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Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

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THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: HEALING

An AJET Editorial

Theological education in the African continent is growing despite various political, spiritual, physical, and psychological problems.

In the lead article, Dr. Scott Cunningham gives a preliminary assessment for doctoral-level theological education in Africa for evangelicals. The question as to whether Africa is ready for it can be answered in the affirmative because it is long overdue.

In the second article, Dr. Paul Bowers traces the beginnings of and his involvement in ACTEA since 1975 through the initiative and vision of the late Byang Kato to the present time. He challenges all theological educators to look afresh at their own commitments, dreams and calling with regard to the continent. In his thesis he significantly argues that *theological schools form the backbone of organized evangelicalism in Africa*. This argument is based on over thirty years since the idea of a consolidated theological education first begun in the continent. He rightly states that there is need to learn from and go beyond Kato's vision for theological education that is committed to the vision of African Christianity that is truly African, biblically grounded and effectively a theological engagement for the evangelical community.

Dr Bowers describes notable trends which point to the fact that theological education matters in Africa: the proliferation of theological schools, Africanisation of staffing, and the persisting academic upgrading of programmes. However, despite these trends, there are challenges still facing theological educators but "are our programmes, our schools, providing suitable incubation for individuals to emerge who can truly bring change?"

The third article discusses the New Testament theology on issues of health, sickness and healing which seem to be widely scattered in the descriptions of the NT books. The author, Professor Judith L. Hill, who has worked now for thirty-five years in theological education in Africa where many people suffer from a variety of diseases and illnesses, seeks to provide biblical solutions to the problem. She answers three primary questions: what

does the Bible have to say about health, sickness and healing? Can believers expect health and (if necessary) receive healing? Is it God's plan to eliminate disease and sickness? (p.54)

In answering these questions, Hill provides a brief OT theology of healing, as foundation to the New Testament teaching. First, God is the designer of the human body; second, what humanity experiences in terms of suffering is the result of the fall which culminates at physical death; third, sickness, she writes, is a "a disciplinary measure on the part of God toward an erring member of his family . . . The "wounding" may be part of God's discipline, but the healing also comes from the same almighty God, as further evidence of the caring relationship he maintains with his creation. Fourth, God is sovereign and able to heal and such healing is linked to all aspects of life (p.56). This anticipates the well-being of God's people in the age to come when the curse of Eden is reversed.

Without much focus on the significance of the material body, the author further discusses issues of health, sickness and healing in the NT by looking at the ministry of Jesus the healer in the synoptic gospels (p. 62 – 70), and in the book John where Jesus as healer is not limited by space, time, preconditions or even death (p.74). She concludes her discussion on the book of Acts by affirming the validity of Jesus' ministry of healing which was carried on by the apostles in dependence on God's power.

The rest of the article provides evidence on the theology of health, sickness and healing from Pauline epistles (pp.75-77), General Epistles (pp.80-87) and the book of Revelation (p.87ff.), ending with a brief synthesis on healing in the NT with practical implications which are worthy of note.

DOCTORAL-LEVEL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AFRICA FOR EVANGELICALS: A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

Scott Cunningham¹

Abstract

African Evangelicals wishing to study in doctoral-level programmes with shared theological convictions now have credible options on the continent, an observation that points to the remarkable development in the deepening and intellectual maturity of the evangelical movement in Africa. With these options available, the advantages of theological study within the African context can be realized at the doctoral level. Credible programmes now exist in Ghana, Nigeria, Central African Republic, Kenya, and a newly inaugurated programme in South Africa. The author makes several observations on evangelical theological education in Africa and then concludes with suggestions for further enhancement of these programmes.

Written five years ago, this overview would have been much shorter. It would have been limited to a discussion of the most favourable options in African national universities (with some weighting towards the more theologically conservative programmes in South Africa). Distinctly

After having taught for a dozen years at ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja Nigeria, Dr. Scott Cunningham served on the staff of the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA) from 1993 to 2007. He is now on loan by SIM to Overseas Council as their Dean of Leadership Development. Cunningham was awarded a PhD in New Testament Studies from Dallas Theological Seminary in 1994.

¹ I gratefully acknowledge the contribution of several colleagues who commented extensively on earlier drafts of this paper including Stephanie Black, Paul Bowers, Philippe Emedi, Jason Ferenczi, Bulus Galadima, Sid Garland, Steven Hardy, Judy Hill, George Janvier, Danny McCain, James Miller, and Rich Starcher. Others have helpfully responded to my specific inquiries, and their contributions are acknowledged in corresponding footnotes. I am also grateful for the contributions I received from the participants in the AIM/SIM Consultation for Theological Educators in Southern Africa (19-23 March 2007, Honeydew, South Africa), at which the major points of this paper were first presented.

evangelical programmes at the doctoral level were just being initiated, with most still in the planning stages. But, during recent years the number of options has grown fairly dramatically, particularly with regard to credible PhD programmes in biblical and theological studies in our African evangelical seminaries.² Before describing options now available (both distinctly evangelical and not), it might be helpful to underscore the advantages of doing doctoral studies on the continent. I will then offer some additional observations regarding doctoral studies within Africa before concluding with possible ways to enhance what we are already doing in these programmes.

Why Study in Africa?

It is widely recognized among us that sending our best and brightest to schools for training in the West has not always worked out as planned.³ If we took a survey of the disadvantages of long-term overseas study among senior Africans heading up our theological colleges, the following broad assessment might well result.

1. Failure of graduates to return from overseas. By pursuing advanced degrees overseas, men and women have to leave their country, organisation, and, in some cases family, for lengthy periods of time. This separation may contribute to the graduate not returning to the country of origin, the well-known "brain-drain" phenomenon.

² This paper focuses on "academic" theological studies in particular, that is, in contrast to "professional" ministerial studies associated at the doctoral level with the Doctor of Ministry degree. While the DMin is less well-known in Africa compared to the PhD, there are a few institutions which are now offering credible programmes, with others in the planning stages.

³ This is acknowledged, for instance, by Louise Kretzschmar ("Baptist Theological Education in Africa, Particularly South Africa," *Baptist History and Heritage* 36 [2001]: 207-8) and R. Paul Stevens and Brian Stelck ("Equipping Equippers Cross-Culturally: An Experiment in the Appropriate Globalization of Theological Education," *Missiology* 21 [1993]: 34-6).

(a) Perhaps the main cause of a failure to return is that the children of the student become familiar with the culture of the host country and benefit from the educational system. Students with younger children seem to be able to better overcome this problem, compared to students going overseas with children in their teens. Retaining the student's family in their own country may be acceptable for shorter periods of time (particularly with the provision of visitation by the student), but the disadvantages of this strategy over a longer period make it unwise for most cases.

(b) Sometimes graduates are offered legitimate ministry and teaching opportunities by churches and schools within the host country.⁴

(c) A lengthy period of separation often leads to loosened ties and decreased loyalties to the sending institution (which may not be the source for most of the funding for the overseas studies).

(d) I have noticed a number of cases where graduates may return, but then after a few years return to the host country, mostly due to family issues or an inability to "fit" back into their original culture or ministry.

(e) We must also admit that graduates and their wives sometimes lose their sense of calling while in the overseas context.

On the other hand, we must take note of the John Stott Ministries -Langham Scholars Programme. Uniquely, Langham appears to have an excellent rate of return among their scholars.⁵ What are they doing right? And, is it transferable to other scholarship programmes?

⁴ Of course, this can happen when a student goes for further studies within Africa as well. I have not seen any research to compare the frequency to that of students who go to the West, but anecdotal evidence would suggest that it is not as common.

⁵ Only 2 of the 100 plus Langham scholars have failed to return to their home countries after their studies. <<http://www.johnstott.org/programs/scholars/>>, accessed 8 March 2007.

Some schools ask faculty who they are sending overseas for training to sign a bond which commits the student to return and spend a stated amount of time in the sending institution after return. Scholarship programmes also regularly ask a student for a commitment to return. Some schools in the West offer scholarships upon condition of return after graduation. I have not seen any research on the effect of such agreements or bonds upon the rate of return. Anecdotal evidence suggests they are helpful, but are not without failure.

2. High cost of overseas study. It is not unusual for a single student to spend \$30,000 a year in studies and living expenses in the West. Added to this is the cost of transportation. And this figure is increased if the family joins him or her. While the cost of a doctoral programme is not inexpensive in Africa, for most programmes it would be a fraction of the alternative. Some organisations and donors are made aware of stewardship issues when they realise the difference in cost.

3. Difficulty of obtaining visas. By my observation, obtaining visas for study in the West has become increasingly difficult for many African nationalities. The rise of the threat of terrorism has perhaps contributed to the difficulty. In some cases, visas will be granted to the student, but not his or her family, leading to other sorts of undesirable results.

4. Separation from family. Due to visa or financial obstacles, it is common that the student proceed to the West for further education having to leave his or her family behind. Such separation of the husband and wife for long periods of time is neither healthy nor cultural (in traditional society). It is important in the African family for the father to be part of the family decisions at home. Often times the father or mother are at that stage in life where there are children in the home, and this separation results in absentee fathers or mothers for extended periods. Though such family fragmentation can accompany doctoral studies even within Africa, by my observation it is not as common nor, when it occurs, for such lengthy periods.

5. Problem of relevance. Men and women who do advanced degree work in institutions that are oriented primarily to one dominant culture, report that their education does not serve them well on return to their own context. Most often the programmes offered abroad are not answering the questions

that are being asked by the African church. It is not only missionaries who find it difficult to contextualise the content of their courses for a different setting than that in which the subject was learned.

6. Some have also noted the situation of those coming back who are not well received back into the life and ministry of the host church or institution. They may very willing return, but through no fault of their own, they are never re-assimilated in useful ways by the denomination or institution, apparently mostly owing to jealousy or fear on the part of older leaders.

7. We versus they. Is it possible that I have detected among some Africans who have had the opportunity to study in the West, a somewhat condescending attitude towards those holding doctorates earned in Africa? Of course, anyone is susceptible to this temptation, that is, anyone who feels that their education, experience, or financial resources make them superior to another, but perhaps we should count this as another disadvantage to overseas diplomas.

8. Ministry experience. Africans studying in the West often do not have the opportunities for significant ministry during their studies. The Provost of the Jos ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS) did janitorial duties during his sojourn at a Western institution during his PhD studies.⁶ In contrast, current JETS PhD students all teach one undergraduate seminary course a semester while being mentored in the development of their pedagogical skills.

9. Disappointment in the West. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some African students are disillusioned with their experience of Western spirituality during their times of study. Unfortunately, they can be the objects of racism (even in some churches) and some detect a colonial or paternalistic mentality on the part of their teachers and other students. While most overcome these unfortunate sides of Western culture and Christianity, a few become embittered and antagonistic.

⁶ This is not to demean manual labour, but only to point out that African students in Western study programmes do not often have the opportunity for ministry in the areas of their training.

On the other hand, a formal survey of African seminary leaders would also surface advantages of doctoral study in the West - advantages many of our leaders know through personal experience.

I outline these advantages for two reasons. While I am persuaded of the overall benefit of African alternatives, there may be compelling reasons in particular cases to strongly consider a Western PhD. Secondly, when we later consider how to enhance our current African PhD programmes, there may be ways to incorporate particular benefits of a Western doctoral programme into those now be offered in the African context.

1. People who spend their entire lives in one locale are often parochial in their focus and outlook. Probably the most important benefit of studying in the West is that it enables the African to gain a broader worldview and a depth of understanding about other cultures. The African studying in the West is exposed to different cultures, a different experience of the Church, and different expressions of what it means to be a Christian, all contributing to the student's development as a global Christian with decreased importance given to exclusive tribal sentiments.

The results of such an exposure in the West can also be far reaching in the student's future ministry. Different church and ministry models, some of which are transferable, can be observed. The visitor may be challenged with different standards of excellence. It may contribute to the development of a vision for world missions. If the graduate would be involved in communications with the West, then it could be helpful in relating more effectively (for instance, in correspondence with donors). Not least, exposure to Western culture would helpful for African scholars who will be engaging their Western counterparts in the international world of academia.

2. Not only does this exposure facilitate understanding Western culture, it may be that one cannot properly understand Africa without experiencing and understanding the West.⁷ First, this is because modern Africa itself is so highly westernized (beyond what people are normally willing to notice).

⁷ A point raised by Paul Bowers, personal correspondence, 12 March 2007.

And secondly, this is because one usually understands one's own context better by experience outside of it, by being able to view it from without and not only from within.

3. The resources for rigorous scholarship and research are concentrated in Western institutions. Libraries are larger and more current, particularly in the area of periodical resources.⁸ Ironically, the best collections of and most convenient access to Africana literature are found in Western, not African, institutions.⁹ And, some faculty in specialised departments of Western institutions are well-equipped to supervise topics relevant to the African context.

4. Some programmes of study are not being offered in Africa, or at least not in a way that is satisfactory to the student and the organisation that is sending him. The PhD in Theological Education supervised by Belfast Bible College's Institute for Theological Education (in association with The Queen's University)¹⁰ has a comparable programme in Central America,¹¹ but not Africa. The Ethiopian Church has a continued need for research in

⁸ One may think here of Pitts Theological Library (Candler School of Theology, Atlanta, Georgia). "With more than 800 theological publications from almost 40 countries, the Sub-Saharan African Periodicals Collection at Pitts is one of the world's larger collections of periodical literature documenting the history as well as social and cultural aspects of religious institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa since the 1970s" <<http://www.pitts.emory.edu/Sub-SaharanAfrica/>>, accessed 4 April 2007.

⁹ For example, the internationally acclaimed Harold Turner Collection at the University of Birmingham provides incomparable resources for the study of African Initiated Churches and New Religious Movements. "This Collection has over 26,000 documents on its first concern: the subjects of African Initiated Churches and analogous movements in other continents, particularly in Third World contexts" <http://www.olrc.bham.ac.uk/special/collection_turner.htm >, accessed 4 April 2007.

¹⁰ <http://www.theologicaleducation.org/courses_description.php>, accessed 8 March 2007.

¹¹ I am thinking here of the Doctorado en Educacion Teológica offered by the Seminario Teológico Centroamericano (<<http://www.seteca.edu/estudios/maestria.htm>>, accessed 8 March 2007).

the area of patristics, and yet the African continent has no school capable of training Ethiopian scholars in this area at the highest level. It is possible that the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School PhD in Intercultural Studies, popular among African students, still has no close counterpart among African schools.¹²

On the other hand, the number of areas of studies absent in Africa is decreasing as schools expand their programmes. For instance, several years ago one could not find an evangelical doctoral programme in Islamics. An African scholar would probably consider attending Fuller Theological Seminary for a PhD in this area. Now there is a credible programme at the University of South Africa (UNISA) (where there is an evangelical supervisor available in this subject), with others in the planning stages at the Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Bangui (FATEB) and the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST).

5. While studying in the West, most students are able to gather prayer and financial support of local congregations and Christians. Sometimes this support continues as they return to ministry in their countries.

6. African students returning from the West report that one of the most significant benefits for them was the opportunity to form a foundational network with scholars from the West, from other parts of Africa, and from other non-Western countries, all of whom came for the same study programme. This network, grown in the programmes of TEDS or Fuller, for instance, provides them with an invaluable resource for future assistance and collaboration in ministry.

