to theologize as well as to set future goals and orientation. A hope-oriented Church cannot be blind to futurology with its anticipatory look at the future.

What we have been saying augurs well with the ministry of Jesus. His teaching was not a blind repetition of the Old Testament theology, nor was his life faithful exclusively to the Torah ethics. Though his ministry was a fulfillment and not a rejection of the Old Law, he went beyond that. He was looking more to the future when the Kingdom would be fully realized than to the past law. He was the anticipation of the days when many will come from the East and the West and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of heaven without any preference or privilege of the inherited ones. He prefigured the days when human dignity takes precedence over slavish observance of Sabbath taboos. His own life was the arrival of the Kingdom in so far as it was the projection of the radical realization of the Father's will. It is this futuristic dimension that makes the ministry of Jesus distinctive and essential. Jesus relativized the past in terms of the future by becoming himself the new Temple and the Lord of the Sabbath. It was this vision of the future that freed the nascent Church from the temptation to remain a Jewish sect. The whole New Testament is future-oriented, looking forward to the day of fulfillment when God will be all in all (1 Co 15:28).

Hence theology and inculturation have to be future-oriented. It is this future dimension that makes inculturation an agenda imperative to all local churches, including those of the West. All have to keep pace with the changing circumstances and outlook. Futurology thus has to become a key factor in theology. A realistic approach to inculturation cannot be made without an investigative look at the future.

Faith Annette Sand

HEALING AS KERYGMA

An Egyptian mathematician friend who lives in Pasadena and I sometimes speak of spiritual matters. Her Coptic background is quite different than my own Lutheran upbringing, yet I find it fascinating to discuss the commonalities of our pilgrimages. One recent Sunday afternoon Faiza told me that when she was young she had been a good Christian and had been very close to God. Now in her adult, sinful state God seemed far away.

When I probed to discover where this conviction came from, she answered, "Take this morning. As always, I fasted before going to morning eucharist. Returning home hungry, I went to the kitchen for a snack - which I ate too quickly and bit my tongue horribly."
Her conclusion seemed incontrovertible: If she had not been a deplorable sinner God would have looked upon her piety more favorably and she would have averted this torment. Poignantly she added that as a child, God had answered all her prayers, giving her everything she asked for. Since she no longer was the recipient of such largesse from God, the inference was clear: her suffering was proof of her sinful state.

My friend Faiza is a sophisticated Ph.D. scientist working for NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, but her spiritual deductions would be shared by animists in the jungles of New Guinea, by Catholic peasants in Bolivia and by tribal people in Zimbabwe: Our distress is a manifest sign of God's displeasure. When we are infirm or in pain, we are paying for our sins.

There are certainly parts of the Gospel that would seem to confirm this belief. When Jesus cured the paralytic lowered through the rooftop, in what might be judged a provocative scene, he said, "Thy sins are forgiven." The pharisees, as could be expected, remonstrated at his outrageous presumption. Christ merely retorted, "Which is easier: to say: 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk?"' (Mt 9:1-8). Then putting legs to the absolution, the paralytic stood and walked.

But as is Christ's wont in the Gospels, other healing incidents refute this stance, precluding anyone from formulating a Law of the Sinful Sufferer. John's Gospel gives a full account of the healing of the man born blind. To his disciples, who could be forgiven their obvious question, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, for him to have been born blind?" (9:2), Jesus responded with an equally difficult concept: "This happened that God's glory might be revealed!"

Does that mean this poor soul was subjected to years of blind groping in order that Christ might have one moment of glory and perform a miracle?

Apparently.

And apparently God's account book is such that this powerful, illustrative message was important enough so that it was recorded for all generations following to muse upon and hold up. In fact I would posit that an examination of the healing miracles of Christ in Scriptures reveals their underwriting kerygmatic nature. As Jesus said about the man born blind, they happened that God's glory might be revealed.

Healing is a dynamic transcendental sign that the numinous is in our midst. Strangely enough, though, it is not always a sign that the holy is in our midst. During the Sermon on the Mount Christ warned that even those who could claim they had worked "many miracles in your name" would still be judged on their actions, on how they treat the poor widow, the homeless and the infirm. Those found wanting would be told "to their faces: I have never known you; away from me, all evil doers!" (Mt 7:21-23).