

Why I Take Seriously....

“Introductory Comments”

Certain experiences that come our way are not meant for us alone. They are clearly intended by God to be of benefit to others through us. We have a responsibility to share them discreetly, with as little embellishment as possible, in a manner consistent with the intentions of Our Lord, as best we understand them.

This means that the element of interpretation, though never totally absent, must be reduced to an absolute minimum. The degree to which the following stories are told exactly as they happened is the degree to which, I believe, they can function for others as God intends. This is my unwavering commitment in what you are about to read. If I feel it is necessary to protect the identity of someone, I will say so. Otherwise the reader is entitled to take at face value everything retold here and to draw your own conclusions. For the most part, my role is to give the testimony, the reader's role is to draw the consequences.

Over the years I have, in fact, been asked many times, in one form or another, why I take certain things as seriously as I do. It is not always easy to provide an adequate response in the time available. And yet an honest question does deserve an honest answer. This little book is above all an attempt to provide a more adequate answer on those occasions when satisfying conversation is not possible. But it can go beyond that. It can lay the basis for that good conversation.

Several years ago, following our entry into the Catholic Church after nearly 60 years for me as a Lutheran, I prepared and privately reproduced a small volume entitled A Gift of Love, The Joys and Treasures of a New Catholic. The purpose of that little book was

also in part to give a serious accounting, to those entitled to it who wanted it, of why we became Catholic in the first place and of what we learned and experienced afterwards. If anyone, Protestant or Catholic, seriously asks to discuss our “conversion” with us, I always invite that person to preface our conversation with a reading of A Gift of Love. It does wonders to enhance the quality of that conversation, to our mutual benefit. It transforms into real sharing what might otherwise have been a mere butting of heads. I envision a similar role for this work, too. It draws heavily on what God has taught me through experiences dating from my pre-Catholic days. By definition, therefore, it can serve as a preparation for conversation with any serious Christian about subjects often well outside the normal comfort zone of most of us.

I trust that as you read these straight-forward narratives you will understand, at least in part, why I, with all my sins and woeful inadequacies, am constrained to take seriously (and invite you to do so, as well)....

....Satan, the Demonic and Christ's Victory

“If our diagnosis is correct, it always works.”

The year was 1966 or 1967. The Westlock Regional Ministerial Association north of Edmonton had arranged for its members a guided tour of the Oliver facility of the Alberta Hospital. This large complex, known popularly as “Oliver” or simply “The Mental Hospital”, lay on the outskirts of Edmonton to the northeast. Our ecumenical group of 6 or 8 clergy was shown by our guide, the hospital administrator himself, from one ward to the next, in one facility after the other, until near the end of the tour he took us, as clergy, to a ward normally off limits for guests, he said. At the end of a short broad corridor we came to a closed door in the wall to the left. The door was furnished with a small window of reinforced glass, less than a foot square. Peering through it one by one we could see a dozen or fifteen people milling about in a large open area. I noted, and our guide pointed out, that there were no sharp edges anywhere. All the furnishings were padded and bolted in place. The walls were also padded. When we had all had a good look, our guide stated in a matter-of-fact manner, “This is where we house our patients whom we suspect of being demon-possessed.”

Clergy or not, that statement floored us.

Finally one of our number sputtered out, “What do you do with them?”

“We call in the exorcist of the Archdiocese of Edmonton.”

It was one of the United Church ministers, a good friend of mine, who blurted out, “Does it work?”

“If our diagnosis is correct, it always works.”

You will remember that the younger clergy among us would just have been weaned on Rudolf Bultmann, the great German Lutheran demythologizer of the Scriptures, who had taught us how to strip the Gospel of those elements deriving from a pre-scientific world view so that “modern man” wouldn’t trip over them and miss the Gospel. For him, Satan and the demons were among the most obvious of such elements used by the ancients to describe conditions now better understood in psychological or psychiatric categories. A modern mental health facility was the last place we expected to find them “resurrected”.

For me, it was as though our guide had loosened or even, God forbid, had removed the keystone holding up a vast mental archway over my head which it had taken me years to construct stone by stone. All but one of us (the elderly Pentecostal minister) returned home that day stunned. Even the young Catholic priest who had organized this tour seemed jarred loose from his bearings.

How could I take this seriously? How could I not take this seriously?

“Someone was Praying”

Several years came and went during which I served pastorates at First Lutheran Church in Calgary (1968-72) and Bethel Lutheran Church in Camrose (1973-80), both in Alberta. Thanks to the experience just related, I was broadening my reading (Morton Kelsey, Francis McNutt, Maurice Rawlings, etc.), exposing myself to seminars conducted by people like Elizabeth Kuebler-Ross, and otherwise slowly shifting my mental furniture around to accommodate a broader view of reality than the closed “scientific” system within which I had become comfortable in my well-considered Lutheran orthodoxy.

All of this reading and studying was a necessary prelude to what God thrust upon me in the fall of 1979, if memory serves me right. Here I will spare you no details, as they are all significant.

One day a man showed up at the parsonage adjacent to Bethel Lutheran Church to enroll his two children, a girl in Grade Four and a son in Grade Two, in our Sunday School. He said he worked away from home most of the time and that he wanted his kids to be raised Lutheran, as he had been. That was the last time I ever saw him. The next Sunday I noticed a large distinctive-looking woman whom I took to be their mother drop them off for Sunday School and pick them up afterwards. This went on for a few weeks.

Then one Sunday I noticed the same woman, whom we will call Colleen, and her two children sitting at the very back of the full church up against the wall under the balcony. After the sermon, during the Liturgy of Holy Communion, just as I was elevating the chalice filled with newly consecrated wine, now the Blood of Christ, I heard a stir in the back of the church. Later when I looked out on the congregation, she and the children were gone.

Within days of that event and following a casual conversation between an older Baptist minister and me at a breakfast meeting of the Ministerial Association, a neighbour came to my door with an audio-tape which he said his pastor (that Baptist minister) had asked him to bring to me with the urgent request that I listen to it immediately and return it to him by the weekend. As I had good reason to honour my elder colleague (whose sons subsequently founded the Rosebud Theatre near Drumheller), early the next morning I listened to the tape. It was a lecture, as I recall, at an evangelical conference of some kind, by a man named “Todd”, under heavy body-guard, who had spent the greater part of his life deep in the bowels of witchcraft and who, by God’s grace, had met Jesus Christ as Redeemer and Lord and been released from his bondage. Lurid details abounded in the story he told. It seems he had inherited his high position in the world of witchcraft, a position which as a matter of course involved him in the “normal” execution of unimaginable horrors and deceptions, attended by unthinkable atrocities perpetrated on children and women especially, including human sacrifice. I was tempted to take the whole story as nothing more than the ramblings of a very sick mind. He spelled out in detail the distinctions and the similarities between Satanism and the “ancient” practices of witchcraft in its varied forms with its varied histories, both real and imagined. He claimed that networks of sheer evil exist worldwide, infiltrating otherwise innocent-looking groups and institutions, and he spelled this out also in some detail. Their only purpose is to gain control over people in the service of Satan, whether they admit it or not, and to enslave them in both subtle and overt ways, the perpetrators as much as the victims, to the practice of anything and everything forbidden by God. He underscored the danger associated with efforts to help “innocent” people drawn into this vicious web and the need for constant prayer coverage over those who undertake to help them find their way out. My head was spinning when I finally came to the end of the thing. I didn’t want to believe a word of it. I

wanted to believe that whatever truth there might be in it was grossly exaggerated.

Reluctantly I asked my wife to listen to the tape with me, to see what she made of it. A couple of days later she did and was just as appalled by what she heard and as skeptical about it as I was. Then I returned it to my colleague through the good offices of our neighbour, having discharged my duty to him.

The very next day my wife met me at the door at lunchtime. “That woman, Colleen, phoned this morning. I almost hung up on her. I thought it was a crank call. All I heard at first was a low growling into the phone. Finally she identified herself enough so that I understood who she was and that she needed to see you right now in her home. I told her I’d pass on the message when you got home. Something is very wrong. I don’t feel at all good about this.”

“I’ll have lunch and then go see what she wants.”

“You should phone Vince and Luther to pray for you while you are with her,” my wife wisely suggested.

Vince and Luther were brothers, ordained Lutheran pastors, who were what is sometimes called “prayer warriors”. They readily consented. Luther, who was convalescing, said he would not let up until he heard from me again. I’m sure he didn’t fully realize what he had agreed to. Somehow, both Vince and Luther sensed in advance that they would be doing battle with the hosts of evil that day.

Colleen’s house was only two blocks away. I had been in it many times before when it belonged to an older couple from our parish. In fact, when the man of the house became house-bound due to a stroke, I had celebrated the full Holy Communion rite at least once

a month in their living room. Recently they had moved to B.C. to be closer to their only son and had sold this house.

I rang the doorbell. Then I knocked at the screen door. The main front door was standing wide open. From the living room I heard a grunt from the far corner that could have been interpreted as an invitation to walk in. I did, into a room that was now far from the cheery living room I knew so well.

“Close the door,” I heard from the far corner. I did. Darkness returned to the room. Heavy shades covered every window in the living room, dining room, and kitchen. It took my eyes a few moments to adjust.

