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Health and healing figure prominently in the New Testament gospels, which portray Jesus confronting a variety of sicknesses, from paralysis to blindness, and epilepsy to abnormal behaviour. Did Jesus really heal those afflicted with these various maladies? Why did the sick come to Jesus? Were there no physicians? Had physicians failed them? Could they not afford to pay them?

This book sets the ancient reports of Jesus as healer in the context of the ancient world of "home remedies," medicine, physicians, and healers. It compares him with other healers of the day and shows how each of the four New Testament gospels offers distinctive portraits of Jesus as healer. We see him as one of many healers in his day, but yet set apart as a "wounded healer" – powerful yet in the end powerless, and thus achieving the ultimate "healing," victory over death. The book follows the reputation of Jesus as healer into the "apocryphal" Christian writings and into the stories of Jesus healing through his followers. Drawing on recent scholarship on Jesus and on sociological, anthropological, and medical studies of sickness and healing, the author offers a carefully weighted response to the question, "Did Jesus really heal?" The Questions for further thought and discussion and the Suggestions for further reading at the end of the volume provide readers with opportunity for further exploration of questions raised in the book.

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Understanding Jesus Today

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Understanding Jesus Today

Edited by Howard Clark Kee

Growing interest in the historical Jesus can be frustrated by diverse and conflicting claims about what he said and did. This series brings together in accessible form the conclusions of an international team of distinguished scholars regarding various important aspects of Jesus' teaching. All of the authors have extensively analyzed the biblical and contextual evidence about who Jesus was and what he taught, and they summarize their findings here in easily readable and stimulating discussions. Each book includes an appendix of questions for further thought and recommendations for further reading on the topic covered.

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Jesus as Healer

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Preface

In the pages that follow the symbols // are used to indicate parallel passages in the New Testament gospels, for example, Mark 2:13–17//Matt. 9:9–13, Luke 5:27–32. Unless otherwise noted, the scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA) and are used by permission with all rights reserved. Translations of other ancient writings are my own.

Dates in the ancient world are indicated by “BCE” (Before the Common Era) and “CE” (Common Era), for example, 136 BCE and 30 CE.

I treat Mark as the first New Testament gospel, and the authors of Matthew and Luke as working from Mark, though not necessarily our version of Mark. Some scholars place Matthew first chronologically, with the author of Mark shortening Matthew to give us what we know as the Gospel of Mark, and the author of Luke employing both Matthew and Mark in composing the gospel of Luke. Regardless of theories of origin, the distinctive natures of each of these three gospels, as pointed out in chapters 2 through 4, remain.

The word “pagan,” commonly used in a negative sense in current usage, I employ in a neutral sense to mean, simply, non-Jewish and non-Christian.

The “Suggestions for further reading” at the end of the book offer information on how to find the various ancient writings and modern studies referred to in the book; other titles that may prove helpful in pursuing a particular subject are also

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included. The “Questions for further thought and discussion” may prove helpful in reflecting on the various chapters of the book.

I want to thank my one-time teacher, Howard Clark Kee, for the invitation to write this book, which accords with various long-standing academic and personal interests of mine.

To Catherine Huggins, Administrative Assistant in the Department of Religion and Culture, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, I owe a large debt of gratitude for translating my sometimes barely decipherable script into laser-print. My colleagues in the Department and in the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies are also owed my thanks for encouragement and inspiration over the years of what might be termed the gestation of this little volume.

My wife, Alice Croft, applied her usual painstaking editing and proofreading skills to the typescript and the index and her usual patience and understanding to her husband’s psyche. Carolyn, my first wife, who knew about sickness and death and taught me much about both, was often in my thoughts as I wrote. Both have a share in what follows.