7. Students who study in the West are sometimes able to find major scholarship funds through the schools which are offering them admission. The Billy Graham Scholarship at Wheaton Graduate School is a well-known example at the masters' level. It is often the case that the selection of the school by the student is primarily influenced by the availability of

¹² <<http://www.tiu.edu/divinity/academics/phd/ics/>>, accessed 8 March 2007.

scholarship assistance.¹³ Due to such scholarships one may find in a few cases that study in the West may actually cost less for the student than if she were to remain in Africa.

8. From the point of view of the sending institution, it is advantageous to have faculty who have studied in a variety of settings and institutions. In developing a faculty, academic in-breeding or over reliance on the doctoral programme of one institution or on doctorates awarded by one denomination's institutions should be avoided. Thus, there may be institutional benefits to judicious use of Western PhD programmes in faculty development.

9. We may think not only of the advantage of the student to exposure to the West, but also of the West's benefit by exposure to Africa brought by a doctoral student in their midst.¹⁴

Considering these advantages, there is still a place for the unusually gifted student who can be better equipped through the incomparable resources of library and faculty in some Western programmes. However, in reality, there are very few students from either Africa or the West who can truly benefit from the academic rigor and resources found in superior Western programmes. Most students, even at doctoral level, will find the resources they need for credible doctoral research in selected African institutions.

Despite the advantages offered by studying in the West, on balance I am persuaded of the overwhelming benefit of training most students for doctoral studies within their ministry context (or as close as possible to their

¹³ Rich Starcher states, "The foremost consideration in students' choice of a doctoral program was achievability. Students would compromise on program context and content if an alternate program was deemed achievable. The most important aspect of achievability was affordability, . . ." ("Africans in Pursuit of a Theological Doctorate: A Grounded Theory Study of Theological Doctoral Program Design in a Non-Western Context" [unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Nebraska, 2003], p. 97). Accessible at <www.richstarcher.com>, using the "Rich's Ph.D. Dissertation" link.

¹⁴ Probably the most significant factor in my coming to Nigeria after seminary were the several Nigerian classmates in my American seminary.

context), if at all possible. For most potential doctoral students there are good alternatives within the African context, and it is to those I now turn.

Options for Doctoral Study

I have divided the options for doctoral study for evangelicals within Africa into six categories.

1. African evangelical doctoral programmes

It is nearly incredible to note that five years ago, this would not be a category of options. Masters level programmes on the continent were only then establishing their credibility. But, at this point I am aware of five African evangelical theological institutions which offer credible PhD programmes in biblical or theological studies.

a. Jos ECWA Theological Seminary (JETS)

JETS is a 25-year old institution located in Jos, Nigeria. The proprietor is ECWA (the Evangelical Church of West Africa), the denomination resulting from SIM's work in Nigeria, and SIM continues to participate in the institution through involvement of six expatriate faculty. It is a large school with approximately 350 students involved in full-time undergraduate and masters' degrees. It has accreditation only for its bachelors' degree (through affiliation with the University of Jos). In August 2006 it began a three-year full-time residential doctoral programme in Biblical Studies with five students. The first year is "taught" courses, the second year will be seminars, and the final year will be for the dissertation. Strong skills in both Greek and Hebrew are required for admission. JETS has a very competent faculty in biblical and theological studies (seven PhDs and more coming after study leave) with additional PhDs in Education and Intercultural Studies. JETS will likely begin with another cohort of PhD students in August 2008 - in Theological Studies. The school's current library holdings would not be considered a strength. However, the school has invested in laptops for each doctoral student, a good internet connection, and students are being taught extensively on how to use

electronic tools (including Bible Works)¹⁵ for biblical and theological research. JETS has intentionally fostered collegiality among the students and faculty, and is using mentors to nurture spirituality and promote ministry skills development. The cost per student per year is approximately \$5,000 (including room, but not board).¹⁶

b. Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTS)

For over a century NBTS has been training church leaders on a large and beautiful campus in southern Nigeria. The seminary was begun through the mission work of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, but little of that linkage formally remains (though they are now trying to recruit two IMB faculty). It operates at the first degree, masters, and doctoral levels with a total of 360 students. Approximately 140 of these are at the masters level, 18 are in the DMin programme, and 24 are PhD students. The PhD is offered in either Theology or Religious Education. The Theology programme is designed with two years of residential seminars (in the areas of OT, NT, Church History, Pastoral Care and Counselling, World Religions, and Christian Ethics) followed by comprehensive exams and a dissertation. The Religious Education programme is similar except that course work is scheduled for two and a half years. The school has a large faculty; almost all Nigerians; and most with doctoral degrees. Unfortunately these degrees do not demonstrate much diversity in training – almost all the masters are “in-house” and the doctorates are awarded by NBTS itself or Southern Baptist schools in the United States. The library has an impressive 54,000 volumes, but there is evidence it has not kept up in terms of up-to-date acquisitions and periodical subscriptions. Nor is there a distinctive emphasis on the use of electronic research tools. The tuition cost is quite low in comparison to other schools, about \$790 per year. NBTS is fully recognised in Nigeria,

¹⁵ ACTEA (the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa) has been able to obtain free copies of BibleWorks software for post-graduate students who originate in poorer African countries.

¹⁶ The Director of PhD Studies, Prof George Janvier, can be contacted at <george.janvier@sim.org>. The JETS website is at <<http://jetsem.org>>, but, not having been recently updated, there is no information on the new PhD programme.

being affiliated since last year for all its post-graduate programmes to the University of Jos. NBTS is also a recent candidate for ACTEA accreditation.¹⁷

c. Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST)

NEGST offers a joint PhD programme in Biblical Studies and Translation Studies. The first cohort of twelve students (half are Kenyan) began in January 2006. The next cohort intake will be in August 2008. NEGST is considering a PhD in Missions and a DMin in Pastoral Studies.¹⁸ The current programme consists of a research colloquium running continuously for fifteen months followed by a dissertation cycle of thirty months. The current research colloquium revolves around the theme of ethnicity. NEGST has a strong faculty (expatriate and African) in both biblical and translation studies. This is complemented by regular visits from scholars of international reputation (I. Howard Marshall, Andrew Walls, Christopher Wright, Gordon Wenham, Isabel Phiri, and many others). Resident faculty and students read the visiting scholars' work before they come and then dialogue with them in doctoral seminars during their visit. The NEGST library contains 37,000 books and 250 print journal subscriptions in addition to major internet journal databases (EBSCO, ATLAS, JSTOR). Library development is receiving major funding. Annual study costs are approximately \$12,000, including international study trips to a Bible land and an international biblical research institution, and one return trip to the student's home for the purpose of "theologising" the content of the research colloquium in the student's language of ministry. Annual living costs are additional and are substantial (due to the relatively high cost of living in Nairobi), resulting in an estimated total of \$23,000 annually for tuition, books, and living expenses for a typical non-Kenyan family of four.

¹⁷ NBTS has no website, but may be reached by email at <nbtssseminary@yahoo.com>. Information regarding this programme was obtained by personal correspondence with the President, Rev Prof J. A. Ilori, 5 March 2007.

¹⁸ <<http://www.negst.edu>>, accessed 7 March 2007. Further information was provided by personal correspondence with the Administrative Director of Doctoral Programmes, Dr Sue Glidden, 2 March 2007.

d. Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Bangui (FATEB)

FATEB, also known as the Bangui Evangelical School of Theology, is located in the capital of the Central African Republic. It is the francophone counterpart to NEGST, also being owned by the Association of Evangelicals in Africa, and likewise shares a broad geographical scope - intending to serve all of Francophone Africa just as NEGST serves Anglophone Africa. The school is currently in transition between the French educational system and the new European model (i.e., the Bologna process). Students are presently admitted into the doctoral programme following their licence and maîtrise degrees and a minimum of two years' ministry experience. The doctoral programme, begun in 2004/2005, is offered only in Systematic Theology (although programmes in Old Testament and New Testament are envisioned beginning in 2008/2009, under the new model). Four students are currently enrolled. The programme is in two stages. Students are first enrolled in a two-year programme of seminars, directed-research, and a mini-thesis for which the student is awarded the DEA (Diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies) credential. Each student is also expected to do a teaching internship at the seminary. For those who perform well, the DEA is followed by the dissertation stage (one to two years, including research undertaken in a foreign country and with access to significant library resources). The FATEB library has more than 19,000 volumes, about forty percent of which are in English. The periodical collection is not strong, but was supplemented in March 2007 with a subscription to ATLAS. The annual tuition cost for each of the first two years of directed-research studies is approximately \$2,825 (plus residential fees). In the following years of the dissertation stage, the annual tuition is \$1,200 (residential).¹⁹

c. Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture (ACI)

“ACI is a venture in research and training in theology mission and culture, initiated by the Presbyterian Church but intended to serve the wider

¹⁹ <<http://www.fateb.net/>>, accessed 8 March 2007. Further information about the doctoral programme was provided by personal correspondence with Dr Judy Hill, 5 March 2007.

Christian and academic communities in Ghana and throughout Africa.”²⁰ It is associated with its renown rector, Kwame Bediako. Initially the Institute began as a research centre. In collaboration with the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), the Institute commenced an MTh programme in 1998, followed by the ACI/UKZN PhD programme in 2001. Currently there are ten PhD candidates at various stages of completion, all but one fully under ACI’s supervision. The PhD programme aims “at making it possible for graduates from all over the world to undertake an advanced study of the forms and traditions of African Christian life and thought emerging as a distinctive strand of non-western Christianity with the potential of contributing to world Christianity.”²¹ Although the emphasis is on African Christianity, PhD studies currently cover areas of Christian History, Biblical Studies, Christian Education, Theology, and Gospel and Culture. The areas of study aim to be integrating. PhD candidates who have not gone through the Institute’s MTh programme are required to take six taught courses in the first year which require assessment through essays based mainly on primary research material. Those who are qualified proceed to the PhD. Those who have done the MTh at the Institute do not need to do the coursework but go directly to research and dissertation writing. All PhD students take part in periodic seminars. Full-time students are expected to finish the programme in three to five years, but there are also part-time students. There are five full-time staff with PhDs at the Institute, complemented by adjunct faculty. The library has approximately 10,000 volumes and 40-45 journal subscriptions. The Institute is accredited by the government of Ghana and since January 2006 has been granted a charter to award its own degrees. Tuition is \$5,000 per annum.

f. South African Theological Seminary (SATS)

In addition to these five PhD programmes now in operation, a sixth can be mentioned in anticipation of its imminent inauguration. SATS brings to mind the image of an “evangelical UNISA” in that the school is fully non-

²⁰ <<http://www.acmcghana.org>>, accessed 8 March 2007. Further information about the doctoral programme was provided by personal correspondence with Dr Allison Howell, 2 March 2007.

²¹ <<http://www.acmcghana.org/ap.html>>, accessed 8 March 2007.

residential, offering degrees only through distance education. For its current undergraduate and masters programmes there is considerable dependence on the internet for communication between students and teachers, and for study resources (including full access to EBSCO with its million plus journal articles). It is fully government accredited at the undergraduate and masters level, one of the only evangelical schools in South Africa to have completed the process. The school has wide impact throughout Africa with a large enrolment in its current programmes. In September 2007 SATS announced that government accreditation had been extended to the doctoral programme. This opens the way for the offering of the SATS PhD. It is planned to be research-based with the only requirement being the dissertation, and will take about three to four years minimum to complete. It will cost about \$4,000 in total. Initially, the SATS PhD will focus on Biblical Studies and Practical Theology.²²

One can't help but note that all five of the currently operating evangelical PhD programmes in Africa are located in an east-west line south of Sahara. A number of reasons could be suggested for the lack of such programmes in Africa south of this line, but perhaps one of them is the availability of theology programmes in the South African universities, an option which will be considered as part of our second major category.

2. African university doctoral programmes

Beyond the evangelical circle are a substantial number of doctoral programmes offered by "secular" national universities. These universities sometimes contain superior resources (particularly in South Africa) and very competent faculty. Most offer a British style research-only degree which provides flexibility to those who are studying. Students are exposed to a broad spectrum of theological and religious academic perspectives. And, the university PhD comes with a measure of credibility both in the local environment and the international community simply because it is

²² <http://www.sats.edu.za/index_new.html>, accessed 8 March 2007. This website contains no specific information on the doctoral programme. The information in the text was provided by personal correspondence with the Principal, Dr Reuben van Rensburg, 5 March 2007.

awarded by a public university. They would be generally inexpensive and offer contextually-sensitive research supervision.²³

However, there are disadvantages to this alternative. In many countries, the professors are so poorly paid that they moonlight, leaving little time for supervision of doctoral students, and thus unduly prolonging the student's research programme. Another disadvantage is that many of these universities require government-recognised masters degrees for admission – which some students from our evangelical seminaries will not have. The main disadvantage (if it should be identified as such) is that evangelicalism may not have a strong presence (or may not have any presence) among the faculty. Hence, some students may feel wary about this option. We should note that in a research-based degree, the supervisor plays a particularly important role, and though the faculty as a whole may be classed as “liberal”, individual supervisors within the faculty may possess theological convictions with a wide range. The supervisor may, in fact, have evangelical inclinations and sympathies. Or, she may be tolerant of evangelical positions held by students. Or, she may be downright hostile to evangelical positions. It is only the third category in which the evangelical student will be frustrated in his academic progress.

Not all dissertation topics proposed by evangelical students will be strongly influenced by the supervisor's theological sympathies. Research in New Testament textual criticism, for instance, or church history, will likely be conducted along the same lines irrespective of the supervisor's tolerance for evangelical convictions.

One could also argue that earning a doctorate under a more “liberal” supervisor may not all be a bad thing, if the student goes into the programme well-grounded in his evangelical position. Such a programme could actually assist the student to more closely define and be able to defend his evangelical faith against critical scepticism, better preparing him for participation in academia outside of evangelical circles.

²³ C. Lombard and D. J. Smith describe further advantages of theological training in a university context as they describe the proposed theological courses for the University of Namibia (“Theological Training in Namibia?” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 71 [1990]: 51-8).

I will divide this educational option into two categories: South African universities and others. In justification of this division, I will refer later to distinct advantages of the South African universities in comparison to those in other countries.