Then I saw her slouched down, her eyes closed, in a big overstuffed chair against the far wall. Her bulk filled the chair, with her legs stretched out straight in front of her. She motioned for me to sit on the couch against another wall at right angles to her chair. A small side table separated my couch and her chair.

Over the next several hours, at the rate sometimes of no more than a word or two per minute, she choked out her story for me, piece by piece. It was as though she was being forced to communicate with me through a hand strangling her around the throat. At times the words dribbled out a little more freely. But when she came to something especially painful for her to remember or especially dangerous for her to disclose to me in the light of her oaths of secrecy, they nearly stopped altogether. I can't describe the Herculean effort it took her to form even a single syllable at those sensitive points in her story.

Now, there was only one reason why I was able to relate at all to anything she was telling me: I had just heard it all on the “Todd” tape, twice! God had pre-arranged it so that I would be in a position to play a part in releasing this woman and her family from

their hell on earth. For her, it consisted of 25 years of a double life, a “normal” life on the one side and a horrendous life on the other, the latter being the price she was convinced she had to pay to shield the former from harm. And the price kept escalating.

Her personal story, as she told it in more detail, involved frequent abuse as a child, having to hide daily in a dark closet from a raging father, a “voice” that spoke to her often as she cowered there in the dark (the same “voice” that she had heard speaking in the dark ever since), that “voice” one day offering her the protection she craved and showing her a vision of a man in a long black coat at the bus stop across from where she lived. He was just waiting for her to come over and ask him if he would protect her, she was told. And so that day, when it was safe for her to come out of the closet, she looked out the window, and there he was, just as she had been shown! She raced out of the house and approached the man. “I’m the one you’ve been shown,” he assured her before she had said anything to him. “I can protect you. Would you like that?” And that’s how it all started for this little eight-year-old girl.

At first the price of that protection was minimal, and the benefits great. He was always there when she needed him, year after year. He won her trust as he skillfully closed the web around her, exacting more and more from her in exchange for “protecting” her, and always assuring her that she was just one step away from total security, total protection.

“And were you?” I asked very gently.

“O No! No! No!” she howled, gripping her head between her hands.

“No! No! No! No! Nooooo!.....”

This led her into series of disconnected wails and groans punctuated with enough words for me to grasp in a general way what was going through her mind. I understood that she had been made the head of a coven in a nearby city, driven by her superiors to perform atrocities in their midst which I cannot bring myself to describe in more than general terms. She spoke of babies purchased on the streets of Central America, smuggled into Canada and ritually disemboweled right here without a trace; of consecrated Hosts smuggled out of churches, especially Catholic and Anglican* churches, for purposes of ritual desecration in the most heinous ways; of recruiting vulnerable children for sexual rites and addicting them to illegal drugs, especially the children of adult members of the coven. As she spoke it occurred to me that the reason she was so desperate to break free of the coven at this time was that her children were next on the list: she was no longer able to use her position in the coven to protect them from the fate of all the other children of members of the coven. At that same instant it dawned on me that the names of her two children were same names identified on the “Todd” tape as the two most common ones used for sons and daughters of practitioners of witchcraft.

(*Some years later as Lutheran bishop I was the guest of my Anglican colleague at All Saints’ Cathedral in Edmonton. While distributing the Body of Christ at the altar rail, I noticed a man who pretended to place It in his mouth and then, when he thought I wasn’t looking, instead tucked It under the cuff of his shirt. I alerted the bishop who told one of the sidemen. The man was apprehended on his way out of the cathedral and the Blessed Sacrament recovered. The bishop later told me that, upon investigation, it was learned that this man was indeed procuring highly prized consecrated Hosts for purposes of communal desecration in an occult setting. In some areas of the world this practice has become so common that Catholic Church authorities

are again encouraging reception of the Sacred Host on the tongue only, not in the hand.)

As she was describing for me these horrors by fits and starts, more to herself than to me, a very strange transformation slowly came over her. Ever so gradually I sensed her slipping away from me and back into the darkness from which she had partially emerged to tell me her story. Never once had she looked at me or even glanced my way. Her eyes were at all times either shut or gazing straight ahead. But I had been looking at her the whole time, which now all of a sudden became a problem for her. She blurted out with her eyes shut tight, “Stop looking at me! The light is killing me!”

I turned my eyes away from her. A few moments later, though, without thinking, I glanced at her again. By this time she was facing away from me with her eyes pinched shut. “Stop that!” she wailed. “I can’t stand it!”

And then this:

“Just like I couldn’t stand the light shooting out of that cup you held up on Sunday. What did you have in it?”

“The Blood of Christ.”

“Ooooooooooooooooooh!”

And with that I lost her completely.

It began with low grunts and moans in a slowly building rhythm and volume. Coherent words became fewer and fewer. She was no longer capable of describing from the outside, even hesitantly, what it felt like to be a pawn of Evil because now she was becoming one. She seemed to be sinking deeper and deeper into the netherworld, more and more out of reach. I was dumbfounded.

At length she took out a book of matches and mindlessly, it seemed, lit one at a time, running her finger through the flame and mumbling some kind of incantation. I surmised that it was directed against me. At that point, unequipped to help her in that state, I decided that there was no further point in my remaining with her. I got up to leave. As I opened the door to go, Colleen let out the most blood-curdling unearthly cackle I have ever heard, a laugh straight from hell. I turned around, marched straight over to Colleen, looked her in the face, closed eyes and all, and said: “Neither you nor any one you can invoke has authority over Jesus Christ and His servants. When you really want His help, you can get back in touch with me. Until then, you will remain where you choose to remain.”

This cut her off in mid-cackle. Like a pricked balloon she collapsed back into her chair, whimpering like a wounded animal. I turned and left the house.

When I got home, I phoned Luther and Vincent and thanked them for their prayers.

I was not able to make good on my promise to Colleen that she could get back in touch with me because the next day I had to leave for the Bishop’s Study Conference for Pastors at the Grey Nuns Centre in Edmonton, where I was one of two featured speakers. Each of us was responsible for three one-hour presentations during the course of the gathering. With these events hot in my mind, I devoted my last session to a blow-by-blow account of what I had just experienced, dangling it before them without denouement, as an example of the lengths to which God is prepared to go to wrest His children free from the evil one, which I saw clearly as His agenda with Colleen and her family, though I had no inkling as to how He was going to achieve it.

(Incidentally, one result of my sharing this unfinished story with this particular group of clergy was that six years later when I became the bishop of most of them in the merged church, they were not the least bit shy about seeking out my advice on such matters. It was all a part of God's ongoing redemptive work.)

But Colleen's story was far from over. After I had left for Edmonton the next day, she showed up at the door. When my wife broke the news to her that I would be away for four days, she became frantic, pacing back and forth in the parking lot, unsure of what to do next. Then she spotted a church across the bridge over Mirror Lake on the other side of the highway. And that is how God led her to the one experienced exorcist we had in our community at that time, the American pastor of the Church of God, and his wife.

This is what I remember of what he later told me.

Colleen charged into the church and demanded help. Seeing how distraught she was and detecting something demonic in her speech, the pastor called on his wife for help and asked her to contact two specific elders to drop everything and come at once. As they were all praying over Colleen, the demon seized her; and sensing, perhaps, that the end was near, it charged at the pastor and his three helpers in a blind fury. They feared for their lives. The pastor commanded the demon to depart in Jesus' name. The demon threw Colleen down right where she was, between two pews, both screwed solidly into the floor, which she proceeded to rip out of the floor and fling into the air like toothpicks. Once more, the pastor ordered the demon to depart in Jesus' name. Colleen collapsed in a heap among the pews. Her breathing stopped long enough to alarm the pastor and the others. They were about to call an ambulance when she opened her eyes and looked straight into the pastor's eyes. "Thank you," she said.

I assume they spent some time with her until they thought she was well enough to let her leave on her own. They themselves were exhausted. Colleen, it seems, wandered around town, at a loss where to go. No one but Colleen was in a position to appreciate that she absolutely could not return to her own house until it had been cleansed of every vestige of witchcraft and then exorcized, and even then it was almost impossible for her to enter it, weeks later. Her children were not an immediate concern as they had been staying in a nearby village with her mother who often looked after them when Colleen was unable or unfit to care for them. So where was she to go now?

She went, for whatever reason God only knows, to the Smith Clinic just up the street from our church. She saw the doctor to whom she was randomly assigned, a Dr. Mol who spent only a year or two associated with that clinic. Dr. Mol committed her to the St. Mary's Hospital with one prescription only: To read the Gospel of St. John by morning.

Two days later when I return from the conference my wife told me that Colleen was a patient at the hospital. I went to see her immediately. She was sitting on the edge of her bed with a Bible in her hand, "(clothed and) in her right mind" (cf. Mark 5:15). She looked me in the eye – wonder of wonders! – and calmly explained to me that now she and her loved ones were truly safe in the love of Jesus. I visited her daily until she left the hospital some weeks later. Dr. Mol had put her on a strict weight loss program and was keeping her in the hospital under surveillance.

I bumped into Dr. Mol at a barbeque at the home of mutual friends not long afterwards. I asked him, an active member of the Christian Reformed Church, what had led him to make the unusual prescription he had given to Colleen. He had no idea. He had followed a hunch, he said. I asked if he had ever made a similar

prescription before or since. He said he had not, and he wasn't sure he would ever do it again. I reminded him of the passages in Scripture (Matthew 12:43-45) in which Jesus declares that if a demon is cast out of someone and nothing holy replaces it, it will invite seven other demons to occupy the empty space within that person, leaving the last state of that man worse than the first. It was obvious to both of us that God had used Dr. Mol to fill the vacated space in Colleen with something holy, with self-evident results. He shook his head in amazement.

