

Nearly Perfect Crime

by Francis MacNutt

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Francis MacNutt has written an insightful book about how the ministry of healing has been greatly diminished in the Church for centuries (almost 1600 hundred years!). Healing was a major part of the ministry of Jesus and His disciples, the record of which takes up about a third of the Gospels, not to mention the book of Acts. Throughout, MacNutt emphasizes the importance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, not just for healing ministry, but for EVERY ministry.

MacNutt shows how healing ministry flourished for the first three centuries, and was then sidelined by nominal Christianity beginning with the Constantinian era. He details how ecclesiastical structures and the developing clergy/laity distinction quickly began to remove healing ministry from the hands of the people-it became a work for the "super-spiritual," and few could qualify to perform it (some of the Desert Fathers, for example). Healing shortly became the province of relics and shrines-and the clergy no longer had to deal with embarrassing questions when healings did not occur at their hands.

He also talks about how the purpose of God's love and compassion in healing had been severely neglected in the intervening centuries. Healing ministry became viewed strictly as a validation of truth, but was no longer necessary for faith. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" became the watchword, and interest in the display of God's love through healing fell by the way.

MacNutt discusses how the Platonic split between body and soul, and the severe doctrines of the Manichees (i.e. the intrinsic evil of the flesh, and especially of sexuality) further eviscerated the ministry of healing. During the middle ages, the development of the "divine right of kings" generated "the Royal Touch," and healing ministry was limited, by law, to the monarchs of England and France.

Although a committed Roman Catholic, MacNutt believes that the Reformation did not extend far enough in its scope-the Reformers continued to ignore the reality of healing ministry. Oh, they recognized that there had once been such a thing in Jesus' day, but now that time was past, and the ministry had ceased. So much for reformation!

But all along the way, there have been healing ministers and ministries among the people, arising in times of revival and when people were desperate for a healing touch from God. In the last 300 hundred years there have been some glimpses of healing ministry arising again, then faltering. Then it began trending upward in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mostly among the pentecostally inclined. These came to include the

charismatic and "third wave" movements late in the mid-to-late 1900s, about which MacNutt writes from personal experience (the appendix is a testimony of how he received the baptism, or "release" of the Holy Spirit, into his life and ministry).

In all, Francis MacNutt brings us understanding about the decline of healing ministry, but also a hope and a challenge to welcome the release of the Holy Spirit and healing ministry back into the Western Church-just as it has been increasingly been experienced in the Third Word Church.