In the “old” South Africa (that is, before full democratisation associated with the election of Nelson Mandela), all of the departments of Christian studies in the public universities were aligned with the Dutch Reformed Church which used these faculties for the training of their pastors. While this did not guarantee a doctrinally conservative stance, there were many evangelicals in the departments, and many opportunities to be supervised in doctoral studies by evangelicals or those sympathetic to an evangelical approach. David Bosch in Missiology at the University of South Africa (UNISA) would have been a well-known example. Schools with notable Christian studies department would have included, besides UNISA, the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), the University of Stellenbosch (over 150 years old, and particularly strong in biblical studies), the University of the Orange Free State (now simply “of the Free State”), and the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (now part of North-West University).²⁴

In the “new” South Africa, these universities, were forced by government policy to become more inclusive. Their departments of theological studies could no longer favour the Dutch Reformed Church (which many associated with the apartheid system). This has resulted in faculty which are much broader theologically. My impression is that, while there are still evangelical faculty members available to supervise doctoral studies, the

²⁴ In an instructive article on the state of theological education in the “old” South Africa, H. W. Turner writes it is his impression (in 1980) “that higher Christian studies, whether in theological faculties or departments of divinity, are most extensive and influential, in proportion to the white population they serve, than in any other part of the world.” He continues, “Not only is this community large, but it is also competent, well-grounded in the biblical languages and basic disciplines, aware of the distinctive nature of theological study and of its high responsibilities, and not led aside into some of the ‘with-it’ substitutes that masquerade as theology in some parts of the world (“Theological and Religious Studies in South Africa: Reflections of a Visitor,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 30 [1980]: 8).

number would be less, and one would need to be more selective (if the theological character of the supervisor is an important component for the student's studies). The same five schools continue to be the best known for their departments (however, now they are not just for "Christian" studies, but "religious" studies in general), and still provide some good opportunities for doctoral work. The competence and scope of the faculty in these schools is breathtaking compared to what is available in the rest of Africa. UNISA's offerings in their DTh include the following: Christian Spirituality, Old Testament, New Testament, Church History, Systematic Theology, Practical Theology, Missiology, Religious Studies, Biblical Studies, Practical Theology with Specialisation in Pastoral Therapy, Missiology with Specialisation in Urban Ministries.²⁵

We may take North-West University (NWU) as an example (though not typical in terms of theological stance) for a more detailed look. A faculty member at George Whitefield College responded to my inquiries with the following description of the NWU programme:

I would say that NWU has the most conservative reformed theological faculty of all the universities [in South Africa]. They have a contractual arrangement with the Reformed Churches of SA (Gereformeerde Kerk - GKSA) and assert that their teaching is in accordance with the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordrecht. They no longer serve the GKSA exclusively - for a number of years now they have accommodated other denominations such as ourselves [Church of England in South Africa] and also the training programmes of dispensational Baptist groups. Of course they are no longer officially a "Christian" university and from time to time there are things we would disagree with, but I cannot recall any serious doctrinal issues in the 10 years I have been involved with them. We have an extremely cordial relationship which, they assure us, is mutually beneficial. They have a whole range of possibilities for doctorates: Catechetics, Church & Dogma History, Church Polity, Dogmatics, Ethics,

²⁵ <<http://brochure.unisa.ac.za/brochure/showlist.aspx?d=progs>>, accessed 8 March 2007.

Greek, Homiletics, Liturgics, Missiology, NT, OT, Pastoral Studies and Semitic Languages.²⁶

There are some decided advantages to doctoral studies in the South African universities which taken as a whole distinguish them from national universities in the rest of Africa. (a) The degrees have government accreditation and wide international academic recognition. (b) Costs are very reasonable compared to the West. (c) Visas are obtainable, particularly for Southern African Development Community (SADC) students,²⁷ but also for other Africans. (d) Supervisors tolerant of evangelical perspectives in student research are sometimes available. (e) The academic quality of the programmes is generally commendable. (f) Library resources are respectable, if not superior. (g) Studies relevant to African contexts can be carried out with understanding and competent supervision. (h) Students studying at UKZN and Stellenbosch would be eligible for application for Langham scholarships. (i) There is a wide range of subjects available for competent supervision. (I believe that UNISA has the largest theological faculty in the world, with over 100 teachers in the relevant departments.) (j) Many South African universities (because of the influence of UNISA's distance education model) offer their PhD's through limited non-residential supervision. One faculty member at the Theological College of Central Africa (Ndola, Zambia) obtained his PhD through Stellenbosch having only visited the schools twice, once before submitting his proposal and then for his oral defence. All supervision (although it was not extensive) was done through e-mail.²⁸ (However, this is not typical, and now the more common pattern is that doctoral students are required to visit their supervisor for a minimum of perhaps three times a year.)

In connection with the South African university option, mention should be made of what is happening at George Whitefield College (GWC), an

²⁶ Personal correspondence with Alan Beckman, 5 March 2007.

²⁷ SADC countries are: Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

²⁸ Personal conversation with John Evans, Ndola, Zambia, 13 March 2007.

institution which trains pastors for the Church of England in South Africa (CESA). GWC is located near Cape Town, close to Stellenbosch (geographically) and close to NWU (in spirit). Seeing a need to provide evangelical theology students at Stellenbosch and NWU with a supportive environment (spiritually and academically), GWC has formed the Postgraduate Research Group for students enrolled in masters and doctoral work in other institutions. GWC's facilities are made available, appropriate seminars and study groups are arranged, and the student can benefit from interaction with other evangelical students and the GWC faculty. The group aims to provide support, interaction, pastoral care and fellowship for evangelical postgraduate students. Students are invited to present their research findings at regular seminars. Some of these students live in GWC campus housing. Two students have completed their doctorates under this programme - both with Stellenbosch, with several others anticipated. In addition, the PGR group has thirteen Honours²⁹ and twelve masters students. Cost for participation in the PGR group is \$450 per year, for use of the library, computer network, etc.³⁰

Though not as extensive as the PGR group, a support group for evangelical theological students at UKZN is in its formative stages through the initiative of Bill Houston (Overseas Council) and Philippe Emedi (ACTEA). Emedi describes this initiative:

Bill Houston and I have discussed and found that evangelicals students from around Africa, involved in post-graduate programme at UKZN, are facing serious challenges. We called for a first meeting on February 3, 2007 to initiate a "Support Group for Evangelicals" and eleven post-graduate students attended the meeting (from Madagascar, DRC, Mozambique, Rwanda, Kenya and South Africa). Some of the issues raised included: (1) social and cultural problems (due to xenophobia and set-backs of the

²⁹ The BA (Honours) programme in the South African context is a one-year post-graduate degree, often a prerequisite for admission into higher masters level programmes.

³⁰ Personal correspondence with Alan Beckman, 5 March 2007.

apartheid system), (2) liturgical and life-style issues, (3) evangelical values and identity and (4) financial needs, etc.³¹

In another development, evangelical institutions are beginning to partner with South African universities to offer PhDs. For instance, Cape Town Baptist Seminary offers a PhD in conjunction with University of Pretoria. Research supervision is done jointly by a CTBS faculty and a UP supervisor.

Besides South African university programmes, there are a substantial number of other African national (and some private) universities which offer doctoral degrees in theological studies. I do not have an accurate count of African national universities which fall into this category, but am aware that they are particularly common in Nigeria and Kenya. For example, most of the federal universities and many of the state universities in Nigeria have departments of religious studies.

We have noted that the evangelical presence in the faculties in the religious studies faculties of national universities is mostly lacking. There are exceptions in some South African universities, and that may also be true of some Nigerian universities. As is true with the general population, these departments appear to be moving in a more evangelical direction. For example, at the University of Jos, out of fifteen academic staff in the Christian Studies side (the department also includes Islamic Studies), thirteen of them could be characterized as evangelicals. This is much different than what the ratio would have been fifteen years ago, and this seems to be a trend in other Nigerian universities as well.³²

I should mention one institution in particular, because of its uniqueness in the Francophone context. The Université Protestante au Congo (UPC), in Kinshasa started its doctoral programme, Doctorat d'Etat in 1991. In the mid-1990s the programme had over seven professors supervising the programme, trained in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, UK and USA. This is a five year programme (two years of the diplôme d'études

³¹ Personal correspondence with Philippe Emedi, 9 March 2007.

³² Personal correspondence with Danny McCain, 12 March 2007.

supérieures with thesis; one or two years of specialisation in Strasburg, France or Switzerland or elsewhere; followed by one or two years of the doctoral thesis and public defense.) There is no equivalent doctoral degree in Francophone Africa to my knowledge except now recently with FATEB.³³

3. *Other Majority World programmes*

Some of the disadvantages of a Western context for doctoral studies might be somewhat overcome through a PhD programme in an overseas institution located in the Majority World outside of Africa. While not gaining the relevance of an African context, there may be some cultural and religious similarities which would result in a more satisfying and useful programme of studies. There may be an increased likelihood of staff returning to the sending country. And, the cost of the programme may be less expensive than Western counterparts. The thought of such South-South theological cross-fertilisation may also be inviting. Along these lines, students could consider strong, well-established doctoral programmes at the Asia Graduate School of Theology (Philippines),³⁴ South Asia Institute for Advanced Christian Studies (India),³⁵ and the Asian Center for Theological Studies and Mission (Korea).³⁶ And, Lusophone students should be aware of several PhD programmes in Brazilian national universities (which would be similar to most African national universities in terms of the general lack of evangelical presence) and a few mainline and Catholic seminaries.

³³ Personal correspondence with Philippe Emedi, 9 March 2007.

³⁴ <http://www.ats.ph/academics_agst.php>, accessed 8 March 2007.

³⁵ <<http://www.saiacs.org/Academics.htm>>, accessed 8 March 2007.

³⁶ <http://English.acts.ac.kr/international/international_2.html>, accessed 8 March 2007.

4. *Distinctive Western programmes*

Though not meeting our criterion for programmes within Africa, brief notice should be given of programmes in the West that are particularly geared to non-Western students.

Several programmes comes to mind that are particularly relevant for African studies. The University of Edinburgh's Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World was for many years under the leadership of Prof Andrew F. Walls.³⁷

Also based in England, the broadly evangelical Oxford Centre for Mission Studies offers PhD programmes through affiliated universities by linking the student's dissertation topic with appropriate supervisors. Awarding universities are usually the University of Wales and the Open University. Residential studies are minimal, requiring only three months initially and then six weeks annually during the six years of part-time studies the degree is expected to take. "Mission studies" is understood broadly, meaning that a wide range of academic subjects can be supervised. While the Centre has students from the Majority World at large, the African Studies Research Group is of particular interest for those students with research topics in this area.³⁸

5. *Western modular courses offered in Africa*

Another option which might be considered, if it was available, would be Western programmes offered in Africa on a modular basis. However, I am unaware of doctoral programmes in theological or biblical studies currently offered by Western institutions following this paradigm.

There would be advantages to this paradigm. The cost would probably be less, as it would eliminate the cost of travel to the West and the high cost of living. The courses offered in Africa would presumably be more contextualised. The visa problem would be eliminated. And, the

³⁷ <http://www.div.ed.ac.uk/worldchristi_16.html>, accessed 4 April 2007.

³⁸ <<http://www.ocms.ac.uk>>, accessed 5 April 2007.

programme could be offered through brief modules over a period of time, and thus appropriate for those who wish to remain in their ministries during their course of study.

Eastern University (Philadelphia) offers such a programme at the masters level in South Africa in the areas of Economic Development, International Development, and Organisational Leadership. Students attend a two to three week residency annually in South Africa and the remainder of their coursework is completed via online discussions and distance education.³⁹

Asuza Pacific University (California) offers a similar programme in certain locations in Africa, again at the masters level. "The Operation Impact (OI) Program provides educational support internationally to leaders of mission, government, nongovernment, and nonprofit organizations by delivering the Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership Program in a distributed-learning approach to global-learning groups worldwide. One- or two-week intensives held throughout the year are followed by semester-long study projects contracted for each course with professors via the Internet, including email and APU Library resources."⁴⁰

6. *Internet programmes*

One would think that with the proliferation of the use of the internet for educational delivery, programmes would begin to appear at the doctoral level for theological studies using this mode of delivery. UNISA, of course, was the pioneer along these lines. And, SATS, according to information they have provided, is soon to follow. One might suppose that a number of Western institutions have also initiated such programmes, but my brief internet search was fruitless. It may be that accreditation

³⁹ <<http://www.eastern.edu/academic/international/sld/FAQs.shtml>>, accessed 8 March 2007.

⁴⁰ <<http://www.apu.edu/bas/highered/operationimpact/>>, accessed 8 March 2007.

standards of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) in North America have hindered this development at the doctoral level.⁴¹

It may also be that for some time for this sort of programme there will remain a basic hesitancy in credibility within the wider educated public, whether deserved or not. Despite the record of UNISA, one might exercise some caution in recommending this mode of delivery for those who come from a culture where relationships, face to face contact, and a collaborative learning style are important. It may be that most Africans best learn within communities of learning that are more than “virtual.”

Additional Observations

1. International Consortium for the PhD in Theological Education

This consortium of PhD granting institutions worldwide is an attempt to mutually benefit from the strengths of other institutions in the offering of a PhD in Theological Education. The consortium, though first considered in 2003, is still in its infancy. The main participating schools are Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Linda Cannell, formerly at TEDS, is the driving force behind the consortium), the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, the Bible College of New Zealand, and the China Graduate School of Theology. I refer to this consortium because NEGST was involved in preliminary discussions (but now their future involvement is uncertain), and JETS is considering involvement. The PhD would be organised around three areas of concern essential for leaders: intercultural capabilities, educational design and management, and critical reflection

⁴¹ ATS standards for accreditation of Doctor of Theology and Doctor of Philosophy state, “Courses, seminars, and colloquia for research doctoral degrees shall normally be completed on the main campus of the institution offering the degree” (Standard L 3.2.0.) <<http://www.ats.edu/accrediting/standards/DegreeStandards.pdf>>, accessed 8 April 2007).

grounded in theological reasoning. Students would be able to undertake portions of their studies at any of the consortium institutions.⁴²

2. *Western scholarship support*

Doctoral education is expensive. Extensive library and electronic resources are essential for a credible programme. And schools are paying salaries at the highest level for qualified and experienced professors.

Most evangelical doctoral programmes in Africa are now receiving some funds for library development and student scholarships, specifically targeted at improving doctoral programmes on the continent. In past years, Western funding organisations mostly provided scholarship assistance for students in Western schools. It is notable, then, that three of the major Western scholarship agencies for evangelical theological studies are re-directing their funds towards the developing African doctoral programmes.

Langham Partnership International has stated that it “is committed to assisting Majority World-based doctoral programs and will further investigate opportunities to support doctoral students resident at Majority World institutions.”⁴³ Within Africa Langham now provides scholarships for doctoral students in theological and biblical studies at KwaZulu-Natal, Stellenbosch, NEGST, and Akrofi-Christaller. They may be adding additional students enrolled in other evangelical African doctoral programmes as well.⁴⁴

Similarly, the Christian International Scholarship Foundation (CISF) states as one of its four strategy points that it will, “Support scholars for education at in-context schools when possible.”⁴⁵

⁴² Linda Cannell, “International Consortium for the PhD in Theological Education,” unpublished paper, January 2007.

⁴³ “Langham Partnership International Protocol,” unpublished paper, 2003.

⁴⁴ Personal correspondence with Merritt Sawyer, 3 March 2007.

⁴⁵ <http://cisf.org/strategic_focus_insures.html>, accessed 4 April 2007.

Overseas Council has directed development funds specifically for the upgrading of library resources and internet capacity for evangelical doctoral programmes. And, faculty development scholarships are being given to OC partner schools that wish to train their faculty in African doctoral programmes.

These three organisations are to be commended for leading the way in this encouraging development.

3. *ACTEA Standards for Accreditation at Doctoral Level*

At its Council meeting last year, ACTEA approved revised standards for accreditation of doctoral level programmes.⁴⁶ NBTS is now a candidate for accreditation at doctoral level, and NEGST has indicated its interest in adding doctoral level accreditation to the existing accreditation of its post-graduate programmes. (JETS, ACI, nor FATEB have yet moved forward in this direction.) Besides the external international credibility that accreditation offers, the process of ACTEA accreditation is designed to result in a higher measurer of institutional excellence.

4. *Consultation on Faculty Development and Doctoral Training for Theological Institutions in Africa (DOCTRATA 07).*

Organised by NEGST, FATEB, and ACTEA, forty scholars, seminary administrators and representatives from donor organisations gathered together in August 2007 on the campus of NEGST to discuss issues relating to evangelical doctoral level training in Africa.

The objectives of the Consultation were to:

- a. Create an ongoing collaborative network of theological institutions offering doctoral level training and sponsoring agencies with a common knowledge base concerning theological educational needs and strategies in Africa.

⁴⁶ Available at
<http://www.theoledafrica.org/ACTEA/Standards/Doctoral_EN.pdf>.