Shortly after Colleen left the hospital, her husband moved her and their children to a town nearby. Through her mother, who had long since separated from Colleen's father, I learned some years later that she, a practising Baptist, had never stopped praying for Colleen from the time she was a little girl when she realized that something was terribly wrong. She was still praying for them all, she assured me, because life had not been easy for Colleen and the family following her exorcism; but they were making it.

As a postscript may I mention that while Colleen was still in the hospital, I happened to meet on the street the man who had delivered me the "Todd" tape. He launched into a detailed story of a remarkable deliverance that had just occurred in our community. It wasn't until he was nearly finished that I realized he was telling me a garbled version of Colleen's story! It was almost unrecognizable. I can see why Jesus told people whom he healed to tone it down. Exaggeration is bad enough, but out and out distortion and egregious error are no testimony to the work of God.

For my part, I learned from this event that it is an honour to have a small part, alongside many other servants of God, in a big work of God. God is the conductor, we are the orchestra, and if the cello player plays the cello part well, that is all that is expected.

There is another postscript. Because a distorted version of events was making the rounds, I devoted my sermon one Sunday, when the appointed Scripture readings for the day lent themselves to it, to a discreet outline of what God in His love had done for Colleen and her family. A member of the parish, a family man who was a pastor's son and a geologist, was attending our church with his wife and children for the last time prior to moving back to Calgary. Their belongings had already left for Calgary where his head office was located. He had been working out of that office for some months already, and now his family was joining him.

I was sound asleep that same evening when just before midnight the phone awakened me. It was the geologist, phoning from Calgary. He was audibly shaken. This is what he told me.

“This morning when I left church, I thought to myself, ‘What a pile of garbage! I’m glad we don’t ever have to go back there again. Who can believe that junk?’

“Well, when we got to Calgary the phone was ringing. It was my secretary. She said something that made no sense to me at all. She was very frightened. She’d phoned me because she knew my dad is a pastor, so maybe I could help her. Well, I’ve been with her now for several hours. In a nutshell, last Friday at her bridge club she found she knew exactly what cards all the other players were holding in their hand. It really spooked her. Then she found that she knew other things she shouldn’t have known, too. That’s when she got really scared. She shuffled a deck of cards and turned it upside down. She knew every card before she turned it up. That’s when she phoned me. As I said, I’ve been with her for several hours. I’ve tested this thing from every angle in every imaginable way. There isn’t a chance in a trillion that this is nothing but a phenomenal string of luck. Something’s got into her. I recalled your words this morning that the surest sign that someone is possessed by an alien mind is when he has accurate and verifiable

knowledge of something he has absolutely no way of knowing on his own. That describes my secretary to a 'T'. What do I do for her?"

Providentially again, I had that very afternoon skimmed over a newsletter from the Pastoral Institute in Calgary which announced that a Christian specialist in paranormal psychology trained for these very situations had just joined the staff. I made the referral. The geologist's wife was the one who told me later that it was a perfect match. The secretary was not only released from the grip of the alien mind by the power of Christ but also given insight into what she had done inadvertently to invite that mind to take control of hers. She had had what the Gospels term an "unclean spirit" (Mark 1:23, etc.).

“I Didn’t Know”

A few years later when we were living on a farm between Bashaw and Donalda and serving Bethany and Sharon Lutheran Churches of Donalda, the Lutheran pastor in Bashaw told me of a strange situation she was facing. It seems that a farm family in her parish was living in fear because of all the unexplainable phenomena that were occurring in and around their house: flashing lights, moving objects, strange voices, among other things. Prayers on the pastor’s part seemed to help for a short while, but then it all started up again, worse than ever. They thought they were going crazy.

I joined her at the farmhouse where we heard an almost unbelievable story of weird happenings. Using a somewhat modified version of the Lutheran Order for the Blessing of a Home, we then went from room to room, carefully consecrating everything there to God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

A week later I received a phone call from the pastor. The phenomena were back, with a vengeance. The family was really worried this time. Would they have to abandon their home, leave the farm? This couldn’t go on! We arranged to meet again at the farm the following afternoon. But something came up and I couldn’t make it.

This time, in response to an insight that came in prayer, I phoned the pastor and suggested an approach she might take. It made sense to her. She started out by asking for permission to look through the house for possible undetected sources of the problem. They were only too happy to agree. She didn’t have to look for long. The first bedroom she checked belonged to their fourteen-year-old son. Under the bed, unknown to his parents, was a stash of comic books, a whole cardboard box full of them, on occult themes. The pastor had never seen anything like it. She didn’t know such comics existed: spells, incantations, voodoo, tarot cards, wild tales

extolling the preternatural, covens, sacrifices, ritual orgies - it was all there.

She asked the boy what he did with them. He read them at night with a flash light.

Had he tried any of the stuff suggested? A little, but mostly he just read about it.

Where did these things come from? Friends who exchanged comics with each other.

Was he prepared to part with them if it would restore normal life to the home? “Yes! For sure! **I didn’t know.**”

Was he prepared to burn them to destroy them? “Yes!”

Right now? “Right now!”

She explained that with our prayers we had closed the door of the house to these influences, but perhaps the window had been left open by accident. The comic books, and what went with them, may well have been that window.

So they lit a bonfire and all the comics went up in ashes. Then they re-consecrated the house. With that, the matter came to an abrupt end.

If these measures had not succeeded, we could have moved on to procedures for dealing with poltergeist phenomena and the unquiet dead. But at that time, we knew nothing about these possibilities, so it was a good thing we didn’t need them.

It was during these years also that I read an article in a respected Lutheran missionary journal which reported that an entire village

of some 200 individuals in Tanzania had had to be exorcized one by one before they could be baptized, by missionaries completely untrained for this. This report reminded me of similar incidents on a grander scale from the experience of the Early Church, mainly in Asia Minor, if I remember correctly, as reported by Adolf von Harnack, the German Church historian of the late Nineteenth Century. In fact, von Harnack called Christian Baptism as practiced in the Early Church “the ultimate exorcism”. Following on a series of minor exorcisms designed to loosen Satan’s hold on the catechumens, Baptism broke that hold definitively and brought them under the dominion of Jesus Christ. In the world of Antiquity rife with the occult imported from Persia and all the bondages associated with it, von Harnack attributed the success of the Church in the face of brutal persecution to the singular effectiveness of Baptism in achieving this transfer. Any risk seemed small, he claimed, compared to the victory over the demonic forces received in Baptism. One day of true life in Christ was worth infinitely more to converts than many years of existence in a living hell. Numerous martyrs testified to this. They died bathed in the light of Christ, as though they were about to be born, not to die. They were rising into the light, not descending into the darkness.

A few years ago I, along with a whole church full of worshipers, witnessed at close range a corroborating incident. The mother of a child being baptized went into a seizure just after the priest had pronounced the ritual Prayer of Exorcism over the child she was holding in her arms. She tossed the baby at the godmother at the last instant. She then had three seizures between the Altar and the Tabernacle as the congregation prayed the Rosary for her until the arrival of the ambulance, eight more seizures in the ambulance on the way to the hospital, and continuous seizures for the next three days. She was transferred between hospitals twice, finally being airlifted to a major medical centre. She had no history of seizures and no evidence whatever was found of a physical cause. The

seizures stopped only when a hospital chaplain prayed a prayer of deliverance over her and thus completed, as it were, the exorcism begun during the Rite of Baptism. There has, to my knowledge, never been a recurrence, though I have subsequently lost touch with the family. Indications are that the mother “learned her lesson” about choosing the occult rather than practising the Faith. And the priest, who was understandably shaken by it all, wondered out loud afterwards if he should have continued the exorcism on the spot.

“Deliverance”

As always, God was a step ahead of me again when it came to preparing me for my part in some pieces of his saving work. I had not been serving as Lutheran Bishop of Alberta and the Territories for very long when I visited the Anglican Bishop of the Arctic, the Rt. Rev. Jack Sperry, and his wife in their home in Yellowknife. Our wide-ranging conversation turned at one point to our respective experiences in dealing with the demonic, especially his among the aboriginal peoples of the North. Then he presented me with a copy of a recently published book edited by Michael Perry entitled Deliverance. It had been published through the Church of England as a result of extensive research and the collation of data authorized by the Bishop of Exeter in the field of deliverance ministry, preternatural phenomena, and related areas in which the Church is called upon for help. The book is well organized into progressive categories. It provides helpful analyses and many case histories to assist in discerning the true nature of a given phenomenon, supplies effective liturgical resources for dealing with it, gives guidelines for forming a healing team in each diocese, and warns not to attempt an exorcism without special training and the authorization by your bishop. The Rite of Major Exorcism is the only rite not published in the book and is available only to bishops for their discreet use.

Over the next 8 years or so I wore out my copy of the book. I asked our bookstore in Calgary to lay in a supply of them. And I informed our clergy about its usefulness.

I will give three instances out of several that I could mention in which the book was worth its weight in gold.

