

## Foreword

This masterly book makes a very substantial and timely contribution to the theological background to our understanding and practice of healing ministry within the church. It is grounded in the author's ministry as parish priest and hospital chaplain and his long association with The Guild of St Raphael – an organisation that has existed for a hundred years for the specific purpose of promoting a sacramental approach to Christ's ministry of healing within the Church of England and beyond. For many years Dr Douglas Ellory Pett was Sub-warden of the Guild, writing articles for *Chrism*, its theological journal, as well as overseeing its day-to-day running. It was only in retirement, however, that he found time to write this truly scholarly work on the healing tradition of the New Testament. He died in 2005, several years before the publication of what he described within the text as a 'working hypothesis'. Clearly he was looking forward to engaging in serious debate with those whose understanding and assumptions are challenged by his conclusions.

After a decade on the Guild of St Raphael Council, I succeeded Bishop George Hacker as editor of *Chrism* in 2009, thereby acquiring a mandate to identify areas of interest where there was a paucity of scholarly yet accessible material and to commission articles that could inform the thinking and practice of Guild members and a wider readership – having in mind both those in leadership positions in the Church and those preparing for ordination. Very soon I perceived that it would be appropriate to produce an issue that looked at healing ministry in the contrasting contexts of New Testament times and the present day.<sup>1</sup> It is absolutely fascinating to recognise the extent to which Pett's work contrasts with, and arguably casts doubt on, some of the precepts upon which the articles by Bishop Nicholas Reade and the Reverend Canon Tony Kerswell are based. Are the healings performed by Jesus to be viewed only as signs of his fulfilling the Messianic

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1. This was published in Autumn 2011 and is available at: <http://www.guild-of-st-raphael.org.uk/chrism.htm>.

prophecy of Isaiah, as argued by Pett was the initial and authentic New Testament understanding? Or, on the contrary, are they to be taken as signs of Jesus's divinity – evidential signs (to use Pett's term) of God at work in and through him, as accepted in the writings of Reade, Kerswell and many others? That view is argued in this book to be based on editorial modifications of the earliest Gospel sources that led to a 'secondary and less authentic tradition'.

This might seem a subtle distinction, but Pett construes the findings of his undoubtedly erudite analysis of the accounts of Jesus's healing ministry as recorded in the four Gospels, and references to healing in the rest of the New Testament, as indicating that truly miraculous healing was performed only by Jesus. He posits that Jesus's disciples were sent out to teach and to exorcise but not to heal, and that healing ministry was not widespread in the early Church. This contrasts markedly with the general acceptance that Jesus sent out his disciples to 'proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal' (Luke 9:2, NRSV). Here, surely, is a worthwhile stimulus to further study and debate because, following a brief consideration of psychosomatic, sociological and relational impacts on health, Pett raises questions about current assumptions and practices in the Church's ministry of healing that need to be addressed.

Overall, this book makes a substantial contribution to contemporary deliberation on the Church's ministry of healing. All those with an interest in the subject should be grateful to Douglas's widow, Mary, and to The Lutterworth Press for their diligence in publishing this seminal work after the author's death.

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