- b. Spearhead a plan for providing faculty development and doctoral level training in Africa for theological institutions.
- c. Document creative and innovative solutions for doctoral level theological training in Africa and for Africa in a published 'Blueprint for Evangelical Doctoral Training in Africa', encompassing keynote addresses and consultation resolutions.⁴⁷

Perhaps as an initial instalment of a more comprehensive "blueprint", the Consultation released a consensus document expressing its findings.⁴⁸ This brief statement gives an overview of the context, assesses the current situation in the format of a SWOT analysis, suggests what "excellence" in an African doctoral-level programme might look like, describes an ideal "graduate profile", and lists factors which need attention in order to produce such excellence and outcomes including: on-going faculty development, new faculty development, resources, and collaboration.

Enhancing Doctoral-level Evangelical Theological Education in Africa

Doctoral theological education for evangelicals is still in its infancy and, despite the credible initiatives already launched, is in a phase of needing intentional support and creative ideas for improvement. I offer below a few suggestions of my own.

1. Scholarship funds directed toward African programmes.

It is noteworthy to observe that Langham, OCI, and CISF have kept pace with the developments in doctoral education in Africa in terms of their scholarship programmes. A few years ago SIM Nigeria intentionally

⁴⁷ "Proposal: Consultation on Faculty Development and Evangelical Doctoral Training in Africa," unpublished paper. Available from Sue Glidden, <Sue.Glidden@negst.edu>.

⁴⁸ "Consultation on Faculty Development and Doctoral Training for Theological Institutions in Africa," unpublished paper. Available from Sue Glidden, <Sue.Glidden@negst.edu>.

stopped awarding scholarships for students beginning overseas programmes, and rather is redirecting those funds to assist students enrolled in the JETS PhD programme, both providing needed financial assistance to the students, as well as building into a local programme. (However, one needs to remember the caution against in-breeding of faculty or overly relying on one doctoral programme for faculty development.) Given the credible alternatives that now exist and the advantages to training in-context, it may be that other relevant scholarship programmes should redirect the majority of their funds to assist students intending to earn their doctorates within the African context.

2. Work towards accreditation of these programmes

One of the six evangelical doctoral programmes in Africa is now working towards ACTEA accreditation with another to soon follow. While two of the others have governmental accreditation (and SATS apparently soon), all could benefit from the self-study process which leads to ACTEA accreditation.

Along these lines one might express dismay over what may soon become a proliferation of evangelical doctoral programmes on the continent with low academic standards. Schools that seem unconcerned with peer accreditation and international standards (such as ACTEA provides) nor are constrained by their country's governmental regulations may soon expand the ranks of those offering doctoral programmes in Africa. However, in reality only very few African evangelical schools have the qualified personnel or resources to sustain quality programmes at the doctoral level. It is therefore worrisome to hear of numerous institutions thinking of initiating such programmes.

3. Collaborative efforts

Rather than proliferate programmes and dilute our limited resources, would it not be preferable to concentrate them in a fewer number of schools which could then offer superior programmes? Is it possible for evangelical schools in one locale to cooperate, rather than to compete, in providing options for doctoral studies? This would allow schools to specialise in terms of their faculty and library resources, rather than engage in the

expensive habit of duplication. The Asia Graduate School of Theology, for instance, a project of the Asia Theological Association, draws together into a consortium eight evangelical, post-graduate seminaries in the Philippines in order to offer a variety doctoral programmes (EdD, PhD, DMiss, and DMin) which no one school could credibly offer on their own. At the very least, why not resist the effort to begin a doctoral programme in a certain subject area when a comparable programme exists close by? Should JETS really consider beginning a PhD in Education when NBTS, a one-day drive away, has capably offered this degree for the last five years? Denominational pride and perceived institutional status coming from doctoral programmes are formidable adversaries.

4. Use of electronic resources

Schools in Africa do not equal those in the West in terms of hard-copy library resources. (However, evangelical schools should do better, and NEGST is to be commended for its recent remarkable efforts.) But, where we can do as well as Western schools is in the area of electronic resources, complementing our meagre hard-copy resources and compensating somewhat for their lack. And, this strategy may be more important in the long run, as an increasing proportion of information is shifting from hard-copy to electronic form.

Significant archival collections of journals are now available at reasonable prices. JSTOR contains about 50 different titles that are significant for theological, biblical, and African studies (among the 500 or so titles in the total collection). Beginning July 2007, access to the entire JSTOR archive is being offered at no cost for all African schools through the Open Africa Initiative.⁴⁹ It is both inexplicable (while acknowledging that broadband internet access is not inexpensively available for all African schools) and disappointing that only a few theological schools are benefiting thus far:⁵⁰

⁴⁹ <<http://www.jstor.org/about/Africa/openafrica.html>>, accessed 8 March 2007.

⁵⁰ <http://www.jstor.org/about/participants_intl.html>, accessed 8 March 2007.

Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Theological College⁵¹ (Ghana)
Catholic University of Central Africa (Cameroon)
ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja (Nigeria)
Ghana Christian University College
Jos ECWA Theological Seminary (Nigeria)
Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (Kenya)
Pan African School of Theology (Kenya)
Scott Theological College (Kenya)
South African Theological Seminary
University of Malawi - Chancellor College⁵²

The American Theological Library Association Serials (ATLAS) collection is also available online, which contains approximately 80 journals, all relevant to theological studies.⁵³ While the institutional rate is fairly expensive, is it not possible that each of our doctoral students could pay the US\$99 annual access fee for individual users?

For its doctoral programme, JETS has purchased a laptop computer for every student (as has NEGST). The doctoral studies room has wireless access to broadband internet. Students each have a copy of Bible Works software (one of the premier packages for biblical studies – available through ACTEA at no cost for students in certain countries). JSTOR is available online, and JETS is planning to soon subscribe to the ATLAS database. During the first semester of classes a course was taught on “Electronic Resources in Biblical and Theological Research”, introducing them to this new and increasingly important world of resources.

⁵¹ The original name of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture.

⁵² Chancellor College is the campus of the University of Malawi which includes its theology faculty.

⁵³ <http://www.atla.com/products/titles/titles_atlas.html>, accessed, 8 March 2007.

5. Support groups for students

I have mentioned the innovative Post-Graduate Research group at George Whitefield for students at Stellenbosch and North-West. Could similar groups be started by evangelical schools where students are undertaking doctoral theological studies in national universities? Certainly there would be a need for such in Nairobi, and probably other centres of learning as well. Perhaps this would be the most effective way to use the established resources found in a number of national universities while assisting the students to retain their evangelical identity as well as to address contrary views in a scholarly fashion.

6. Linkage with institutions in the West

Is there value in some formal linkage of African doctoral programmes with institutions in the West? In particular, there could be substantial benefits from doctoral programmes scheduling times abroad for their students. By this means they might gain some of the benefits which we identified above from studying in the West without the disadvantages of a prolonged sojourn. Students would broaden their horizons, gain networking opportunities, and benefit from significant library resources. And, Western academics would become acquainted with a few of the rising evangelical intellectual leaders of Africa. There is some encouraging evidence that Western scholarship agencies (like Langham Partnerships) are willing to sponsor students who are enrolled in African PhD programmes for brief trips for concentrated research to Western study centres such as Tyndale House, Cambridge.

Along these lines, NEGST has sent its students for a study trip to Israel (the JETS PhD programme is planning the same) and intends to send some of its students to Tyndale House, Cambridge, to provide further interaction with Western scholars and access to those superior resources. FATEB has formal linkage with two evangelical seminaries in France, Vaux sur Seine and Aix-en-Provence. (However, in this case the benefits of such linkage are yet to be seen.)

Are there Western institutions which could regularly provide an institution with teachers for modular courses or seminars? Or, even stronger ties could

be explored. The Open University (UK) and the University of Wales seem to be willing to explore such possibilities. The DMin organised by SETECA (Guatemala) is actually awarded by Dallas Theological Seminary, which provides a number of the teachers. The collaborative linkage being initiated by the International Consortium for the PhD in Theological Education mentioned above might be another avenue for useful international collaboration.

While such linkage could prove beneficial, one must also admit the difficulty in practice of healthy, interdependent relationships between African and Western institutions. Do Western institutions really think that their African counterparts have anything to contribute to the relationship? Are they willing to grant appropriate control to the African institution? Genuine, give-and-take relationships need to be negotiated that will not compromise the goals and identity of African PhD programmes.

7. *What are the non-negotiables of a credible doctoral programme?*

What does it take to offer an internationally acceptable doctoral programme, which at the same time is appropriately contextualised to meet the needs of the African Church? Or, as drafted (in rough form) by the organisers of the Consultation on Faculty Development and Evangelical Doctoral Training in Africa,

What constitutes 'excellence' at the doctoral level – coming to some agreement across the north-south divide as to what are the generic and non-negotiable aspects of doctoral excellence - that are independent of cultural factors; and then what are the local and cultural distinctives that can be built alongside such 'deep - down' elements. - with a view toward programmes and degrees that have recognizable and internationally accepted academic credibility, and yet are clearly and deliberately and unapologetically African in flavour, and address the African context, issues and needs.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ "Proposal: Consultation on Faculty Development and Evangelical Doctoral Training in Africa," unpublished paper, p. 2.

ACTEA has made a decent start on identifying the essentials of a credible doctoral programme for Africa in its standards for accreditation. And, this document might well serve as the starting point for this discussion.

Conclusion

There is no doubt the third stage of development has begun in evangelical post-secondary theological education on our continent. When I first came to Africa in 1981, the number of competent programmes at the bachelors level was minimal. In the early 1990s, a few credible masters level seminaries began to be noticed, but they could be counted on one hand. And, now in this decade, we have seen the establishment of nearly a half-dozen new doctoral level programmes. This significant upward movement in the academic capacities of seminaries may be among the most significant trends in African evangelicalism over the past quarter century. African evangelicalism has reached a milestone in its intellectual maturity.⁵⁵ It has come of age. African Christianity is being heard with increasing volume throughout the world and its intellectual foundation is now being strengthened, widened, and deepened on African soil at the highest academic levels for the cause of Christ and to the praise of God.

⁵⁵ Confirmation of this is also seen in the recent publication of the *Africa Bible Commentary*, written entirely by evangelical African scholars (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2006).

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AFRICA: WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Paul Bowers*

1. ACTEA

When a history of evangelical theological education in modern Africa comes to be written, it will doubtless take as one defining moment the founding in 1976 of the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa, ACTEA. That would not be the only defining moment in such a history, but easily it has proven to be among the most consequential in the last half century. For it was with the emergence of ACTEA that evangelical theological education in Africa first gained that sense of common identity, that sense of community, of shared values and purpose, that has so bonded and energized the movement ... to a degree that we almost take for granted today.

The ACTEA community today represents a formal family of 150+ institutions in more than 30 countries, and its informal constituency is of course much larger than that. While not every single institution of evangelical theological education in Africa is formally linked with ACTEA, it would be difficult in our day to find any *major* evangelical post-secondary institution on the continent that is not ACTEA-related. Indeed

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* The material in this article was presented on 19 March 2007 at a consultation of theological educators in southern Africa.

many of our most important institutions have been active participants in the ACTEA community for two and three decades now.

I take it as emblematic of the depth of ACTEA presence on our continent, and its constructive partnership for good, that last week the distinguished Theological College of Central Africa (TCCA) in Ndola, Zambia, underwent its *third* ACTEA accreditation visitation. Its first was back in 1985 and the second was in 1996. It happens that I was present on the visiting team in both those earlier events. And now it has had its third decadal visitation. This is not only in its own way a historic achievement, both for TCCA and for ACTEA, but it represents something very, very good, very healthful, for all of us, this sustaining continental collaboration for theological education, and for God's good purpose in and for Africa, that the ACTEA movement represents. It is certainly an honour to our gathering here this week that we have present with us Joe Simfukwe, who serves both as Principal of TCCA, and at the same time as ACTEA's continental Director.

2. AIM and SIM

If we seek to take the measure of this phenomenon of which we are a part, evangelical theological education in Africa, I also take it as symbolic of something deeper and consequential that this event we are engaged in this week is sponsored by the two international missions, AIM and SIM, each with now well over a century of deep, costly, committed engagement in the work of the Lord across this continent (together with AEF, which merged into SIM several years ago). Just as these two international bodies stand in the background of this event that has brought us together for common good, so each of these two bodies has stood, in the background, behind so much of what has been achieved for good in evangelical theological education in Africa during the past half century and more. We salute them in the Lord for their servant posture, demonstrated over the years, as in this present gathering. Not only have these two missions, with AEF, been in the forefront of founding and sustaining eminent theological schools across the continent, but each has played and continues to play a crucial sustaining role in the ACTEA movement from which we all benefit.

From the first days of ACTEA, SIM has been providing the movement with core support staffing that has helped service the inner structures and operations, and it still does so today. What a privilege, what an appropriate

thing to do, that we should here pause to salute SIM's Scott Cunningham, who has served so diligently behind the scenes in ACTEA since 1993, and this year is transitioning to a new global role with Overseas Council International. God bless you, Scott. Thank you, from all of us. And don't forget us. OCI is well-resourced, and we are still family. So don't forget African family values!

And it was AIM's two flagship theological colleges, Scott Theological College in Kenya, and the Institut Supérieur Théologique de Bunia in Congo (for which institution AIM was a principal sponsor), it was these two that helped form the crucial nucleus of ACTEA founding institutions, lending their own status and credibility to ACTEA in its earliest fledgling years. It is these two institutions that have continued steadily ever since to supply the movement with exemplary support and leadership. It is not surprising in the least that ACTEA's current Chair is Dr Jacob Kibor, Principal of Scott Theological College. Nor that his immediate predecessor at Scott, Dr Titus Kivunzi, was one of ACTEA's Principal continental leaders for a generation.

In acknowledging the critical role of AIM and SIM to the continental movement that we represent here today, one would err not to mention as well the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, which Scott Theological College has managed to publish for a quarter century, providing all of us across the continent with a distinguished forum for dialogue on issues of theology and ministry in Africa. Nor dare we fail to mention in further evidence the magisterial achievement of the *Africa Bible Commentary*, published last year, a project for which SIM was a principal sponsor.

And finally in this assembly we have present fresh evidence of AIM and SIM's long-term support to evangelical theological education in Africa, in the persons of Keith Ferdinando and Steve Hardy, each having already made their mark in African theological education for some years, ... and now each helping coordinate the involvement of their historic missions in Africa, AIM and SIM, in ongoing support of theological education. May the Lord prosper your hand, brothers, as you go forward.

3. Theological Schools as Backbone

Turning now to the question that focuses our reflection today, namely: *Theological education in Africa: why does it matter?*, may I suggest for

your consideration a fundamental proposition, namely that *theological schools form the backbone of organized evangelicalism in Africa*. I propose that this is the case far more than most evangelical church leadership on the continent is aware, more than the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) may have always recognised, more than para-church leaders and mission strategists both here and overseas take into account, perhaps more true than even we ourselves are aware. And I believe it is not a recent development; I believe that *theological schools have formed the backbone of organized evangelicalism in Africa* for much of the past half century.