During the years I served as bishop (1985-1994) I probably stopped in at our large bookstore and warehouse in Calgary four or five times at most. On one such rare occasion, I had picked up a

few things and was getting ready to leave when one of our Calgary pastors, normally a soft-spoken man, virtually accosted me halfway up one of the aisles. “Am I ever glad to see you! I’ve just been handed the worst job of my life. A psychiatrist has referred a woman, a fringe member of our parish, to me because he can’t dislodge the demons that are after her, or so he says.” The unhappy pastor then went on to describe the woman’s symptoms, as she herself had described them to him, and finished by throwing up his hands and declaring, “Am I God? What am I supposed to do about this?”

Now, providentially, no more than a foot from my hand, on a shelf in the very aisle in which we were standing, was a stack of those books I had ordered, Deliverance, edited by Michael Perry. I picked one up, opened it to the appropriate chapter, and said to him, “This is what you are supposed to do about it.” He was flabbergasted. “Furthermore,” I said, “you’re not on your own. Just recently Pastor X had a case similar to yours. I put a little team together for him, as suggested in the book, with notable results. He and that team will be happy to work with you.” He shook his head. Pastor X was an intellectual, a disdainer of the charismatic renewal, someone my colleague admired and trusted.

“Let’s stay in touch.”

We did. Receiving regular reports for the next two or three weeks on how this woman’s plagued life was yielding to the gentle authority of Christ over the hosts of evil, mediated by none other than this reluctant pastor and his team of associates, was one of the deep joys of my years as bishop. As a result he found himself on the receiving end of referrals from other psychiatrists and he developed excellent insights and skills along the way.

The second instance in which this book proved its worth involved another bishop. By this time I had acquired the Rite of Major

Exorcism from the publishers of the book. Right in the middle of his tenure as the bishop of a small and widely scattered Lutheran Church body in a South American country, this man had come to Edmonton to get treatment for his wife, a Canadian slowly dying of cancer. While he was there, I appointed him to serve one of our parishes in the city as interim pastor. This was a happy arrangement. One day he came to me with the story of a man associated with that parish who was exhibiting strong signs of classical demon possession such as the bishop had previously encountered in Latin America. He sought my advice on how to handle it.

We agreed that within the same parish he was serving there were the makings of an excellent support team – a respected psychiatrist, several medical doctors and nurses, some social workers and a retired pastor. I provided the bishop with his own copy of Deliverance and, because he was a bishop, of the Rite of Major Exorcism. I suggested that he gather his team for a briefing in line with the recommendations in Deliverance. And I authorized him to proceed with the exorcism unless the psychiatrist thought it unnecessary or unwise.

It was on a Wednesday evening that the team met in the church with the needy man. The exorcism, though lengthy, was entirely successful. The demon was eventually dislodged and fled. The man was himself again. The experience was very intense for all. For the psychiatrist it was an unforgettable experience of witnessing an alien mind operating independently within another mind in a manner very different from schizophrenia, with a sudden and full cure achieved through the exorcism.

In the third instance I myself conducted the Rite of Deliverance (Minor Exorcism) because the subject was the daughter of one of the pastors I was serving. Her psychiatrist phoned me directly and requested it. Although prayers of deliverance are often a process

involving repeated sessions, a kind of peeling back of layers, in this case one prayer session with anointing and Holy Communion proved sufficient to release her entirely from the blackness of the demon's oppression which had become very aggressive after plaguing her for a long time. There has been no recurrence.

On another occasion I used the Rite of Deliverance to release one of the pastors I served from a similar oppression stemming from his unprotected involvement in trying to help someone trapped in satanic rituals. One session was sufficient to restore him fully to the graces of his Baptism. On still another occasion I successfully used the Rite of Exorcism of Places to cleanse a church building from end to end. It had been badly desecrated by the sins of its previous pastor. His successor, an academic, but very aware spiritually, sensed the presence of raw evil throughout the facility although he did not have the slightest knowledge of what had happened there to cause it. It was polluting everything. At Christ's command, that dark presence was expelled, and the light of Christ returned to His holy place.

“Just in Case There’s Any Doubt in Anyone’s Mind”

Every year during my tenure as bishop, I gathered all our chaplains for a day together in October. Each year we focused on a theme, with lots of time for discussion and sharing. These were men and women, all ordained, serving as prison chaplains, university chaplains, street ministry chaplains, and of course hospital chaplains – some 20 to 25 of them. In my final year before retirement I decided to bite the bullet and focus on the demonic, to equip them to identify it accurately and respond to it appropriately.

The meeting was scheduled for all day Friday. It was surely no coincidence that I, who normally handled about three or four cases of this sort of thing **per year**, had one case **per day** that week – four in all – the final case involving one of our street ministry chaplains in a big way.

I set the stage that Friday by sharing with the group some of the reasons why I had been forced to take demon possession and related phenomena seriously – reasons of which you are already aware. Then I simply told them that each day that week I had had a different case to deal with, two referred to me by psychiatrists and one by another Lutheran bishop who didn’t know what to do. As for the fourth case....

At that point I asked the street chaplain if she was prepared to tell what she and I had gone through in the past 24 hours. She was, still trembling. People listened. Here was a no-nonsense person if ever there was one. She started out by paying me a big compliment I didn’t really deserve, about my dropping everything and being there for her at all hours when she was desperate, and not knowing what to do.

Then she said, “And just in case there’s any doubt in anyone’s mind about the truth of what the bishop has been telling us, let me

tell you what we've just been through,... if I can." She stood up and gripped the back of her chair for support.

Here is a sketch of what she shared with the whole group in greater detail:

A desperate young man wanted to part ways with a motorcycle gang who vowed to kill him for that reason and placed a curse on him. He turned to our petite chaplain for help. She phoned me early Thursday morning, described his location and the very imminent danger he was in, and asked me what I thought she should do. There seemed only one choice. By a sheer miracle she managed to whisk him out from under the nose of the gang at the last possible moment. Later in the morning she phoned me again in a whisper from their hiding place near the scene where they had been cowering for hours as the gang, who knew he'd been there, fanned out in search of him. His increasingly frantic behaviour was about to blow their cover, she informed me. They needed a safe house NOW. I asked if she could get him into her car unnoticed. She said she'd have to try. In the end, she did manage to pack him undetected into the backseat. She casually drove away from the scene and called me from a phone booth at a gas station. By now, she said, he was raving, out of his mind with fear, crouched on the floor of the back seat. I told her to bring him directly to the Stillpoint House of Prayer (God bless those Ursuline sisters!) just off Whyte Avenue, and then I phoned the sisters and told them what I had done. When they got there, the poor man was completely beside himself. Weird sounds were coming from his throat. His breathing was heavy and irregular. The chaplain didn't know whether Stillpoint or anywhere else would be able to handle him. She managed to get him out of the car and through the front door at Stillpoint. The first person they met head-on in the entryway on his way home was the elderly retired Catholic bishop of Nelson, B.C., the Most Rev. Emmett Doyle, accompanied by another elderly priest. They took one look at the man, and at the

frazzled chaplain, and led them both straight into the adjacent chapel. The man freaked out. He flew into a rage, uttering unmentionable obscenities in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament - Jesus. There was no time for observing the fine points. Bishop Doyle exorcized him on the spot. The biker dropped to the ground like a dead man. When he finally opened his eyes, he was calm and in his right mind. After prayer and many words of assurance from that courageous old bishop, our chaplain took him to his room and tucked him in bed like a mother, leaving him in the care of those beloved but somewhat traumatized sisters. He slept the sleep of the innocent.

He was still there even as she was standing here among us telling us about it.

(That morning, by the way, the sister superior phoned me and apologized for the unauthorized exorcism. I assured her that God had arranged for Bishop Doyle to be in the right place at the right time to do exactly the right thing. The next day the exorcised man was spirited out of town by reliable contacts of our chaplain, to parts unknown.)

Back at the chaplains' gathering you could hear a pin drop. The street chaplain sat down. Nobody said a word. Finally one of the hospital chaplains broke the silence.

“We needed to hear that.”

For the rest of the day, one story after another came tumbling out. “I thought I was the only one who had this sort of thing happening to him.” “Let me tell you about what I found in the Drumheller prison.” Almost everyone had a story or two to tell, some bone-chilling, some heart-warming, some tragic, some mysterious. By the end of the day, we were all seeing each other in a different light – as servants of Christ confronting the powers of darkness in the

setting to which we were called, and freeing His captive loved ones in His name.

Two of the university chaplains, a married team, were uncharacteristically silent throughout the day. I knew why. They had virtually abandoned Christ by redefining Him out of the way. They sympathized with Satan by adopting a yin/yang mentality which trivializes both good and evil. Nothing we were sharing that day had any place in their New Age world. One of them seemed genuinely disturbed, even challenged, by what he was hearing; the other one became downright angry, but she held it inside behind a condescending smile. They had been routinely recommending and modeling behaviours and practices for their students which openly repudiated their Baptismal covering and laid them wide open to the demonic. I know. I'm still in touch with some of the "kids" they messed up. And their successor had to face some of the consequences, too.

Except for that university chaplain, I think everybody present was aware that God had arranged that week in such a way as to compel us to take seriously an aspect of ordained ministry in Christ's name which, though long neglected in our circles, is and has always been absolutely foundational (cf. Matthew 10:1, etc.) and is in our time more essential than ever in the proclamation and life of the Reign of God.

