genesis suggests are intrinsically linked. Spiritual death leads to physical death, and physical death is a sign of the spiritual death into which the whole human race has fallen. See Maurice Gilbert, “Gn 1–3 dans le livre de la Sagesse,” in id., *La Sagesse de Salomon. The Wisdom of Solomon, Recueil d’études. Collected Essays*, Analecta Biblica 189 (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011), 405–429. Wisdom 2:24 is also likely alluding to Cain, whose murderous envy brought about the first death (Gen 4:8). In any case, Catholic tradition interprets this verse as referring to physical and not only spiritual death (CCC, nos. 391, 413, 1008).

44 See Ex 15:26; Lev 26:15–16; Num 11:33; Deut 28:21–35; Heb 3:17. Illness is at times linked with individual sin (Num 12:9–10; 14:37; 2 Chr 26:16–21; Ps 32:3–5; 38:2–18; 39:8–12; 107:17; Jn 5:14; 1 Cor 11:27–30); however, the figure of the suffering just man in the Psalms and Job clearly refutes the mistaken notion that *all* illness is attributable to personal sin.

due to the Fall] needlessly open the faith to the contempt of scientifically educated people” (208), then such contempt falls on Catholic teaching itself. However, as McDermott recognizes (214), the Catechism acknowledges the tension, without fully resolving it: “In a sense bodily death is natural, but for faith it is in fact ‘the wages of sin’ [Rom 6:23].”⁴⁵

IS SUFFERING AN EVIL?

McDermott likewise objects to my description of suffering as an “objective evil” (217). But here too, I simply restate Catholic teaching. As Pope John Paul II wrote, “The Christian does not seek suffering, he must fight against it, for himself and for others, because he knows that it is an evil, a consequence of the sin of men from the beginning (cf. Gen 3:16–19). But when it is inescapable, he carries it in faith.”⁴⁶ In a document specifically concerning prayers for healing, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith asserts that “Although sickness may have positive consequences. . . , it remains, however, an evil.”⁴⁷ If suffering is not an evil but a good, it becomes difficult if not impossible to defend the Church’s massive endeavors throughout the ages, including the self-sacrificial labors of many saints, to *alleviate* suffering—the hospitals, medical clinics, soup kitchens, emergency relief, and countless other corporal works of mercy, not to mention the prayers offered daily for the healing of the sick.

To refute the notion that suffering and death are evils, McDermott asks, “Did not St. Francis praise and welcome ‘Sister Death’? Did not St. Paul desire to die and be with Christ? (Phil 1:21–23; 2 Cor 5:8)” (210). Even more, “Why did Jesus freely choose an objective evil? Could He not have saved the human race by preaching the

45 CCC, no. 1006.

46 John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Une espérance nouvelle pour le Liban (A New Hope for Lebanon)* (May 10, 1997) no. 34. Translation mine.

47 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Prayers for Healing *Ardens felicitatis* (September 14, 2000) I, art.1.

gospel and healing all physical and mental ills?” (219). Once again, the paradox inherent in biblical revelation seems to escape McDermott. God, in his infinite wisdom and power, is able to bring good out of evil, but that does not mean it is not evil. McDermott seems to admit as much when he notes in regard to the blind man healed by Jesus that “God brings a greater good out of evil” (217), thereby affirming that the blindness is an evil. It is precisely because the Son of God freely chose to *submit to objective evils*—his own torture, mockery, crucifixion and death—out of love for the Father and for the sake of our salvation, that his sufferings have infinite value. One can readily affirm, with McDermott, that in Jesus, suffering “is transformed into glory” (222).⁴⁸ But to imagine that suffering and death are good in themselves does not enhance the value of Christ’s passion but in fact empties it.

McDermott contends that suffering is not only natural but, in some sense, essential, since “a world without the possibility of suffering would be intolerable, totally boring. . . . A perfectly adjusted world would leave humanity without any task to be performed, and our existence would be boring” (220). One wonders where that leaves the status of our existence in heaven, in the new creation where God “will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore” (Rev 21:4). Although in this world it is indeed hard to imagine a life that is interesting yet without pain or danger, surely that will be the case in the world to come.

Finally, if suffering and death are good in themselves, it is impossible to explain why Christ came to conquer them. Christ has “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim 1:10). The Gospel of Matthew affirms that among the benefits bestowed on us by Christ’s passion are deliverance from sickness and demonic oppression: “He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, ‘He took our infirmities and bore our dis-

48 My chapter on redemptive suffering (chapter 9 of *Healing*) explains in simple terms how such transformation can occur for all those who unite their sufferings with Christ’s passion in faith and love.

eases” (Mt 8:16–17).⁴⁹ If death is good in itself, how can Paul call it “the last enemy to be destroyed” (1 Cor 15:26)? The doctrine of the resurrection of the body, affirmed throughout the New Testament and expounded by Paul in this very passage, precludes any objection that Paul is referring only to spiritual death.

HEALING AND EVANGELIZATION

What then is the place of healings and miracles in the new evangelization?⁵⁰ McDermott argues that miracles are unnecessary and even counterproductive to the Church’s evangelizing mission, and that we should rely on an “objective apologetics” rather than on the expectation of such demonstrations of divine power. He rightly underscores the importance of an apologetics that articulates the reasonableness of Catholic doctrine, especially for those malformed by a postmodern culture of relativism and scientism. Although apologetics is not in itself *evangelization*—i.e., the proclamation of the gospel kerygma with the goal of leading people to an encounter with Christ—it is an indispensable auxiliary ministry, as is healing itself.