I was deeply struck by a statement that the noted international scholar Andrew Walls made last year at the ICETE Consultation for Theological Educators in Chiang Mai, Thailand, which a number of you attended. Walls used an impressive metaphor to express the critical role that theological schools play in global evangelicalism. I find his metaphor perhaps nowhere more applicable than in Africa. He said that theological schools of today function for evangelical Christianity much like the monasteries did for Christianity in medieval Europe. Just as the great monastic centres scattered across Europe held things together for the Christian movement through those centuries of chronic disruption and confusion, could it be that today in Africa our theological schools are playing a similar role? Amidst all the heady vibrancy and growth of Africa's Christian communities, but also amidst all the debilitations and disorders of this continent, the theological schools have remained linked together as beacons of steadfastness, and hope, and constructive engagement. It has been these schools, and their stream of graduates moving out into leadership roles across the continent, that have anchored, and sustained, and equipped, through circumstances not so dissimilar from those of the medieval monasteries, with survival ever threatened, but nevertheless surviving and conserving and rejuvenating. What a dynamic, heartening symbol!

It may be that African evangelicalism under-estimates the degree to which our schools function as crucial bonding matter and resourcing for the cohesion and vitality of the larger community. But let us not then take ourselves, our particular roles, for granted. They do matter. We do matter. In the Lord, for Africa. It is that on which I wish to reflect with you in more detail here today.

4. My Involvement

The year normally mentioned for the founding of ACTEA is 1976, as I have done today. That would make ACTEA 30 years old last year. All of us know that a continent-wide service network remaining still active throughout Africa more than thirty years later is something to be noticed, ... and even to be celebrated. Actually the founding date for ACTEA could just as reasonably be placed in 1975 rather than in 1976. It was in a meeting of the AEA Theological Commission in Limuru, Kenya, in November 1975 that the decision was taken, under the energetic leadership of AEA's General Secretary, Byang Kato, to found what has become ACTEA. We use the date 1976 because, following Kato's sudden untimely death only weeks after the 1975 Limuru meeting, it was then in March 1976 that the AEA Executive Committee formally actioned Kato's proposal to undertake formation of what came to be known as ACTEA.

It was in that previous year 1975 that Byang Kato visited ECWA Theological Seminary in Igbaja, Nigeria, where I was a lecturer. At that time Igbaja was one of the premier evangelical theological schools on the continent. Kato was an alumnus, and a former lecturer; and the now well-known African evangelical leaders Tokunboh Adeyemo and Yusufu Turaki had just graduated. My wife and I first came to Igbaja in 1968, and in 1975 we had just resumed a place on the faculty after I had completed doctoral studies at Cambridge in England. Kato took me aside and asked me to accept an assignment to form an association for evangelical theological schools throughout the continent. At that point I respectfully declined. I suppose I wasn't used to thinking continentally, as Kato was; I was fully focused on serving at that one very worthy institution in Nigeria. Aggressive initiator that he was, Kato took my response in stride, and simply went over my head to my mission directors and had me assigned to the task. That is where it all started for ACTEA. Knowing as I do now how very hard it is to form, much less sustain, continent-wide movements in Africa, it is amazing how everything fell together so quickly. But in short-order that is what happened. People were ready for such services, such a movement, such community, eager for it, ready to put shoulders to the wheel. And here we are today, standing in that heritage, and by God's grace still part of that movement.

Those were heady days, not least for me. I had grown up in West Africa, in Liberia where my parents were missionaries. But up to the time

of Kato's invitation in 1975 my experience of Africa had been West Africa. With the launching of ACTEA I made my first trip across to Kenya in 1978, and then in 1979 to Cameroon, Congo/Zaire, Burundi, Rwanda, Malawi, and to Zambia, to TCCA in fact. Later, in 1982, I managed to get to South Africa for the first time, to Johannesburg where I was hosted by the Baptist Theological College, then to Pietermaritzburg and Durban, and on to Cape Town as guest of the Bible Institute and what has now become Cornerstone. But by then I had also been co-opted by the World Evangelical Alliance into the formation of what has become the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), linking ACTEA with similar continental movements globally. That eventually took me quite beyond the ACTEA project and beyond Africa, ... which is another story.

5. Kato

Why was Kato so keen to get started an association for the evangelical theological schools of Africa? Of all the pressing needs of the African evangelical community, which was then still in such an embryonic state, why did he think that theological education mattered so much? In point of fact at that 1975 Limuru meeting when he pushed through the idea of ACTEA, he also pushed through the grand vision of founding two graduate schools, one for francophone Africa and another for anglophone Africa, what eventually became FATEB and NEGST, bright jewels today of the African evangelical community's cooperative endeavours. So why were these sorts of initiatives so much on Kato's mind? I think this warrants some re-visiting now so many years later as we ourselves take fresh stock of our own commitments and dreams, and our calling before the Lord on this continent.

As you know so well, among the most extraordinary and fundamental characteristics of modern African Christianity has been its explosive growth. Recently an award-winning cover story in *Newsweek Magazine*, on "The Changing Face of the Church", stated that in Africa the Christian faith "is spreading faster than at any time or place in the last two thousand years." The measure of that growth is statistically vast and long-term. This can be highlighted by three familiar but nevertheless remarkable statistics: (1) that for the entire past century the African Christian community has averaged an annual growth rate twice that of the continent's general annual population increase; (2) that already the majority of Africans call

themselves Christian, even when including northern Africa in the calculation; and (3) that statistically there are now more professing Christians in Africa than in North America. Just last week an insightful article in *TIME Magazine* stated that “Christianity, especially Evangelicalism, is growing faster in Africa than anywhere else on the planet.”

This explosive growth clearly feeds the enviable vitality of the African church. At the same time this growth has generated what has been widely regarded as among the most basic challenges facing African Christianity today. Put simply, the rate of intake has persistently outstripped the capacities of the African church for orderly assimilation. We are growing faster than we have been able to manage properly. At all levels the church has been unable to generate sufficient trained leadership to disciple the influx of would-be adherents. In consequence it has found itself in many areas overwhelmed by massive numbers of participants with very little perception of the implications of genuine Christian commitment. The result has been an exuberant foliage linked to what is commonly perceived to be a dangerously shallow rootage.

The repeated urgent call of Africa's Christian leadership in such circumstances has therefore been for attention above all else to church leadership development. Most of our theological schools represented here today arose because of this sense of critical need. As churches have multiplied, and multiplied again, the nurture of effective leadership for such rapidly expanding communities has become a challenge of primal significance. And nowhere within the African evangelical community was this more articulately expressed than by Byang Kato. It is he who first called the evangelical community in Africa to this awareness, clarified its implications, and gave practical substance to its implementation.

6. Kato's adjunct concerns

It is important to notice that Kato combined this vision of theological education's strategic role for Africa with two other foundational concerns. One of these two was his profound commitment to the vision of African Christianity being truly African. He expressed repeated gratitude to those who had brought the Gospel to Africa in costly response to God's call. But he also repeatedly emphasized the need for African Christianity to be both truly biblical and truly African. The challenge, as he saw it, was how to be

genuinely in the world—in his African world—while not being merely of that world, how to change the clothing without changing the content, how to serve the genuine gospel in an African pot, how to adjust the accent without adjusting the truth.

It is inherent in the character of Christian advance that it always arrives from outside, that it always arrives anywhere, not just in Africa, unavoidably as *international post*, with a *foreign postmark*. Nevertheless it is also inherent in the character of Christianity that wherever it arrives it is meant to take indigenous root, to begin to use *local postage*, to have a *local postmark*. As John Mbiti said: "It belongs to the very nature of Christianity to be subject to localization. Otherwise its universality becomes meaningless." The biblical mandate to universalisation, to bringing the faith everywhere, is therefore a mandate to universal localization, ... or, put otherwise, to contextualisation. So far as I can discover, it would seem that Kato was the very first person to introduce publicly to the global evangelical world the word 'contextualisation'. Today that word is everywhere used, even perhaps over-used. But it was still a barely minted neologism, not yet in the dictionaries, when Kato featured the word and affirmed the concept in his plenary address at the historic Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation in 1974.

In Kato's perspective, one principal hindrance to the development of African Christianity towards firm rootage and stable maturity has been the pervasive feeling that it is foreign, that somehow Christianity is but another aspect of the cultural and ideological imperialism of the western world. African Christians have long shared a heart-hunger to be at home in their faith, not feeling like awkward guests in someone else's home, not feeling that they must always live off imports. They long for the faith to become indigenously acclimated, to have the taste and look and feel and sound of something authentically of God in Africa, so that it may thereby become sustainably effective for God's good purpose in and for and through Africa. Kato courageously embraced and articulated just this commitment.

The second foundational concern that Kato combined with his vision for theological education was for sound biblical grounding and effective theological engagement for the evangelical community. He knew that if we fail, in Paul's words, deliberately to become all things to all men, then the Christian faith will not gain appropriate traction. Yet if, to avoid that risk, we *over-adjust*, we *over-acclimate*, what takes root (as Kato pointed out)

may very well *not* be true Christian faith. What may take root can all too easily be indigenous tares—indigenous weeds—rather than gospel wheat—as has happened again and again in the history of the Christian faith elsewhere, and is so evident in western lands today. Kato knew this and gave repeated warning to this effect. Hence the title of his book: *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*.

So it is that along with his sense of the strategic significance of theological education, and his emphasis on appropriate cultural contextualisation, Kato combined a profound concern to awaken the African church to its theological responsibilities, to be in the world but not of the world, holding fast to God's Word while holding it forth to a needy continent. Therefore if we want to understand the impact of Kato's vision, and its continuing relevance today, we may wish to tease out these three strands, reflect on them, and perhaps reanimate them in our commitments as we go forward in our generation, our new century, for God's good purpose in and for and through Africa, namely: a commitment to cultural contextualisation, a commitment to biblical faithfulness and theological engagement, and both of these to be energised by fundamental strategic initiative in theological education.

In Kato's view there was no greater calling in his day than that we should pray and work, with all the energy available to us, to see the equipping of pastors and teachers for the church, who are themselves biblically and theologically mature, not tossed to and fro, disciplined and able to disciple. This was at the heart of Kato's strategic vision and message: *that theological education represented the central most urgent need for Christianity on the continent*. That assessment remains valid for today. Kato's vision would seem to be a timely word, a still valid vibrant challenge, even now as we stand in the opening years of the 21st century.

7. Trends

Now let me shift to focus on the present and future for theological education in Africa, in light of Kato's perspective. That is to say, if theological education so matters in Africa, then how have things fared for evangelical theological education since the days of Kato? At least in rough overview, where are we now thirty plus years on? How are we doing?

When I accepted responsibility to get ACTEA launched back in the 1970s, very soon I undertook a research project to find out just what existed in theological education on the continent. Subsequently I wrote two articles based on the findings. Some of you will be familiar with those articles, or at least with their titles: *New Light on Theological Education in Africa*, and *More Light on Theological Education in Africa*.¹ I was hoping by those two publications to stimulate, indeed to provoke if you please, ongoing research in such an exciting field of inquiry. It has been amazing to me since then how little that intended provocation has had effect. Basic research on evangelical theological education in Africa remains very much still in its infancy.

Nevertheless that early research uncovered certain notable trends that I believe continue to be evident and characteristic today. I believe there are also persisting challenges, already evident in the 1970s, that continue to face us today as we move forward into the 21st Century. My comments in this respect will be impressionistic, but hopefully they are also informed impressions.

I see at least three notable trends in the decades since Kato, namely (1) the proliferation of theological schools, (2) the Africanisation of staffing, and (3) the persisting academic upgrading of programmes.

(1) *Proliferation*. As for proliferation, throughout the period under review the number of theological schools in Africa has everywhere mushroomed. The increase in numbers all across the continent has long since exceeded, indeed escaped, all documentation. When I began my inquiries, the most complete listing then available referenced 189 theological schools in Africa. By the time we published the *ACTEA Directory* in the latter 1980s, we had increased the documentation nearly four-fold to 742. When efforts at revision of that publication lapsed in the 1990s, over 1200 institutions had been identified. This persisting trend is owing doubtless not least to the astonishing growth and vibrancy of the African Christian community throughout these years. And yet this proliferation of theological training institutions still struggles to keep up with the need. Extrapolating from what data is available, one estimation is that if every person presently in any sort of leadership training programme in Africa were to be sent into pastoral ministry, and each put in charge of congregations of 600 members, then each such person would have to pastor 10 such congregations to cover the numbers of professing believers in

Africa today.

(2) *Africanisation*. A second trend in African theological education, for which we may rejoice, has been the very evident Africanisation of administrative and teaching staff. When ACTEA first started it was not so. Everywhere the effort was urgent to provide advanced training for key individuals in order to meet this pressing challenge. We stand today well down the track in that noble, and continuing, effort. But already for some years now virtually every leading ACTEA-related school has been African-led, and with the majority of teaching staff also African. While there is still progress to make on this front, overall this has been a notable attainment in the ongoing development of African evangelical theological education. It would be interesting to have someone develop the statistical warrant for what I am here stating as fact.

(3) *Upgrading*. A third major trend has been a persisting, even dramatic, pattern of academic upgrading. In ACTEA's opening years the impression was that schools needing ACTEA's services would mostly be functioning at the secondary level, and ACTEA's initial plans were designed accordingly. This calculation proved mistaken. In fact, except in selected areas of the continent, the core schools benefiting from ACTEA services are almost exclusively post-secondary, and today many have moved on to include post-graduate programmes. The rising educational level of the African Christian community has doubtless been a principal contributing cause. And because the leaders of African society, business, and government have been increasingly highly educated, the church has sensed a need to provide more church leadership equipped to the very highest academic levels.

8. Challenges

One could suggest other notable trends, but let me turn instead now to continuing challenges in the present and for the future. What do I take to be the principal challenges still facing us as theological educators? Again I will be impressionistic.

(1) *Beyond pastoral formation*. First I would say that evangelical theological education in Africa needs to reach, much more than it presently does, *beyond* its characteristic focus on *pastoral* formation. It should certainly cater for training pastors, perhaps principally so. But it should be

catering as well for other specialized leadership roles required by the church. As the *ICETE Manifesto* puts it:

To provide for pastoral formation is not enough. We must also respond creatively ... to the church's leadership needs in areas such as Christian education, youth work, evangelism, journalism and communications, TEE, counselling, denominational and parachurch administration, seminary and Bible school staffing, community development, and social outreach. (Article 3)²

Overall this is not yet a characteristic strength of our movement. We need to broaden the range of programme specialisations so as to relate more responsibly to the full range of leadership needs within the African church. If we are servants of the church, as we are meant to be, then those academic and vocational specializations important to the church leadership needs of the African evangelical community should be more proactively provided by us, additional to and beyond standard pastoral education. We should begin to provide for advanced-level leadership specializations in such fields as Islamics, urban ministry, community development, cross-cultural mission, and organisational administration. In this area of need I suspect the patterns have hardly shifted since the days of Kato.

(2) *Beyond preparatory education.* Secondly, evangelical theological education in Africa needs to reach *beyond* its characteristic offering of one-time preparatory education. Again it has hardly shifted in this respect since the days of Kato. Our efforts are focused almost entirely on getting people ready for their life-time roles, in time-delimited three-year or four-year programmes. Properly we should be focused instead on providing church leaders with multi-faceted means for life-long growth, for life-long professional development. This would include foundational preparatory training for our students, as almost all of our theological institutions presently do. But it would also include modes for educative upgrading that continue to be available throughout our students' entire leadership careers. Our theological schools should be adding to their basic preparatory programmes a range of in-service training institutes and continuing education programmes for leaders already in the field, including regular workshops and refresher courses, to help pastors and church leaders better integrate theological reflection with effective ministry in the African context. In this respect we are thus far still working from a defectively truncated script.