“I Knew What I Had to Do”

I am free to share this story about Dr. Walter Freitag, the late Professor of Historical Theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon, because he freely shared it with all and sundry during the last year of his life. I heard it at the last meeting of the Synod Examining Committee which he attended at my office in Edmonton before his death from cancer a few months later. All his professional life Professor Freitag had taught the course on Bultmann to seminarians because he had an encyclopedic knowledge of the man's vast and influential works. Remember what I said earlier about Bultmann's view of demon possession.

Professor Freitag was convalescing in the cancer ward in the hospital in Saskatoon, still feeling quite weak. In a room not far from his there was a female patient who was “hallucinating”. No drugs, no counseling, no restraints could control her. She seemed endowed with superhuman strength. In sheer desperation, someone suggested bringing Professor Freitag into her room to pray for her. So they wheeled him in.

Now, Professor Freitag knew his Bible. What he saw before him was a classical case of demon possession, he later recounted. I have no fresh memory of the details of what followed, but I do recall his remark that everything Bultmann had consigned to the dustbins of history was being played out before his eyes. He'd never met the woman before, yet “she” knew things about him that only he and his wife knew. And “her” strength was indeed superhuman, though she herself looked frail and worn. “I knew what I had to do, and I did it,” he told us. Scarcely believing that he was doing it, he commanded the demon to depart from the woman “in virtue of the authority bestowed on me by Jesus Christ as His ordained minister.”

And the demon gave a long loud shriek and departed.

The woman fell back in her bed and from that point on was docile and fully cooperative.

Professor Freitag was amused by the steady stream of medical personnel who paraded in and out of his hospital room for the next few days just to find out what in the world he had done to her.

“Nothing,” he told them. “I was just the scalpel in the Surgeon’s hand.”

Everyone who knew him said the same thing. In the last months of his life, something was different. God used him to free the woman, but perhaps God also used the woman to free something in him. I’m just guessing.

...Jesus' Command to Heal the Sick in His Name

“Thank Your God for a Miracle”

In my upbringing there was a place, albeit a modest place, for miracles of healing. I was raised in a Lutheran parsonage. The Gospel which Dad proclaimed Sunday after Sunday was replete with miracles of healing on the part of Jesus, miracles Dad took very seriously because they were part and parcel of the Word of God. He was a master at drawing out the inner meaning of Jesus' miracles for their value as Signs of the Kingdom. He never suggested that the miracles themselves were anything less than Deeds of Power (“Mighty Works” is what they were called back then) in response to human suffering and misery, designed to create and shape our faith in Jesus as Redeemer and Healer of the world. Nor did he ever suggest that they were confined to the Age of the Apostles. His prayers for healing, both public and private, implied at the very least that he believed that God was still free to provide them for people in our own time. But for all that, in our minds the “ministry of healing” was more medical than spiritual, and the primary role of the Church was to help people accept the inevitable and not lose hope.

Dad himself became the occasion for expanding the scope of our understanding. As the result of a freak well-drilling accident, Dad received a powerful blow from a whip-lashed rope directly on one of his eyeballs. Specialists informed him that his retina was irreparably damaged - smashed and detached. He lay motionless and blind in the hospital for weeks for fear of hemorrhaging, his eyes bandaged to discourage them from moving until the blood had slowly drained off. His specialist warned him that the best he could expect was reasonably good vision in one eye only. His days as a private pilot were over. People, hundreds of them, were praying for him. When the day came to take off the bandages and examine the

injured eye, the specialist couldn't believe what he was seeing. The eye was in perfect condition. Only the iris was affected, stuck in the wide-open position. From that day on, Dad needed a dark lens over that eye in a bright light. Otherwise, everything was normal.

“Pastor,” his physician told him in words that became legendary in our family. “Before you leave this hospital, I want you to go into the chapel, get down on your knees, and thank your God for a miracle. I have never seen a smashed and detached retina repair itself even slightly, let alone perfectly, nor has anyone else I know of. They just don't do that without Help.”

Dad was deeply grateful for his healing, but quite self-conscious about referring to it, true to his stoic Norwegian heritage. As far as he was concerned, the whole point of his healing lay in its value as a sign, a sign designed to commit him more whole-heartedly to his vocations as pastor, husband and father, and, yes, as pilot!

With all that, we tended to dismiss all self-proclaimed faith-healers as charlatans, as some of course were. As for Lourdes and Fatima, they were little more than words to us, more suggestive of Alice-in-Wonderland than of Jesus in Galilee. We remained in ignorance of them because we were so suspicious of all things Catholic back then.

“University and Seminary Years”

At university (mainly at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, 1958-62) my primary influences were an orthodox pietism on the one hand which took miracles seriously but tended to leave them in the Bible where they belonged, and a liberal Protestantism on the other hand which played down their literal factualness both then and now. There were, however, a few luminous exceptions, like Dr. Arne Flaten, our respected and much loved Art Professor, who conducted an informal weekly prayer group composed mostly of students in which, it was said, healing prayer occurred and miracles were not unknown. It was all kept very low-key, consistent with Dr. Flaten's self-effacing personality. I learned of it late in my senior year and was able to attend it a few times, with appreciation.

Seminary took me first to the heartland of Protestant Rationalism, the University of Strasbourg in France (1962-64), and then to Northwestern Lutheran Theological Seminary in Minneapolis (1964-65).

During my university and seminary years I personally experienced two physical healings very different from one another. The first occurred when I was working in the US Forest Service out of Challis, Idaho, on a summer job. I was laying in a supply of firewood for a ranger station before riding the trail into my posting at the fire lookout cabin on Loon Creek Point. The day before I was scheduled to leave for the lookout, I became quite ill, with fever, sore throat, diarrhea, and other symptoms. I knew I wasn't up to the long ride on horseback in to the lookout. When I didn't show up for supper, the cook came to my cabin, discovered me in bed, and asked if I believed that Jesus could heal me. When I said I did, she laid her hands on my head and prayed a simple heart-felt prayer for my healing. Relief was instant. I enjoyed a good supper and a good sleep, and the next day drove my Studebaker to the end

of the road and was delivered by horse and mule to my lookout. Incidentally, through her prayer God seemed to have banished also another nagging physical problem that had been plaguing me for some time, a back condition about which she knew nothing.

Then, in February of 1963, while at seminary in France, I went to the Holy Land on my own, sailing from Marseilles by Jewish immigrant ship. During the 16 days I was there, I spent time in Jerusalem, Nazareth, at a kibbutz south of the Sea of Galilee, and at Eilat on the Gulf of Aqaba. On the recommendation of a friend, I sought lodging at the home of an elderly Hungarian Jewish Christian woman, Magda Kepesh. She invited local Christians to her home that evening for a prayer meeting “in your honour”, as she put it. During the prayer meeting I developed a high fever and a very sore throat. She saw I was not doing well, so when the meeting was over she packed me off to the townhouse next door where she ran a hostel for pilgrims. It was a single large room with cots up and down the walls, a washroom and a kitchenette. I went right to bed, but during the night my condition worsened until by morning I could swallow nothing, not even a sip of water. When I didn't show up for breakfast, Magda came to see how I was doing. She took one look and said, “My doctor is coming to check up on me this afternoon. I'll send her in here to have a look at you.”

By the time the doctor showed up, an Austria Jew with whom I could communicate in German, I was severely dehydrated and almost delirious from fever. She pumped me full of penicillin and said, “Another two hours, and it would have been too late. I'll see you in the morning.” That night my fever broke and my raw throat eased. I could take water. By morning, though weak, I knew I was on the mend.

This experience was a blessing in several ways.

It taught me that death is not always scary. I fully expected to die as that day dragged on. Yet, my heart was full of thanks to God for my 22 years of life, for my family and all my experiences, and above all for His love. This was a gift. It was just there. A sense of peace and well-being enveloped me. I totally trusted Him, whatever the outcome.

This permanently affected my approach to people who are dying. I have never since panicked at the prospect of someone's death, nor regarded it as an irreparable loss or separation. I have never had the feeling that things were out of control at the approach of death, or that someone is slipping through God's fingers by mistake. If the dying person is panicking or despairing, I claim for that person the peace God gave me, knowing how real it is. And I accompany that person, if he or she is willing, on whatever journey is still needed to reach the peace which I know is there for them. That too is a gift.

And, of course, there is the physical healing. Taking the doctor at her word, my life was saved because Magda just "happened" to have an appointment with her in the nick of time.

One more very significant event occurred at the end of those years. Just before graduation and ordination, Dr. Clemens Zeidler, our seminary president, gave us all a handbook on the place of the healing ministry in the normal life of the Church. "Don't put this one on the shelf until you have read it," he told us. Published by the Society of St. Luke, an Anglican group ecumenical in scope, it is a treasure-house of biblical, historical, theological, and practical wisdom. I treasured it and put pieces of it into practice right from the start in my first parish in Westlock.

And, of course, we all knew at that time that the Second Vatican Council had just restored the Sacrament of Anointing for the Sick to the dimensions it had had before Pope St. Gregory the Great, for

good and valid reasons, had limited its use to the dying and narrowed it down to “Extreme Unction (Unctio in extremis)”. Our own official prayer books were not long in following suit.

“Do You Think God Has a Sense of Humour?”

