

The Ministry of Healing

Recent years have seen a flood of books, pamphlets, articles, and pronouncements on spiritual healing in the Protestant churches. Latest of these is the just-issued but long-expected report of the Archbishops' Commission on "The Church's Ministry of Healing." The distinguished commission of the Church of England which prepared this report has devoted almost five years of study to its task.

The report itself is cautious and conservative, as was to be expected, and its conclusions are naturally shaped by the doctrinal beliefs and medical orientation of its members. But its recognition of the duty of the church to take up with vigor "its divine commission to heal the sick" reflects and reinforces the deep conviction of a growing number of churchmen of all faiths.

The report is strongest when it acknowledges that "fullness of health depends primarily upon a right relationship with God" and that "Christ's example and precept are authoritative." It will win wide agreement when it warns against mass displays of healing based on suggestion and hysteria rather than on prayer and regeneration, as well as in its strictures against facile and exaggerated claims of cure. But to those Christians who have experienced the healing that follows from a total reliance on Spirit, God, the report will be unconvincing when it insists that mate-

rial means must supplement spiritual.

In one place the commission states that it does not "deny for a moment the possible occurrence of extraordinary and medically inexplicable healings which present themselves to faith as miraculous." But it views these only as "occasional marvels" and does not believe "that definite and precise rules can be deduced from an examination of Christ's practice."

It is to be regretted that the commission did not see fit to look more closely at the vast body of evidence furnished by Christian Science over almost 90 years. This evidence indicates that such healings are very far from being "occasional marvels" but are rather the natural result of a cultivated spiritual understanding of the divine Principle and rules of Jesus' healing. A scientific age may rightly deduce that if the master Christian's healings are to be accepted at all, they can only be explained on the basis that he healed through the law of God, not in violation of the law. The experience of Christian Scientists supports this view.

Despite its avoidance of this issue and its unintentional misrepresentation of a theological position that differs from its own, the commission is to be commended on taking the traditional Christian churches a step closer to a frank recognition of the possibilities of Christian healing.