(3) *Addressing the intellectual challenge.* Thirdly, I suggest that in the world of African evangelicalism we are faced with a profound intellectual challenge that is yet to be sufficiently addressed. We have been good at so many things for Kingdom values in Africa, but with respect to intellectual responsibilities, not so, not yet. John Stott has spoken often in Africa of the essential biblical summons for Christians to be mature *in mind*, for a mindful Christianity, a faith that is grounded and effective because it is biblically rooted and theologically engaged. That mattered also to Kato, hugely, but African evangelicalism is not there yet.

The principal *intellectual* challenge for Christianity in modern Africa is not in dealing with rampant individualism, as in the west. Certainly it is not a need to address the ravages that come with affluence, as is so common for believers in the west. Nor are we being distracted and diverted by post-modernity, or by aggressive secularism, yet. We have other basic intellectual drives on the African continent, other habits of the heart, other habits of the mind. Using the so available, so up-to-date western evangelical textbooks in our theological colleges, accessing the superb educational facilities of evangelical communities overseas for our advanced training, we hardly have begun to tune in to the distinctive contemporary intellectual realities of our own continent, to modern Africa's intellectual life.

Make no mistake, we have been intellectually active. African evangelicalism has admirably equipped itself for scholarly engagement with the biblical text—witness the just-released *Africa Bible Commentary*. African evangelical theologians have also been addressing with sensitivity the consequential issues relating to Africa's traditional life and culture. But modern Africa is not traditional Africa. And modern Africa's *intellectual* life in particular has remained a largely uncharted territory for us. That part of our African context we do not know, and have yet to effectively engage.

The intellectual trends that now dominate and determine the western world are well known. And we can thank God for the Francis Schaeffer or Lesslie Newbigin or Ravi Zacharias, who in their various ways have understood and interpreted the times for western believers, who have aided God's people in the west in discerning how best to maintain a godly biblical mindset and witness amidst the often enticing and deceptive intellectual cross-currents of their modern world. But where is the Schaeffer or Newbigin or Zacharias for our own world, for modern Africa? Are our programmes, our schools, providing suitable incubation for such individuals

to emerge? Here we and our students live in modern Africa, amidst habits of the mind not the same as in the west, but which certainly, as much as in the west, as anywhere and at any time for Christians, can be habits of the mind that are not always compatible with a thought-life taken captive to Jesus Christ ... habits of the heart that can produce, too readily, competing altars of the mind.

We and our students, to our credit, have been devoted to mastery of the biblical text. We also train our students in the practicalities of ministering in the African church context. With them we seek to address the implications of traditional Africa's pervasive presence in contemporary African life. But we have hardly begun in equipping our students for ministry in modern Africa's *intellectual* context. Indeed we ourselves are hardly acquainted with that context. Our dominant theological discourse has become tuned to traditional Africa, one might say to 19th Century Africa, but not to modern 21st Century Africa's intellectual life.

I am saying that if Kato were to return today and take assessment of where we are at, he would likely want to say, even as he did say three decades ago, that African evangelical Christianity faces an intellectual challenge, a theological responsibility, that remains scarcely recognized much less taken up. So the African university communities, and the educated elite of Africa, are hardly addressed by the gospel in its richness and depth and relevance. And African Christians functioning in the professional world of modern Africa can often live dichotomized intellectual and spiritual lives, devoted to Christ in their personal life and witness, but functioning by alien interpretive commitments in public life, because (a) African Christianity tries to live without theology, as both Mbiti and Kato famously stated; (b) exuberant Christianity distrusts theological and intellectual life; (c) mission-minded Christianity is appropriately eager to reach the unreached; and (d) the desperate needs of the continent are rightly driving us all towards greater social responsibility. But all this can come with a dangerous risk, a hazardous side-effect, namely that in African Christianity every thought is generally speaking not yet being brought into captivity to Jesus Christ. The anchors are loose; the rudder is ill-attended; and we are not in a tideless sea.

Hence a principal challenge to evangelical theological educators in Africa today would be to develop a vibrant, winsome theological life, effectively engaged with the intellectual realities of modern Africa. This in

turn would require developing the supportive infrastructures, additional to theological schools, by which such a mindful life can be sustained and flourish throughout African evangelicalism, so that the blessings of Christ's Lordship may be fully experienced in our midst.

Conclusion

In conclusion, if biblical Christianity in Africa is to survive and flourish for God's good purpose in and for Africa, if it is to speak in our day with a distinctive voice, rather than as but a mere sub-set, a weak echo, of the dominating ideologies of our modern African context, then it must continue to prioritise the formation of leadership that is both profoundly committed to biblical foundations, and at the same time tuned to and engaged with the dynamic realities of its present context. Only by providing urgently for the formation of such disciplined and discipling leadership will the church in Africa be able to meet the critical needs and also the remarkable opportunities thrust upon it by its rapid growth, in serving its generation after the will of God in this great continent in the coming decades of the 21st Century.

That is the call before us, the call upon our lives as theological educators. That is why your own personal individual engagement has mattered and continues to matter, the sacrifices that you have made, the difficult choices, the costly service over the years, surviving through unwelcome personal disruptions and losses and conflicts. That is why theological education matters, for God's good purpose in Africa. To my mind in this day, in this hour, on this continent, there is really no higher calling.

¹ Both documents are available on the web, at: www.theoledafrica.org/OtherMaterials/

² The text of the *ICETE Manifesto* is available on the web, at: www.icete-edu.org/manifesto.html

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HEALTH, SICKNESS AND HEALING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A Brief Theology

Judith L. Hill

I. Introduction

Here in Africa the question of healing has always been one of great importance. So many people suffer from a variety of diseases and illnesses, some of which are eminently treatable (or even preventable) if only there were medicines and health professionals available.¹ Other health problems are not so easily addressed, such as the AIDS pandemic and its consequences.

In the search for better health for Africans, a variety of solutions have been attempted. The traditional healers as well as the sorcerers are ever-present and frequently consulted. Sometimes, well-wishers from other parts of the world offer African states the wonders of Western medicine. Unfortunately, the donors have occasionally forgotten that the vital economic and scientific-industrial infrastructures necessary for sustaining the technology are often lacking on the African continent.

Others work tirelessly and sacrificially at promoting primary health care, attempting to educate the populace so that they can spare themselves from the most easily avoided diseases and infections.

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¹ See Lydia Polgreen, "An African Doctor Returns to Heal His Ravaged Homeland," in *New York Times* (December 16, 2006). The article highlights the difficulties, even in the most basic aspects, in attempting to provide the health care necessary for the survival of the Central African population, where the mortality rate has fallen by ten years over the last decade, now only at 42 years.

Still others take a different approach. They feel overwhelmed by the immensity of problem of health care in Africa and, as a result, tend to downplay this present life and simply emphasize eschatological joys and glorious, heavenly bodies.

In contrast, the supporters of the Health and Wealth Gospel fervently proclaim healing in the atonement and a theology that announces prosperity and good health in this life for all those who believe in Jesus.² Their healing services and evangelistic campaigns in African cities are almost always filled to overflowing by those seeking the physical health that they have not found elsewhere.

But what does the Bible have to say about health, sickness and healing? Can believers expect health and (if necessary) receive healing? Is it God's plan to eliminate disease and sickness? To find answers to these and similar questions, we will look particularly to New Testament theology. On the basis of the biblical evidence, we will formulate a NT theology of health, sickness, and healing.³

Biblical theology is by nature descriptive rather than prescriptive. It takes what is present in a given author, describes the theological impact of the data and then organizes the results into some sort of coherent whole. It is not terribly surprised or embarrassed by the fact that different NT authors have distinct perspectives. NT theologians see each writer as an individual contributor to the whole.

Since the Bible is not a textbook of theology, the relevant data for a theology of health, sickness and healing are widely scattered. For the OT, we will present only the most basic understanding of its contribution to the topic. For the NT, however, we will attempt a brief description of the relevant theology of each writer. This method has the advantage of not silencing the individual authors but allowing us to see the contribution each person makes to the whole, as the work of each one reinforces and supplements the thoughts of the others. In proceeding by genres, we have the opportunity to look (somewhat) diachronically at the NT,⁴ allowing us to move forward in time from the deeds and teachings of Jesus in the Gospels, on

² For bibliographic indications and a critique of the healing component of the Prosperity Gospel, see Douglas Moo, "Divine Healing in the Health and Wealth Gospel," in *Trinity Journal* 9:2 (Fall 1988), pp. 191-209. See also D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988), pp. 148-169.

³ Our NT Theology will be developed on the basis of the second half of the Christian canon. Nevertheless, its roots are to be found in the OT, where the NT writers themselves founded their theology. For this reason, we need to start in the OT, even if we cannot do more than mention a few points there before proceeding to the NT.

⁴ The Gospel of John, with its probable date in the 90's, throws off this calculation somewhat.

through the founding and strengthening of the church (Acts and the Epistles) and, finally, on to the earnest expectation of the return of the Lord as described in the book of Revelation, written near the end of the first century AD.

Excursus on the Old Testament Evidence: A Brief Survey of Its Theology of Healing

Since this study centers on the NT, we must limit this preliminary section to a few obvious implications drawn from the OT with regard to the issue of health, sickness and healing. These few statements are, however, foundational to understanding the NT. The writers of the NT were committed to what we know as the OT as their Sacred Scriptures (2 Tim. 3.14); and, with the probable exception of Luke, they each grew up in a synagogue setting where the Bible (the law, the prophets and the writings) would have been read faithfully. Thus their own theology had already been shaped by what Scripture recorded of God's character and his dealings in history. Their theology was then further molded by their contact with Jesus and by their personal reflections on the implications of the New Covenant.

The first and most important point to underline in an OT theology of health, sickness and healing is that God himself created the first human beings, Adam and Eve (Gen. 1-2). Therefore, as designer of the human body, God thoroughly understands its workings, as David pointed out:

*For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place.
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,
your eyes saw my unformed body.⁵ (Ps. 139.13-16)*

A second fundamental concept from the OT is that sickness and death are among the ongoing results of the Fall, when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3). Sickness and death were not part of the "very good" creation God fashioned (Gen. 1.31). But these negative effects were indeed what he said would happen as a consequence of human disobedience. Pains from labor—whether from

⁵ Unless otherwise noted, the biblical citations in English are from the New International Version. Those in Greek are from the 4th edition of the UBS *Greek New Testament*. The Hebrew comes from the BHS.

working in the fields or from bearing children—became a reality when the first couple did what God had forbidden. In a NT comment on the Fall and its aftermath, Paul explained that “*just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, ... in this way death came to all men, because all sinned ... [D]eath reigned from the time of Adam...*” (Rom. 5.14).

In the third place, and related to the issue of the Fall, the Old Testament writers were aware that sickness (even to the point of death) could be a disciplinary measure on the part of God toward an erring member of his family. In the Song of Moses, God proclaims himself to be the only all-powerful God: “*I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal*” (Deut. 32.39). The “wounding” may be part of God’s discipline,⁶ but the healing also comes from the same almighty God, as further evidence of the caring relationship he maintains with his creation.

Very often, the prospect of God’s discipline is expressed in conditional statements. From the beginning of Israel’s journey with Yahweh toward the Promised Land, God emphasized through Moses that he was interested in their obedience to him and would be able to protect them if they would but trust him and follow his instructions: “*If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you*” (Ex. 15.26). This same idea of sickness as discipline is reiterated in the conditional commands given to Moses at Sinai (Ex. 23.25f.).

Fourthly, and as already intimated in the previous point, the OT highlights God’s sovereignty and his ability to heal. No sickness, not even death, is beyond his capability to overcome. God called himself “*the LORD who heals you*” (Ex. 15.26). Moses took Yahweh at his word and called upon him to heal his sister Miriam of her leprosy, which God did (Num. 12.13f.). David the psalmist described God as the one who “*heals all your diseases*” (Ps. 103.3). The prophet Elisha prayed to the Lord, and the Shunamite’s son was raised from the dead (2 Kings 4.32-35). According to the OT evidence, then, God can and does heal; but it should be noted that death still “reigned” (in the apostle Paul’s terms), for God did not always choose to heal.⁷

⁶ Cf. Hebrews 12.

⁷ Richard Mayhue, *Divine Healing Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), p. 144, notes some of the OT saints whose illnesses were not cured by God: Isaac (Gen. 27.1); Jacob (Gen 32.25; 48.1); Ahijah (1 Kings 14.4); and Elisha (2 Kings 13.14). To that list, we can add some NT

One of the psalmists⁸ enlarged the idea of healing to include dimensions other than the physical, when he spoke of the Lord as the one who “*heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds*” (Ps. 147.3).⁹ King Solomon, in his prayer of dedication for the Temple, said that if God’s people would turn to him in humility and repentance, then God would “*hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land*” (2 Chron. 7.14), perhaps opening the possibility that “healing” here includes the ideas of ecological healing¹⁰ and political stability. Once again the accent is on a right relationship to God as being a precondition for candidacy for the healing activity of the sovereign Ruler of the universe. God may not always grant healing, but being in right relationship with him is the first step God asks of his people.

In the prophets, healing was frequently linked with the social, political and spiritual aspects of life. Hosea 14.4 promised spiritual blessings to the repentant: “*I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them.*” In the same book, God described his relationship with his people as that of healing them (Hos. 11.3), which, in the context, is perhaps a reference to delivering them socially and politically from slavery in Egypt. In Jeremiah, we find the language of curing and restoring being used for the spiritual relationship that Israel (Jer. 3.22) and Jeremiah himself (Jer. 15.19) had with God. “Healing” is needed in order to choose the right values in life, as Jeremiah seems to say in the context of chapter 17:

*Cursed is the one who trusts in man,
who depends on flesh for his strength
and whose heart turns away from the Lord....
But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,
whose confidence is in him....
Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay
is the man who gains riches by unjust means.
When his life is half gone, they will desert him,*

personalities as well: Paul (2 Cor. 12.7-10); Trophimus (2 Tim. 3.20); and Timothy (1 Tim. 5.23).

⁸ No ascriptions are given for Psalms 146-150. Throughout this article, the numbering of the psalms and their versification follows the English text.

⁹ Although this article is dealing primarily with physical aspects of health, the fact that God is Creator, not only of the entire animate and inanimate universe, but most specifically of humankind, guarantees his interest in all aspects of human welfare and of the future of the planet as well. Cf. Rom. 8.

¹⁰ Cf. the plague of locusts mentioned in the preceding verse, 2 Chron. 7.13.

*and in the end he will prove to be a fool....
 O LORD, the hope of Israel,
 all who forsake you will be put to shame.
 Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust
 because they have forsaken the LORD,
 the spring of living water.
 Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed;
 save me and I will be saved,
 for you are the one I praise. (Jer. 17.5, 7, 11, 13f.)*

The OT writers thus underlined the fact that God can indeed heal his people in every aspect of their life.

A final point in this rapid survey of the OT deals with the Jewish anticipation of well-being the Age to Come. At that time, Messiah would come as a healer, and sickness would be a thing of the past for God's people. This aspect is most clearly and frequently observed in Isaiah's lengthy prophecy. In the context of the messianic age and restoration, God spoke of binding up the bruises of his people and healing the wounds that he himself had inflicted (Isa. 30.26). In that time of eschatological redemption, physical healing would characterize Messiah's activities:

*Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
 and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
 Then will the lame leap like a deer
 and the mute tongue shout for joy. (Isa. 35.5f.)¹¹*

The Suffering Servant of Yahweh prepared the way, bearing the punishment that was due to others:

*Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows,
 yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.
 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our
 iniquities;
 the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds
 we are healed. (Isa. 53.4f.)*

At that final glorious time, the year of the Lord's favor, there would be joy instead of the sadness that surrounds those who suffer. God himself would act through his Servant:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,

¹¹ Note that Jesus, when talking to the messengers of John the Baptist, refers to this verse as one of the indicators that he was indeed the Messiah. Cf. Mt. 11.4f. in the discussion of the Synoptic Gospels.