In the first two parishes I served in Alberta, Trinity Lutheran, Westlock, and First Lutheran, Calgary, I relied heavily for my ministry to the sick on that handbook from the Society of St. Luke. I nearly wore out one copy and procured a second copy.

It was in the third parish I served, Bethel, Camrose, that God brought about some fresh developments which led me to take the healing ministry more seriously still. As always, it began with a period of preparation.

Certain members of the parish, associated with the charismatic renewal movement, were keen to see us initiate a more consistent approach to the healing ministry. But they agreed with my recommendation that we devote a year to prayerful study and parish-wide catechesis before making any decisions about this. It was quite a year!

Beginning with Society of St. Luke materials, I plunged into the study to which I had committed myself, sharing the results as I went with a sizable group that met regularly. The entire leadership of the parish was involved, and many others besides. Morton Kelsey introduced me to the perspective and practices of the Early Church as revealed in the writings of the Church Fathers, which I was able to verify and amplify in the college library. I was surprised to find that, contrary to my assumptions, the healing ministry was as common and widespread throughout the first six centuries of the Church's life as it had been in the New Testament period. Even initially reluctant and skeptical Fathers, like St. Augustine of Hippo, found themselves witnessing and performing spectacular healings in the name of Christ. It was in fact the success of the healing ministry that caused Pope Gregory I to put the dampers on it in his letter to St. Augustine of Canterbury who had complained that his missionary monks had no time for

anything else! The witness of the Fathers is convincing, but it also serves, we found, as a much needed corrective to how the healing ministry is often conducted in our own times. For example, there is no evidence anywhere of public services or liturgies devoted primarily to healing. Virtually all reported healings occurred either in church within the context of the Eucharistic celebration, many of them spontaneously (for example, the healing in Constantinople of the man born blind who was standing near the pulpit, in the very middle of a homily being delivered by St. John Chrysostom), or as directed by St. James (5:14-15) in the context of the visitation of the sick. One might assume that healings also occurred when the sick approached the clergy in public, as in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. But direct evidence of this is scanty, whereas it abounds in the other two categories.

We learned that the healing prayer of the Church is always effective in promoting the healing desired by God for the sufferer, which is not necessarily the healing requested (cf. II Corinthians 12:1-10 in which Paul's "healing" was the message from the Lord that Paul was more useful to him with his thorn in the flesh than without it, leading him to embrace his affliction as a blessing). We also learned that although healing is normally related to faith, at times it can simply be God's way of making a point (cf. Acts 3:1-10).

Armed with these and other helpful insights from such credible contemporary practitioners as Fr. Francis McNutt, Agnes Sanford, Leanne Payne, Pastor Erwin Prang, the Christensens, and others, we cautiously designated three Sundays per year for exercising a healing ministry in the context of the principal Liturgy of the day. Those who sought healing were invited first to present themselves for the laying-on-of-hands and prayer from one or the other of two pastors available for it off to the side near the front of the church, and then to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. That was the formal side

of it. Of course, we also welcomed healing whenever God might choose to give it or when people requested it.

On the first designated Sunday, two people presented themselves, both of them a surprise to me. I wasn't sure if anyone would. As they are both still alive and easily identifiable, I will need to be somewhat vague in describing what happened.

The first person, a recent convert, had an ongoing inner struggle which caused her much anguish and many doubts as to whether grace or sin would prevail in her life. I had heard her confession earlier in the previous week and thought that that was the end of the matter. Now, it happened that a year or two earlier she had slammed the car door on her thumb nail and split it vertically up the middle. I knew all about it because it had happened in the parking lot of the church and I was right there. When the thumb eventually healed, she had two parallel nails, side by side, with a deep fissure down the centre. If she didn't file them back, they grew apart from each other in the shape of a miniature sling-shot, like two fangs.

Now, it happened that the Monday after she had presented herself for healing we were together at a meeting in the church basement.

Before the meeting started, she approached me away from the others and said coyly, "Pastor, do you think God has a sense of humour?"

"He'd better have," I replied.

"Well, look at this." She held up both thumbs before my eyes. They were identical, absolutely no trace of the split in the injured thumb. "Yesterday before church I filed this thumbnail down as usual. It was in two pieces then, growing away from each other side by side. Look at it now."

“Good mercy! What do you think God is telling you?” I asked, knowing the answer.

“He’s telling me to quit worrying and trust Him. Soon there will only be one me, not two. And He’ll be the Winner because now I belong to Him.”

“Right on!”

She had come seeking inner healing. And God gave it to her and sealed His gift with an unmistakable outer sign.

The second person, a winsome professional woman in her late twenties, raised in an evangelical church but only recently confirmed as a Lutheran, also came for prayer and received Jesus in the Eucharist. I had no idea what her need was. The following Sunday on her way out of church I asked her if she had been blessed the week before.

“Blessed? Of course! Jesus healed my lupus.”

I swallowed hard.

As it turned out, her condition had been so grave that she had had a return appointment with specialists at the University Hospital in Edmonton the Wednesday after she presented herself for prayer and anointing, to decide on a more advanced treatment plan. She kept the appointment. They found no trace of the lupus she had struggled with for years. This came as no surprise to her. Like the woman with the hemorrhage, having touched Jesus “she (had) felt in her body that she was healed of her disease” (Mark 5:29). She had spurned suitors up to that point in her life because of her worsening chronic ailment. But shortly thereafter she was transferred to Edmonton where she met and married a fine

Lutheran man, an American, and moved with him to the United States where they raised three children. My last contact with her was about fifteen years later. She was in perfect health.

Now, despite a full year's worth of preparation and study, you should know that I entered upon this phase of my ministry with fear and trepidation. The message to me contained in the results of this first hesitant attempt on my part to be faithful to my full vocation as an ordained minister (Matthew 10:1, etc.) was, "You're on the right track. Keep on going." I really needed to hear that. It helped me persist later when the results were not always so evident.

Nonetheless, I could easily fill this entire little book with stories similar to the foregoing, God's mercies are so great. But I will select only three more because of what each of them reveals about the extent of the love God has for His people, and how He perfectly orchestrates and dovetails events in our best interests, taking my cue from John 20:30-31.

“Where Can I Find a Lutheran Pastor Who Speaks German?”

Only twice in my years as bishop did I have a “free” Sunday morning. This was one of them. Now, one of the pastors I served was a patient in the Rockyview Hospital, recovering from a heart attack. I phoned him from my Calgary office the day before and asked him if he would like me to come and celebrate Holy Communion with him in his room at 10:00 a.m. the next day. He seemed happy at the prospect.

So that is what led to the highly unlikely scenario that a Lutheran bishop would be coming through the main doors of the Rockyview Hospital at 10:00 a.m. on a Sunday morning, armed with a Communion kit.

I wasn’t even all the way through the doors when a frantic woman accosted me and said, “Do you know where I can find a Lutheran pastor who speaks German?”

“You’re looking at one,” I replied.

“O, thank God! Please come with me. Dad is dying.”

“Give me a moment,” I said. “I’ll be right with you.”

I went to the desk, phoned the pastor who was expecting me, and told him I’d be a little late and would explain when I got there.

I followed the woman into a nearby room. “Dad”, whose retirement home was in B.C., had had a heart attack while visiting his children in Calgary. He was not expected to live. There were six or eight disconsolate people gathered around his bed. He was conscious, though gasping for air. I set up my Communion vessels on the bed table and proceeded to celebrate from memory a shortened form of the Eucharist in German, including the Rite of

Confession and Absolution. Dad received the Body and Blood of Christ by intinction, to his great consolation and the relief of his family. I will never forget how the anxiety drained out of his face and was replaced by a most peaceful smile. I then gathered up my things and said I would look in on them again as I left the hospital.

The story of what had just occurred, also greatly edified and consoled my convalescing pastor, as does every sign of God's love when one is vulnerable.

By the time I returned to "Dad's" room, his soul had departed. I learned that "Mom" had not felt up to the trip and had stayed back in B.C. Now she would have to come for the funeral, and she spoke only German. I found out where their children lived and recommended to them a German-speaking Lutheran pastor in their neighbourhood who would be happy to minister to them from that point on. Actually, they should have known the pastor already, and they were a bit embarrassed that they didn't. I do wonder whether the grace they experienced that morning resulted in a reawakening of their faith. God certainly did His part to encourage it.

“Grace Dovetailed”

My pastor-friend was shaken. “Deb” (not her real name), his wife, a head nurse in a large hospital in Edmonton, had just been diagnosed with a virulent and rare strain of breast cancer. The doctors called it “galloping”. Could my wife and I come for supper the next night and lead a small group of close friends and fellow-pastors in prayers and anointing for her healing?

The next evening we learned over supper that the doctors held out little hope for her. She had a type of cancer virtually impossible to control, she was told. The treatment would be harsh, the results most doubtful. And they would have to begin it at once if there were to be any hope at all of a temporary remission. This news had left the childless couple in a state of shock.

After supper we gathered in the living room. Knowing that this pastor had performed in Edmonton the wedding of the young woman whom God had healed of lupus in Camrose and had stayed in touch with her after she and her husband had moved to the United States, I began by sharing her story with them. I thought it would be helpful in strengthening their faith. As well as they had known her, they had no idea that she had experienced this healing of an incurable condition. I briefly alluded to two or three other similar healings and then suggested we prepare for prayer and anointing. At that very moment the telephone rang. The pastor answered the phone in his adjacent office. I heard him say, “Oh.... I’m so sad to hear that (several times). Is that right? A good idea.... He’s right here.... No, really, he is! I’ll tell you about it later. Let me put him on the line.”