49 Contrary to his usual practice of following the Septuagint version when quoting the Old Testament, here Matthew translates Isaiah 53:4 directly from the Hebrew in a way that emphasizes Jesus’ saving mission as including not only forgiveness of sins but also *physical healings*, at the ultimate cost of his life.

50 In his Part I, McDermott expresses concern with my view that the new evangelization entails “‘a complete retooling and re-visioning’ of institutional Catholic life” (97). However, this proposal originates not with me, but with Pope Francis, who writes in his Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013) no. 33: “Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way.’ I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities.” Such pastoral resourcefulness does not mean abandoning that which belongs to the permanent, unchanging structure of the Church. Rather, it means an openness to changing that which can and should be changed given the Church’s present circumstances, recognizing that many of our current structures are a product of historical contingencies and human custom rather than unchanging tradition. For a full-scale argument for proper ecclesial reform in continuity with tradition, see George Weigel, *Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st Century Church* (New York: Basic Books, 2013).

To oppose apologetics and healing is to pose a false dichotomy. Citing Paul, McDermott rails, “Has God’s word of truth lost its force? Must it be supplemented by healing miracles and deliverances? Are there no other resources to help people believe?” (223). Paul would answer: God’s word is indeed a word of power, but precisely for that reason it is to be accompanied by demonstrations of God’s power.⁵¹ St. Thomas would agree:

[B]ecause oral teaching that is offered requires confirmation so that it may be accepted, unless it be evident in itself, and because things that are of faith are not evident to human reason, it was necessary for some means to be provided whereby the words of the preachers of the faith might be confirmed. Now, they could not be confirmed by any rational principles in the way of demonstration, since the objects of faith surpass reason. So, it was necessary for the oral teaching of the preachers to be confirmed by certain signs, whereby it might be plainly shown that this oral teaching came from God; so, the preachers did such things as healing the sick, and the performance of other difficult deeds, which only God could do. Hence, the Lord, sending forth His disciples to preach, said in Matthew (10:8): “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils.” And it is said at the end of Mark (16:20): “But they going forth preached everywhere: the Lord working withal, and confirming the word with signs that followed.”⁵²

Although preaching, teaching, and other forms of discourse like apologetics are necessary, the New Testament gives a clear priority to the manifestation of God’s power, which confirms the truth of the gospel. As the Venerable Bede put it, “Fishers and unlettered men are sent to preach, that the faith of believers might be thought to lie in the power of God, not in eloquence or in learning.”⁵³

51 See Rom 15:18–19; 1 Cor 2:4–5; 2 Cor 12:12; Gal 3:2–5; 1 Thes 1:5.

52 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 154, 8; translation by Vernon J. Burke, available at <https://isidore.co/aquinas/ContraGentiles3b.htm#154>.

53 Bede, *In Marc.*, 1,6; cited from Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected out of the Works of the Fathers*, ed. John Henry Newman, 4 vol. (Southampton: The Saint Austin Press, 1997) vol. II, 22.

The witness of both Scripture and Church teaching makes clear that the Spirit's supernatural gifts, including healings and miracles as well as innumerable more "ordinary" charisms like administration and teaching, are indeed necessary to the Church's life and mission. As the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith stated,

[S]uch gifts are not to be considered optional in the life of the Church; rather "from the acceptance of these charisms, including those which are more elementary, there arises for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and the building up of the Church, in the freedom of the Holy Spirit." The authentic charisms, therefore, come to be considered as gifts of indispensable importance for the life and mission of the Church."⁵⁴

It is a sign of hope that in these times of deepening secularization and hostility to the gospel, the Lord is restoring a vision of the Church that goes back to the beginning: a Church alive with the continual working of the Holy Spirit through supernatural gifts distributed among the members, gifts that powerfully demonstrate the inbreaking of Christ's kingdom to a wayward and wounded world.⁵⁵ As Pope John Paul II wrote, quoting Novatian:

It is the Holy Spirit "who . . . bestows and directs [gifts] like jewels to the Church, the Bride of Christ. It is in fact he who raises up prophets in the Church, instructs teachers, guides tongues, works wonders and healings, accomplishes miracles, grants the discernment of spirits, assigns governance, inspires counsels, distributes and harmonizes every other charismatic

54 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter regarding the Relationship between Hierarchical and Charismatic Gifts in the Life and the Mission of the Church *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* (May 15, 2016) no. 9, quoting Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12; see also *Lumen Gentium*, no. 4; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 3; *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 9.

55 See Mathias Thelen, "John of the Cross and Exercising Charisms for Evangelization," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (November 25, 2019), at <https://www.hprweb.com/2019/11/john-of-the-cross-and-exercising-charisms-for-evangelization/>.

gift. In this way he completes and perfects the Lord's Church everywhere and in all things."⁵⁶

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56 Novatian, *De Trinitate*, 29,9–10 (CCL 4,70); quoted by John Paul II, Encyclical Letter regarding Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teaching *Veritatis Splendor* (August 6, 1993) no. 108.