*because the Lord has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor... (Isa. 61.1f.)*

This favor would include the physical well-being of God's people, according to Isaiah's description of life in the new Jerusalem in the Age to Come:

*Never again in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not live out his years;
he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth;
he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. (Isa. 65.20)*

In the Age to Come, the ransomed of the Lord expect to enjoy all that he has prepared for them. Indeed, even the curse of Eden will be reversed: "*Before she goes into labor, she gives birth; before the pains come upon her, she delivers a son*" (Isa. 66.7). Health and healing were anticipated as part of the eschatological blessings God's people would one day receive.

Here, then, is a brief overview of the OT material which the NT writers had in their theological background as they considered what to say about God's work in the New Covenant. Obviously, they would be inspired by God to write what he intended to communicate, but the following points are the basic elements that were already in the thinking of everyone associated with Judaism and its Scriptures.¹²

- God is the Creator of the human body.
- Sickness and death are results of the Fall.
- Sickness can be a disciplinary measure imposed by God.
- The sovereign Lord is able to heal in all aspects of life.
- The Age to Come, ushered in by Messiah, would be a time of healing and of reversing the curse of Eden.

¹² A survey of intertestamental literature, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, goes beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, there are indications in the NT that the attitudes of some first-century Jews were not as clearly balanced as what the Old Testament intimates. For example, in the story of the healing of the man born blind, Jesus needs to correct a (seemingly common) misperception that physical misfortune was necessarily a result of personal sin (Jn. 9.1-3). In Mark, Jesus has to emphasize that spiritual healing is even more significant than physical healing (Mk. 2.1-12).

II. Moving from the Old Testament to the New Testament

We proceed now to the NT, though it is important to keep in mind that NT theology cannot in any way be detached from the OT. The ideas enumerated above with respect to the OT theology of healing provide the conceptual framework for the NT writers, who not only reaffirm those fundamental OT values but also quote the OT directly.¹³

In looking at the question of health, sickness and healing in the NT,¹⁴ a further note of explanation needs to be given as to the limits of this particular study. Although the major tenet of God as the Creator of the human body was already announced from the very beginning of the Bible (Gen. 1-2), the significance of the material body later became an issue in the culture surrounding the church, especially in circles interested in Greek philosophy and Gnostic ideas, in the

¹³ Quotations relevant to the topic of healing from Isaiah are found in Matthew, Luke, and 1 Peter. See the discussions that follow.

¹⁴ Before beginning a systematic look at the NT, it may also be helpful to point out one of the ambiguities interpreters face in considering the NT evidence. Whereas certain verbs (and their cognates) are generally rather clear in their intent (for example, *ijavomai* and *qerapeuvw*), the verb *swv/zw* and its cognates (*swthriwa* and *swthvr* primarily) are quite a bit wider in their meanings. Only the context can help the translator and exegete to see whether "heal" or "save" (or some other variation) is the actual intent of the biblical author in a given verse. Thus, BAGD has two main definitions for this verb *swv/zw*: "1. preserve or rescue from natural dangers and afflictions" and "2. save or preserve from eternal death, from judgment, and from all that might lead to such death, e.g. sin, also in a positive sense bring Messianic salvation, bring to salvation." Thus, the lexicon recognizes two main categories, one basically physical, one spiritual. But beyond these definitions, BAGD adds a third definition that highlights how difficult it can sometimes be for NT scholars to arrive at the proper understanding of this verb: "3. Certain passages belong under *u*definitions 1 and 2 at the same time." A certain ambiguity thus exists with respect to the verb and its cognates, and it is not always clear (perhaps particularly in the Gospels) whether the writer uses the verb for physical healing or spiritual healing. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. rev. and aug. by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago/London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979). With respect to the Lukan corpus, see the study of *sw/vzw* in Ben Witherington III "Salvation and Health in Christian Antiquity: The Soteriology of Luke-Acts in Its First Century Setting," in I. H. Marshall and D. Peterson (eds.), *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 145-166.

centuries on either side of the composition of the NT.¹⁵ This article, however, will not examine the question of the significance of the material body.¹⁶

Some other aspects that have relevance for the topic of health, sickness and healing are similarly beyond the scope of this article. These include circumcision, which was looked at very differently by the Jews (for whom it was a covenant sign; Gen. 17.9-14) and by the Greeks (for whom it represented physical mutilation¹⁷). Similarly, the concept of physical and mental suffering caused by persecution (even to the matter of Jesus' crucifixion) will fall outside the limits of the present study. The same is true for the incarnation. Finally, we will not undertake a study of the greatest physical miracle of the NT, the resurrection of Jesus to unending life.¹⁸ Other examples of the dead being raised will, however, fall within the overall scope of this article, as will exorcism as an example of healing.¹⁹

¹⁵ To illustrate the difference in interests as represented in the NT writings, one needs only look up the term "Body" in the three volumes of the InterVarsity dictionary on the NT. In Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), the heading "Body" does not appear at all. In Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), we find ten columns of text devoted to "Body" and a further eleven columns treating "Body of Christ." In the third volume, Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (eds.), *Dictionary of the Later NT and Its Developments* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), the section on "Body" is merely cross-referenced to "Psychology."

¹⁶ Note the excursus on the body in Paul's writings, at the end of this article.

¹⁷ Cf. Paul's stinging comment in Gal. 5.11f. In the era of hellenization under Antiochus Epiphanes, some Jews, because they wished to identify more closely with the Greek culture, had their circumcision surgically reversed (1 Macc. 1.15).

¹⁸ In the NT, the chief actor in the resurrection of Jesus is sometimes noted as being Jesus himself (αἰνασθη`ναι; Mk. 8.31); sometimes the resurrection is described as being the act of God the Father (εἰργεργη; Mk. 16.6).

¹⁹ This article is based on the conviction that the NT records can be believed and that actual miracles of healing took place. See also the remarks of Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, ed. Conrad H. Gempf (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), pp. 428-443, concerning the reliability of the accounts of the miracles in the book of Acts. For a different viewpoint from a NT scholar, see the three introductory chapters on miracles in John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. II: *Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (Anchor Bible Reference Library; NY: Doubleday, 1994), pp. 509-645. These three chapters are followed by three others that have relevance to our study, as Meier looks at the exorcisms, healings and raising of the dead performed by Jesus, pp. 646-873.

III. The New Testament Evidence: The Synoptics

When we come to the Gospels, we are primarily looking at the ministry of Jesus as healer, for Jesus himself is the focus of the Gospels and the gospel. All four Evangelists give examples of Jesus as a healer (and, in the Synoptics, an exorcist). The Synoptics also note that the disciples were to practice the same ministry.²⁰ Although these similarities exist among the Gospels, it is also useful to note the distinctions in the separate Gospel accounts before attempting a synthesis.

A. *The Gospel of Mark*²¹

In the first ten chapters of his Gospel, Mark averages more than one healing pericope per chapter, indicating how important this aspect of Jesus' ministry was to him. Of the four canonical accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus, only Mark puts the healing ministry of Jesus so near the opening of his Gospel narrative (Mk. 1.21-34, 39, 40-45). In so doing, he emphasizes from the very beginning Jesus' power over demons (Mk. 1.25, 34) as well as his healing of physical maladies (Mk. 1.30f., 33). According to Mark's Gospel, the exorcisms and healings demonstrate the authority of Jesus: he is more powerful than evil spirits (Mk. 1.27), and his healing of the paralytic (Mk. 2.7-12) displayed his (further and surpassing) power to forgive sins. Mark, however, does not himself comment on the healings nor record many comments by Jesus.²² For the most part, the healing miracles are simply presented as narrative fact, with the reader left to draw his or her own conclusions. Mark does, however, record some of the reactions to the miracles, as the following examples demonstrate:

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." (Mk. 1.27)

²⁰ Mk. 3.13-15; Mt. 10.1; Lk.10.9, 17.

²¹ Mark's Gospel appears to be the source of many of the pericopes in Matthew and Luke. We therefore begin with it as the foundation. In addition, it should be noted that because Mk. 16.9-20 is unlikely to be original (and thus is not to be considered inspired Scripture), two verses that might otherwise be part of the discussion (Mk. 16.17f.) will not be included in this article. For the question concerning textual criticism, see, for example, Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsch Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), pp. 102-107.

²² In fact, in Mark's Gospel, Jesus seems to shun the publicity that the healings and exorcisms would ordinarily bring, often enjoining silence or at least restraint (Mk. 1.25, 34, 44; 5.43; 7.36; 8.26). This observation led W. Wrede to posit what came to be called The Messianic Secret. See G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the NT*, rev. by Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 178-180, for a debunking of Wrede's position.

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mk. 2.6f.)

This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!" (Mk. 2.12)

Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus. (Mk. 3.6)

And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons." (Mk. 3.22)

Mark, to a greater extent than the other Gospels, gives details as to how some of the miracles were performed. The most striking pericopes in this respect are those concerning the healing of the deaf-mute and of the blind man at Bethsaida.

... Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!"). (Mk. 7.33f.)

[Jesus] took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. (Mk. 8.23-25)

Thus Mark appears to put some emphasis on technique, and yet the technique varies from one miracle to another. Sometimes such indications are missing altogether, as, for example, when Jesus simply announced the healing (through exorcism) of the Syrophenician's daughter (Mk. 7.29) and proclaimed the restoration of sight for blind Bartimaeus (Mk. 10.52).

Although the accent in Mark's Gospel is on Jesus, the Evangelist also records the fact that the immediate disciples of Jesus (Mk. 6.13) and some unnamed others (Mk. 10.38-41) similarly performed miracles in Jesus' name.

The evidence pertinent to the topic of healing in Mark's Gospel can now be summarized in the following points:

- Jesus was a powerful healer and exorcist.

- Jesus used various methods in healing.
- The disciples of Jesus also healed people and cast out demons.
- The miracles of healing were variously received, sometimes stirring up controversy.²³

B. The Gospel of Matthew

Matthew's Gospel, which has grouped many of the healings performed by Jesus into chapters 8 and 9, differs from the Gospel of Mark in that Matthew has provided some commentary²⁴ on the healing ministry of Jesus. For example, Matthew includes the following brief statement of Jesus' action in healing and then adds his own commentary:

When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took our infirmities and carried our diseases." (Mt. 8.16f.)

In verse 17, Matthew clearly links Jesus' ministry of exorcism and healing with Isa. 53.4: "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows...." According to Matthew, then, the link with the OT is clear: Jesus is the healer who was promised by the prophet; he is the (coming) Messiah, the Servant of Yahweh. In addition, Matthew has fashioned the Isaianic text to suit his own purposes. Whereas the MT of Isa. 53.4 used "our infirmities" (WnyEl;j;) and "our sorrows" (Wnyyb«`aokjm`ý), and the LXX had "our sins" (ta;~ aJmartiva~ hJmw`n) and "feels pain" (ojduna`tai), Matthew (Mt. 8.17) has opted to present lexical choices more clearly oriented toward the concept of physical suffering: "infirmities" (ta;~ ajsqeneiva~, weaknesses) and "diseases" (ta;~ novsou~, sicknesses). Furthermore, the context immediately preceding this quotation relates the stories of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Mt. 8.14f.) and the healing of "all the sick" (pavnta~ tou;~

²³ Paul Hiebert, "Spiritual Warfare and Worldview," in William D. Taylor (ed.), *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue* (Globalization of Mission: Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), pp. 174f., makes the valid point (which he substantiates through a survey of John and Acts) that so-called "power encounters" may lead to belief on the part of some, but "they also excite the enemy to greater opposition, leading to persecution and death" (p. 174). Cf. also Daniel Marguérat, "Magie, Guérison et Parole dans les Actes des Apôtres," in *Études Théologiques et Religieuses* 72/2 (1997), pp. 200, 203.

²⁴ This is consonant with Matthew's pattern with respect to all that takes place in Jesus' life and ministry.

kakw'~ e[conta~; Mt. 8.16). These pericopes underscore again the fact that Jesus' ministry of healing was in the realm of the physical.²⁵

The readers of this Gospel would not have been surprised to see Matthew connecting Jesus to the OT in this way, for Jesus' fulfillment of the OT prophecies is Matthew's constant theme.²⁶ Specifically, these readers had already read the pericope that Matthew placed at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, a pericope which included another quotation from the messianic prophecies of Isaiah, introduced by the usual fulfillment formula: "...to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah..." (Mt. 4.14). The quotation chosen by Matthew indicated that Messiah would be able to bring positive changes in the conditions of life for the people: "... the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (Mt. 4.16). In Isaiah (Isa. 9.1f.), this prophecy predicts the coming messianic Age.

In Matthew (Mt. 4.15f.), the verses are quoted as an indication of the overall nature of the public ministry that Jesus was about to begin. The connection with the healing theme here is dependent on the understanding of the contrast—the "before" and "after"—for the people so described. The negative aspect of darkness and death has been overcome by the light that has dawned. The Matthean context (Mt. 4.17-25) of this Isaiah quotation points toward the idea that the "before" and "after" transformation foreseen by Matthew is probably both spiritual (with Jesus' teaching and preaching ministry) and physical (with healings and exorcisms²⁷).

In this teaching and healing ministry of Jesus (Mt. 4.17, 23-25), Matthew records that Jesus received a very favorable response:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, the epileptics and the paralytics, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him. (Mt. 4.23-25)

²⁵ The spiritual dimension is not left out of the picture, though, for Matthew also says that Jesus performed exorcisms, driving out evil spirits with a word (Mt. 8.16).

²⁶ See, for example, the numerous examples of OT fulfillment noted in the first two chapters of the Gospel: Mt. 1.22f.; 2.5f., 15, 17, 23.

²⁷ Exorcisms actually seem to straddle both categories: spiritual and physical.

When, however, the reader arrives at the bulk of the Matthean healing pericopes, which are grouped in chapters 8 and 9, the Evangelist notes a broader variety of responses to Jesus' actions.²⁸

Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region. (Mt. 8.34)

At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!" (Mt. 9.3)

When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men. (Mt. 9.8)

The crowd was amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel." (Mt. 9.33)

But the Pharisees said, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons." (Mt. 9.34)²⁹

John the Baptist was, however, somewhat uncertain as to how to react to Jesus, and so he sent messengers to Jesus to ask him whether he was the Christ. Jesus replied that his ministry accurately reflected the messianic prediction of Isa. 35.5f. (and other similar verses): "Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor'" (Mt. 11.4f.).

Another distinction between Mark's account of healings and what is recorded in Matthew's Gospel is that Jesus' use of "techniques" in Mark receives no emphasis in Matthew. This can be seen, for example, by comparing the stories of Jesus' analysis of the healing of the demon-possessed boy, immediately after the Transfiguration. Mark mentions the technique of prayer; Matthew underlines the inner quality of faith:

Mark 9.29—"He replied, 'This kind can come out only by prayer.'"³⁰

²⁸ In some instances, Matthew does not specifically relate the reaction.

²⁹ This same conjunction of reactions by the people and the Pharisees (Mt. 9.33, 34) occurs once again in Mt. 12.23, 24: the people are amazed and wonder if Jesus is David's Son, but the Pharisees again say that Jesus exorcised demons by the power of Beelzebul, the prince of demons.