“It’s for you, Bishop.”

On the end of the line was the quavering voice of a pastor I knew very well, phoning from B.C. She had served her internship under

our host in Edmonton some years before and they had remained fast friends. Now she was phoning to ask for his prayers for her mother, a pastor's wife from a town in Central Alberta who had just received word that she had a form of skin cancer which is nearly always fatal. Only then did my caller learn from me why it was that we were at our hosts' house unexpectedly that evening. She started apologizing for the interruption.

"No," I told her. "Don't apologize. This is the work of God. His hand is in it. Please phone your mother and tell her I'll be at their home, God willing, at 2:00 p.m. tomorrow afternoon for prayers and anointing. Your dad will want to join us."

"I can't believe I actually reached you there. Thank you so much. Tell everyone we're praying for 'Deb'. I'll let you get back to her now."

That evening we offered prayer and anointing for "Deb", and the next day I drove the three hours to the home of the pastor and his wife in Central Alberta where I heard the whole story and, together with her husband, offered prayer and anointing for her.

God in His mercy completely healed them both. These many years later they are still healthy for their age. Both of them told me that their doctors used the word "miracle" repeatedly to describe the unexpected disappearance of their cancers.

On the tenth anniversary of her healing, 'Deb' and her husband had a large group of friends over for a barbeque, without telling them why in advance. They insisted we come even though, as a Catholic layman now, not a Lutheran bishop, we knew our presence would make the others uncomfortable, and we were right. Most people avoided us, but a few did not (those who had, as it happened, a story not unlike 'Deb's'!) After the meal, the pastor stood up and thanked every one for coming, so many of their dearest friends,

naming them one by one and saying something very appropriate about each in turn. He left us to the last.

That's when he said, "You may wonder what is so special about today." Then he told about that night exactly ten years before when God's hand of mercy was laid on them. He said more very kind things, which softened some hearts that were understandably hardened against me, and all but melted mine down. In a different way, God's hand was equally evident in what happened within that gathering that evening.

I share these stories not because they're more significant than anyone else's stories, but only because they provide insight into why I take seriously Jesus' command to all His ministers to heal the sick in His name. Compared to the countless stories of how God used, for example, Coptic Pope Kyrillos VI in the 1960's to heal all and sundry who came to him, they seem halting and crude. But Pope Kyrillos was a sharp instrument in God's hands, like Father Solanus Casey and a few others. He had a direct line to the mind and heart of God through his spiritual patron, St. Mina, and he used it constantly. I am a blunt instrument who happens to be an ordained minister, now a priest, of Christ. Perhaps the fact that God can do anything at all through the likes of me is an even greater testimony to His determination to save and heal people than the fact that He can do so much through the likes of Pope Kyrillos.

...The Life Everlasting

As an article of faith, this concept has always been firmly entrenched in my outlook. But two incidents which occurred in rapid succession in the late 1970's, and one in the early 1980's, breathed fresh life into it for me, and subsequent experiences have sustained and enhanced it.

No doubt the previously mentioned two-day seminar with Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in the packed auditorium of the Foothills Hospital in Calgary in the early 1970's set the stage for this growth spurt on my part, especially the saga she told of a "Mrs. Black" who died clinically and was resuscitated some 15 times, as I recall, in the large Chicago medical complex where Kubler-Ross was practicing psychiatry at the time. This gave her the opportunity to test publicly in several convincing ways, which involved hundreds of persons, the objectivity of the experiences Mrs. Black reported she was having each time between "death" and resuscitation. At that stage in a journey that took Kubler-Ross in some wrong directions she was mostly reporting data, and those data lent strong scientific support to the reality of the personal soul and its life as distinct from the personal body and its life, with the soul not only surviving the body but enjoying a vastly enhanced capacity for perception when freed from the confines of the body.

Other researchers, like Moody and Rawlings, brought other clarifying insights to light in the wake of her studies which restored a high degree of credibility for me to previously obscure passages in the Church Fathers and opened up the possible veracity of the experiences of great mystics like St. Teresa of Avila and many others. As this process was unfolding, God saw fit to expose me to the three examples of it mentioned above, right under my nose.

I am changing the names here to avoid giving offense to some of the people associated with these occurrences; but if any of them should ever see this, they would recognize what I am relating at once.

“Beneath This Wretched Husk in the Happiest Woman on Earth”

Ellie was a tiny woman in her mid-70's when I got to know her, the mother of ten children, three of whom were active in the parishes I served. She was a patient in the local Lutheran nursing home. Her chart, to which we had access in those days, noted that she was severely diabetic (which explained the small refrigerator in her room containing insulin), had congestive heart disease as well as cancer, and suffered from rheumatoid arthritis which left her body curled up in a ball and her fingers all gnarled. I enjoyed visiting with her. She had a bright welcoming smile as she sat propped up in her chair by the window. She had a quick mind and expressed herself well. Sometimes she reminisced about life on the farm raising ten children in the steep hill country of Central Alberta. She also had many questions about the Faith, spurred on by some dubious theology someone was trying to pump into her. She never said who that person was.

One day she died. Her doctor happened to be in the nursing home at the time and succeeded in restarting her heart after some minutes. The next time I saw her, she told me in a matter-of-fact way, “I rose up out of my body. There was the sweetest singing. I went toward a light that was soft and bright at the same time. Suddenly I found myself in the most beautiful garden I've ever seen, much more beautiful than any garden on earth. Jesus was there. He looked at me so full of love and said, ‘Ellie, I have one more job for you to do for me on earth. And as soon as it's done, I'll meet you back here.’ I told Him, ‘Yes, Lord.’ And that's when I found myself back in this bed with the doctor pounding on my chest.”

I'm not sure, but I think Jesus gave her an infused knowledge of what her job was. At least she never indicated that He spelled it out in words for her.

Was it a week or two later that I received a telephone call from her daughter, a nurse on her ward? Ellie was requesting me to meet her and her family the next morning in the Bethany Chapel to celebrate Holy Communion, with full Confession and Absolution.

When I got there, they were all gathered around her in the front of the chapel, all but one son – the three members of my parishes, two others active in other parishes, and four more who had long since fallen away from the Faith, one or two into the street life of Edmonton, many with their spouses and other family members. Her wheelchair was front and centre. She was beaming. Through her, God had prepared everyone there for a great and holy moment of reconciliation and restored faith and life.

I believe I did no more than read the Parable of the Lost Sheep from Luke 15. I didn't need to do more. Tears flowed. Using the long form of Public Confession and Absolution then current in the Lutheran tradition, especially before Holy Communion, I witnessed pure and unalloyed contrition on the part of several of Ellie's children for whom it was long overdue. Into those hearts, craving His forgiveness and hungering for His love, Jesus then came in His broken Body and His poured out Blood, "given and shed for you".

I had one more visit with her in this world. As if to warn me and console me at the same time, she said, a bit evasively, "Don't be surprised by what's going to happen. I told him he could be in charge of my funeral. It won't make any difference by then."

I wasn't with her a few days later when Jesus kept His promise to her, but her daughter, the nurse, was at her bedside. She is the one who phoned me and told me that Ellie's last words, said with a broad smile, were: "Beneath this wretched husk is the happiest woman on earth."

She also told me, with considerable embarrassment, that the one son who was not at the Family Communion Service was in charge of all the funeral arrangements, with the consent of Ellie. It was to be held in the funeral home under the auspices of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

I assured her, after catching my wind, that Jesus was up to something by permitting this to happen.

The chapel in the funeral home was packed with members of our congregation. I sat near the rear to avoid intimidating the "officiant" or offending the son. We were treated to a forty-five minute monologue that turned at times into a harangue: no prayers, no singing, no Scripture Readings, no committal, no blessing. We learned that there is no such thing as a soul, that human life stops at death, and that bona fide Jehovah's Witnesses - and nobody else! - will be recreated by God from scratch, not resurrected from the dead, to populate the New Earth. When the speaker was done, he simply walked out the door, leaving those of us who knew what had happened to Ellie to marvel at what we had just heard, with sorrow.

Truth was never more eloquently proclaimed than by its gainsayer that day!

The following Sunday, with her family's permission, I shared her story with the whole congregation, which left us all marveling at God's boundless mercy and inscrutable ways.

“It was Jesus”

Albert was a very nice man, hard-working, honest, upright, devout. But he had a problem with anxiety, aggravated by a heart condition. You could see it written all over his face. He'd always been that way. He'd always worked hard to keep up the appearance of having things under control. Changes, even small changes, bothered him a lot. The unknown was by definition a threat. He hated surprises. Eileen, his wife, had learned to live with this. After all, he was very good to her. They did everything together. As long as she did the predictable thing, they got along just fine. And she did. She was made that way.

The three of us had had a particularly tender moment together a couple of years earlier. Eileen's aged mother, once a pillar of the congregation in the best sense of the word - “A hard worker in the kitchen” - was on death's door in the nursing home. The charge nurse phoned me and I joined them in her room. Albert and Eileen were at the foot of the bed, clinging to each other with as much dignity as possible in the circumstances. I knelt at the side of the bed, opened my Bible to John 10:27-29, and read these few verses softly:

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me;
and I give them eternal life,
and they shall never perish,
and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.
My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all,
and no one is **able** to snatch them out of the Father's hand.*

As I was reading the last line, Eileen's mother took one deep breath and slipped away.

We looked at each other. We knew whose hands she was in. A more peaceful death one could hardly imagine.

But now it was Albert who had been rushed to Edmonton by ambulance. I knew he had both gone and a few days later returned home. So I wasn't entirely surprised when Eileen phoned and in her tentative voice said, "Pastor, Albert would really like you to come and see him. Can you come for coffee this afternoon?"

I arrived to find Albert sitting in an upholstered chair in the living room, dressed as if for church, looking like a million dollars! All sign of stress was gone from his face. He broke out in a big smile when he saw me. What in the world had happened to him?

He couldn't even wait for Eileen to serve the coffee. He launched into his story.

"Pastor, the ride to Edmonton in the ambulance was a nightmare. I was gasping for every breath. And when I got there, I had to wait on the gurney forever. The pressure in my chest became unbearable. I was ready to explode. I panicked and went blank. Someone shouted, 'He's dead!' Then I felt a hand on my shoulder. I knew it was Jesus. As plain as day He said to me, 'It's all right, Albert. I'm right here with you.' That's all He said. But He never took his hand off my shoulder. It was Jesus, all right. It was Jesus."

Big tears swelled up in Albert's eyes. He was still smiling, a big deep permanent smile.

"I'm not afraid of anything any more, Pastor, not even to die. How can you be afraid with Jesus' hand on your shoulder?"

Albert died at home a month later, with Jesus' hand on his shoulder.

“Don’t Worry about Me.”

He had served for many years as mayor of his little village, this 75-year-old man who had been born in Denmark and had immigrated with his family to Canada as a child. As often happens, he got too busy first with farming and then with operating his business in town to show up in church more than a few times a year. But he supported the church well financially, and even did his stints on the church council. He had his kids baptized, confirmed, and married in the church. He was a little less successful in getting them to do that for their kids, except for one daughter and her family. Yet, from childhood on up he had faithfully recited his daily morning and evening prayers from Luther’s Small Catechism. That was not uncommon for his generation of Danes and Germans.

I was farming at the time, and serving as half-time assistant pastor in this 4-point parish. Once a month I would switch places with my full-time colleague – he served my congregations on a given Sunday, and I served his. It was the daughter of the former mayor who on one of those Sundays shared with me her father’s story.

“Dad hadn’t been feeling right for a couple of days. Then, last Tuesday at supper he just keeled over onto the table. I don’t think he’d been sick a day in his life until then. Mom phoned the ambulance and they rushed him off to the hospital in Camrose. Halfway there he stopped breathing.

“The ambulance crew and the emergency medical staff did everything they could to bring him back. I think the doctor, in one last effort to save his life, hooked him up to an electrical charge and shot it through his body. And lo and behold, his heart began to beat again. By that time several of us were there with him. ‘You’ll never guess where I’ve just been,’ Dad said when he opened his eyes and saw us all there.

“We told him to take it easy. He could tell us later. The medical staff was still working on him. He seemed eager to talk. We told him we weren’t going anywhere. He could tell us as soon as they had him stabilized.

“An hour or so later he was lying on a bed in the ICU, hooked up to monitors and drips. Then it all came spilling out.

“He told us he had been in the Garden of Paradise with Jesus and that Jesus had taught him so much, whether by words or by inner intuitions, he couldn’t recall. In any case, Jesus had shown him so clearly that in this world we worry about things we shouldn’t and we let them consume us. And we neglect things that really matter. He had the distinct impression that Jesus wanted him to come back here and share what he had learned with us because if we don’t get it straight, we can do a lot of harm to ourselves and others, especially our kids, permanent harm.”

“Can you give me some examples?” I asked.

“Well, it seems like the quality of our relationships means a lot more to Jesus than it often means to us, according to Dad. We need to spend more time and effort really caring about one another. That’s what Heaven is all about. When Jesus said, ‘Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness, and all these other things will be added unto you,’ He meant it. We make a big mistake when we do it the other way around, a really big mistake.

“Dad also said that every good thing we learn on earth will be useful in Heaven. We should never stop learning and growing, because when we leave this world, we take all that with us. And the more we bring with us, the more useful we are to God. Our role in Heaven is much more directly related to our preparation for it on earth than we realize. Of course, Jesus told us that long ago. But

we act as if this life is all there is to it, and that's where we make another big mistake.”

“Wow! Jesus sure taught your dad a lot in a little time.”

“You know, Pastor. The thing that makes us all sit up and take notice is how happy he is. ‘Don’t worry about me,’ he’s always telling us. ‘I know what I’ve got to do from now on. And I know where I’m going when I leave here. And now, so do you!’”

God gave him, if I remember correctly, almost another year to live in this world. During that time he never missed church. He spoke candidly to young people about what they were doing with their life. He convinced most, though not all, of his family to rearrange their priorities from the perspective of what matters in the end. He had always been a pleasant person, but now he was positively joyful. He didn’t lecture any one. He showed by example what Jesus meant when He told him to make quality relationships his top priority. He cherished people, and they knew it, starting with his own family.

In the end, he died, I’m told, pushing a neighbour’s car out of the ditch, with a smile on his face.

His family told me later that what Jesus had done for their dad had taken from him all fear of death. Even his wife couldn’t mourn his passing. Several members of the family told me that because of him they also had lost their fear of death.

But even more importantly, they had gained so much more reason to live!

“Concluding Comments”

As I noted in the “Introductory Comments”, the primary focus of this book is on the experiences God has sent my way which have compelled me to take seriously aspects of basic apostolic ministry which initially fell outside my “comfort zone”, and sometimes still do. In some ways they blindsided me and sent me off in an unlikely direction under God’s guidance, not unlike how God shocked Peter into complying with His will through the several supernatural events recorded in Acts 10 and 11. One thing they taught me is that the Church betrays both itself and God if it tries to ignore the role of what we call “the supernatural” in its normal everyday operations. On this point, Bultmann could not have been more wrong. Efforts to explain it away in order to make the Gospel palatable to modern skeptics are akin to withholding real food from a growing child because the child prefers candy. The supernatural is not extraneous to the Gospel, not something we could remove without destroying the Gospel itself. It is intrinsic both to the Gospel (the Resurrection!) and to the apostolic witness to the Gospel (Mark 16:20; 2 Corinthians 12:12, etc.). True, it will often take us by surprise, and it is subject to being counterfeited (Matthew 7:21-23; 24:24 etc.). But Jesus is adamant about it: the real thing is an essential part of the Gospel (Mark 3:22-30), and woe to those who misread it or refuse to acknowledge it through sheer ill-will! After all, you can’t have a counterfeit if there is no real thing.

The supernatural keeps us humble. It doesn’t always work out the way we expect (Mark 9:14-29), but very often it also surpasses our fondest expectations (Luke 10:17). Where God is at work, we are at best “the scalpel in the hands of the Surgeon”, as Professor Freitag put it so memorably. We apostolic ministers never have a right to presume to be more than that, but also never to be less. The only thing more damaging to the Gospel than an occasional counterfeit sign is blindness to Christ’s authentic signs, for that

means that our eyes are closed to everything God is doing in our midst and we are left on our own. And religion without God is a desperate enterprise.

That is the scope of this book.

I have also been asked not infrequently why I take seriously Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, and Judgment. Evangelicals and some lost Catholics sometimes want to know why I take Mary's mission to the world so seriously, or Jesus' declaration that His Church will be built on Peter. These questions are important, but they lead us into a different context for answers, though parallels abound. For example, Mary's mission has generally been accompanied by a rich array of evangelical signs and wonders aimed, as she herself says, at the doubting Thomases of our own time whose fundamental goodwill leaves them at least a little open to Heaven. And Maria Simma's testimony to the reality of Purgatory has certainly not lacked signs that have convinced many skeptics and hard-nosed Church authorities to pay attention to her in a most culturally hostile setting. I have met many former Catholics who are oblivious to all this, in the general abysmal groveling once engaged in by some Catholics instructors about all things "unmodern", or "pre-Vatican II", however credible these things might be in their own right. I can't tell you how often I've heard: "If only someone had told me!" "How could my priests have ignored all this for so many years?" "This is in the Catechism of the Catholic Church? How come I haven't heard about it?" And on and on.

So, although this little book does not address those vital questions, please dig for answers rather than settle for ignorance. A good guide for every faithful Catholic is to be sure to take seriously what the Holy Father takes seriously. That would have saved many people a lot of grief in the post-Vatican II era. We should learn to pay scant attention to the cynics who counsel otherwise, who in a

bid to “out-protest the Protestants” are quick to sell their Catholic birthright. When anyone presumes to arrogate to him- or herself an authority over your faith that demands of you greater allegiance than you owe to Peter, you can smell a rat. Peter is, after all, the one Jesus commanded to “feed My sheep” (John 21:17). I would hate to be in the shoes of anyone who takes that role unto himself. We are not called to be our own Pope, or anyone else’s, or to acknowledge anyone in that role except Jesus’ choice - Peter.

Incidentally, if you are interested in exploring my responses to some of these other questions, I’ll be glad to supply you with a copy of [A Gift of Love](#). At least it will get you started on your quest.

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