Matthew 17.20—"He replied, 'Because you have so little faith...'"³¹

In fact, the two most graphic healing accounts in Mark (in terms of their reference to technique) are completely omitted by Matthew.³² Yet, in other places, Matthew adds details that Mark lacks, as to how the healing was performed: "... *he drove out the spirits with a word...*" (Mt. 8.17). And sometimes Matthew copies Mark's indications, as, for example, Mk. 1.43 is paralleled by Mt. 8.3: "... *Jesus reached out and touched the man.*"

We can therefore summarize the findings from Matthew's Gospel as follows:

- Jesus was a healer and exorcist.
- His miracles elicited a variety of reactions.
- Little emphasis is placed on the technique of performing the miracle.
- Explicit links with the OT demonstrate that Jesus was the promised healing Servant of Yahweh.

C. *The Gospel of Luke*

As for Luke, whom Paul identifies as a doctor (Col. 4.14), he begins his account of Jesus' public ministry in a manner similar to Matthew's introduction of the public ministry of Jesus. Both writers start off with a programmatic statement to define Jesus' ministry. For Luke, this proleptic overview of Jesus' ministry is indicated in what Jesus read in Isa. 61.1f., for the congregation at the synagogue of Nazareth.

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners*

³⁰ A large number of manuscripts add, "and fasting" to this statement. The strongest among them are ^{45vid}, a^b, and A. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that this longer reading is original. Cf. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, p. 85.

³¹ Keith Warrington, *Jesus the Healer: Paradigm or Unique Phenomenon?* (Carlisle/Waynesboro: Paternoster, 2000), p. 94, n. 72, cites with favor the comment of G. F. Hawthorne, "Faith: The Essential Ingredient of Effective Christian Ministry," in M. J. Wilkins and T. Paige (eds.), *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), to the effect that Matthew's formulation here can be considered a clarification of Mark's, since prayer expresses faith.

³² These are the Marcan healings cited earlier: the deaf-mute (Mk. 7.33f.) and the blind man at Bethsaida (Mk. 8.23-25). See the analysis of this phenomenon by Heinz Joachim Held, "Matthew as Interpreter of the Miracle Stories," in Gunther Bornkamm et al., *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 246ff.

*and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.* (Lk. 4.18f.)³³

Jesus then states for the Jews of Nazareth that he himself is the fulfillment of this OT prophecy: "*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*" (Lk. 4.21). Both spiritual and physical healing is evident in the remainder of chapter four of Luke's Gospel. Interestingly, Luke's narrative delays until chapter 18 (vv. 35-43) a pericope of Jesus healing a blind person. It is actually the final healing miracle of the Gospel, as if to underscore the fact that Jesus had indeed fulfilled Scripture and the program God had set for him.³⁴

Luke used some of Mark's material³⁵ in illustrating the healing ministry of Jesus, but he also included other pericopes that are unique to his Gospel, such as:

- ❖ The widow of Nain's son was raised from death. (Lk. 7.11-17)
- ❖ A crippled woman was straightened. (Lk. 13.10-17)
- ❖ A man with dropsy was healed. (Lk. 14.1-6)
- ❖ Ten lepers were cleansed. (Lk. 17.11-19)

In addition, Jesus mentioned a healing that had taken place in the (OT) Scriptures, the healing of Naaman the Syrian (Lk. 4.27; cf. 2 Kings 5.1-14). Like the writers of the Gospels, Jesus accepted the fact that God had in the past used healing, even of non-Jews, as part of his overall dealings with humankind. Here we note once again that the OT perspective on God's sovereignty is ingrained in all actors and writers of the NT.

Luke also stresses that the ministry of healing (of which exorcism is a part), whether accomplished by Jesus himself (Luke 11.14-22) or by his disciples (Luke 10.17-19), is an attack on Satan's kingdom.³⁶ Jesus thereby announced the arrival of the more powerful Kingdom of God.

³³ Interestingly, in order for the physical healing aspect of Isaiah's prophecy ("*recovery of sight for the blind*") to have been included in Jesus' reading at Nazareth, Jesus would have had to read from the LXX, since the (extant) Hebrew text does not include this phrase.

³⁴ See, however, the more generalized description of Jesus' ministry in Lk 7.21: "*At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind.*"

³⁵ For example, Mk 1.21-34 // Lk. 4.31-41.

³⁶ Others are also involved in the miracles of healing (Lk. 9.49f.), but Luke does not specifically use that pericope to underscore the defeat of Satan.

Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub.... But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils." (Lk. 11.17f., 20-22)

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." (Lk. 10.17f.)

A resumé of the evidence in the third Gospel can now be presented to enable us to grasp the Lucan theology of health, sickness and healing:

- Jesus' ministry is defined from the start as having a healing dimension.
- No situation is too difficult for Jesus to overcome.
- The benefits of Jesus' healing ministry are not limited to the Jewish people.
- Healing demonstrates Jesus' power over Satan's forces.

D. Summary for the Synoptic Gospels

Before proceeding to the Gospel of John, it may be helpful to combine our findings and observations concerning the healing ministry of Jesus in the Synoptics.

- Jesus was a healer and exorcist.³⁷
- Healings and exorcisms were considered an indication of spiritual power (over Satan or the effects of sin).
- Jesus' disciples also performed exorcisms and healings.
- Healing a sick person was clearly distinguished from performing an exorcism.³⁸
- Jesus did not follow any one pattern for his healing ministry.³⁹

³⁷ On exorcism, see the conclusions of Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), pp. 225-228. For the conclusions of Warrington concerning Jesus as a healer, see his study, *Jesus the Healer*, pp. 160-163.

³⁸ See in this regard the comments of David P. Nystrom, *James* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1997), p. 306, with reference to Mk. 6.13 and the disciples' ministry.

- The result of an attempted healing was always a success,⁴⁰ regardless of the means used.
- His healing ministry evoked in the crowds a sense of admiration and wondering whether Jesus was indeed the awaited Messiah.⁴¹
- Jesus' ministry of healing was considered by the Synoptists to be the fulfillment of the (OT) messianic Scriptures concerning the Golden Age and the Servant of Yahweh.⁴²
- Jesus' own understanding of his ministry was that he had come to inaugurate God's reign.⁴³

IV. The New Testament Evidence: The Gospel of John

The Gospel of John represents the reflections of a mature apostle.⁴⁴ In many ways, it should be studied along with the rest of the Johannine literature (1, 2 and 3 John and Revelation). Yet it is also a theological essay on the ministry of Jesus and

³⁹ This is true in terms of technique, terminology, the emphasis (or not) on faith, the group of people served, and so forth. Such an observation makes it difficult to accept the facile manner in which some form critics (for example, Wrede and Bultmann) categorized the large variety of miracle stories that exists.

⁴⁰ Mk. 8.22-26 has Jesus healing in two stages, but it is not at all clear that this is because Jesus failed on his first attempt. The context of the entire pericope rather suggests that it is illustrative of the reactions of the disciples to Jesus himself. *Contra* this interpretation, see Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 421f; Nor should Mark's comment in Mk. 1.34 ("... and Jesus healed many who had various diseases") be compared unfavorably to the parallel in Mt. 8.16 ("... *ijjesu* healed all the sick."). The reason for the difference between "many" in Mark and "all" in Matthew is likely to be found in the Aramaic mother-tongue of the writers. Cf. Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1:1-8:26* (Word Biblical Commentary 34A; Dallas: Word Books, 1989), p. 66. Gundry, *Mark*, p. 88, points out as well that several words are used together in the context of Mk. 1.34 ("*many*" *ubisi*, "*all*," "*various*") to emphasize the "wide range of Jesus' ability to heal."

⁴¹ Mk. 7.37; Mt. 12.22f.; Lk. 5.26; 7.16; 8.43. The reactions of the leaders, however, were not always so favorable.

⁴² Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit*, vol. I: *Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 7.

⁴³ Cf. the message Jesus sent to John the Baptist (Lk 7.18-23 par.) and Jesus' comment on the source of his power to drive out demons (Lk. 11.20 par.).

⁴⁴ This statement and the following one, which labels the Fourth Gospel a "theological essay," are not in any way intended to deny divine inspiration for the Scriptures.

therefore rightfully falls here toward the beginning of the NT. The distinctive character of the Fourth Gospel means that it needs to be investigated separately from the Synoptics.

John's Gospel contains only four miracles of healing, each one of which emphasizes a particularly spectacular aspect of Jesus' power as healer.⁴⁵

- ❖ An official's son is healed at a distance. (Jn. 4.46-54)
- ❖ A lame man is healed after thirty-eight years of infirmity. (Jn. 5.1-15)
- ❖ A man is healed of congenital blindness. (Jn. 9.1-12)
- ❖ Lazarus is brought back to life. (Jn. 11.1-44)

In presenting these healings (including a resurrection), John shows that Jesus has no equal. No obstacle that can be imagined is too great for him to overcome. Even death could not stand in the way of God's plan.

John himself as author does not comment on these miracles. Indeed, there is no transition at all between the first two healings on the list; in John's narrative, one leads right into the other.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, these miracles set up a reaction on the part of bystanders that, in turn, allowed Jesus to present truth to the hearers (and readers). For example, after the first two miracles listed above, the Jews wanted to kill Jesus because he healed on the Sabbath, the Jewish day of rest. Jesus then had opportunity to explain his relationship to his Father and to tell who it is who bore witness to him (Jn. 5.16-47). After the pericope of the healing of the man born blind, John presented the conflict of the Pharisees and Jesus, in which Jesus the Healer clearly demonstrated that the Pharisees were the ones who were truly blind (Jn. 9.13-41). The raising of Lazarus opened the final chapter in the Jewish plot to get rid of Jesus (Jn. 11.45ff.).

The Gospel of John shows Jesus as the consummate healer, the one who reflects all that his Father is, as the Creator and Life-Giver. John also includes an important comment from Jesus about the nature of sickness: "*His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?' 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life'*" (Jn. 9.2f.). Jesus thus refuted a popular concept linking misfortune directly to personal sin. Jesus here put sickness (and other forms

⁴⁵ Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey*, rev. by Walter M. Dunnell (Grand Rapids/Leicester: Eerdmans/Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), p. 192.

⁴⁶ John merely comments that the miracle of the lame man occurred "*some time later*" and in a different city (Jerusalem rather than Cana; Jn. 4.46, 54; 5.1).

of suffering) into their proper perspective.⁴⁷ Everything, he stated, is under God's sovereignty and moving toward a single goal: God's ultimate glory. That glory may, in point of fact, come through a situation of misfortune or through a miracle of healing.

As far as the question of technique is concerned, John's Gospel notes that, in healing the blind man, Jesus used spittle and mud, as well as having the man bathe in the Pool of Siloam (Jn. 9.6f.). For the lame man to walk, he gave a command (Jn. 5.8), as he also did in the case of Lazarus (Jn. 11.43). For the official's son, Jesus merely declared that the healing was operative (Jn. 4.50). As was true in the Synoptics, the Fourth Gospel sets no simple pattern for how a healing takes place. The overwhelming impression one receives is that technique has very little of a substantive nature to do with the healing. Jesus suited the technique to the occasion, because the real power came through him, his Father having given him that authority.

In summary, then, we can see the following elements in John's Gospel:

- Jesus as healer is not limited by space, time, preconditions or even death.
- Techniques are not significant as far as the actual result is concerned.
- Jesus heals as a manifestation of the authority with which the Father has invested him.

These, then, are the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. The various pericopes record the stories where Jesus and his disciples healed, raised the dead and exorcised demons. Healing was a frequent factor in Jesus' ministry but was truly significant only because it demonstrated who Jesus was (the promised Messiah, a compassionate healer) and announced the coming of the messianic Age and Kingdom, when Satan's control would be overthrown. Jesus' power was always sufficient for the miracle to be performed. Further, he gave priority to the needs of the person rather than being impeded by the question of whether the healing would take place on the Sabbath. Compared to his Jewish opponents, Jesus had a more far-reaching agenda: releasing those who were captive to various illnesses and demons; demonstrating his authority; showing that Satan's defeat was sure and that the Age to Come was already a reality; and, most importantly, bringing glory to his Father. The healings produced a variety of reactions by the participants and observers: joy, bewilderment, amazement, praise to God, and anger, among other reactions. Jesus obviously had a program to follow that was not dependent on how either the person healed or those around him or her would react.

⁴⁷ Cf. also Lk. 13.1-9, where Jesus indicates that misfortune is a part of life in a fallen world and not necessarily linked to individual sin.

Furthermore, Jesus did not heal all who were ill⁴⁸ but acted in each situation so that his Father would be glorified.

V. The New Testament Evidence: The Book of Acts

The book of Acts is a transition point between the Gospels (in which the ministry of Jesus is detailed) and the Epistles (which contain instructions for the church). For that reason, we can see in Acts an affirmation of the healing ministry of Jesus, as a part of the “miracles, wonders and signs” which Peter cited as evidence that Jesus was appointed and anointed by God (Ac 2.22; 10.38). Other than a possible allusion in Hcb. 2.4, these verses are the only ones outside the Gospels that mention Jesus’ healing ministry. Thus the historical healing ministry of Jesus himself, though definitely acknowledged, seems not to have been a major factor in the ongoing witness of the church.

Peter stressed Jesus’ ministry to the God-fearer Cornelius, saying that Jesus’ healing ministry both attested God’s approbation (Ac. 2.22) and was an aspect of what Peter called “doing good,”⁴⁹ as Jesus healed those whom the devil held under his own power (Ac. 10.38). As in the Gospels, so here in Acts, there is an awareness that sickness is not from God but from Satan, just as the evil spirits are. Though sickness is a constant factor in human existence since the Fall, it is not what God had wanted for humankind.

The book of Acts further confirms that what Jesus had foreseen for his disciples, namely, a healing ministry,⁵⁰ was indeed being carried out by the

⁴⁸ Cf. Mk. 6.5-6 and Jn. 5.3ff. for examples of pericopes in which some sick people are apparently left unhealed. Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 106-107, notes that Jesus’ aim was not relieving physical hurts, although he often did so with compassion. His principal mission was to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Jesus himself suffered physically, even to the point of death, in order to provide resurrection and eternal life for anyone who would believe in him.

⁴⁹ “Doing good” (eujergeteww) is a term that can have the technical sense of being a benefactor, such as was known in the Greco-Roman world. See Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (First Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World; Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/Paternoster Press, 1994), p. 34f. Similarly, Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Social-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1998), p. 358, n. 127. It may be that this fact of “doing good” was stressed when Peter addressed Cornelius because the centurion himself was a generous benefactor; cf. Ac. 10.2, 4, 31.

⁵⁰ Cf. Mt. 10.8.

believers even after Jesus' ascension (Ac. 5.12-16). But in performing the miracles of healing, resurrection and exorcism, the believers all refer back to Jesus and/or to God, who provided the power. The apostles did not expect to heal in their own right but in dependence on God. Luke sometimes describes how, as a sign of that relationship of dependence, prayer is offered or the name of Jesus is invoked for a miracle of healing.⁵¹ The experience of non-Christians demonstrated, however, that, in and of itself, the name "Jesus" had no magical potency. The Jewish exorcists who attempted to (mis)use Jesus' name found that they themselves were overcome by the demons they had tried to exorcise (Ac. 19.13-16).

The book of Acts makes a clear distinction between the apostles who performed miracles and the non-Christian wonder workers. Simon the Sorcerer (mageuwn, working magic) was himself thoroughly astonished by the "great signs and miracles" the deacon/evangelist Philip accomplished in Samaria (Ac. 8.9-13). Elymas, a Jewish sorcerer (οἱ μαγοί~, magician, presented as a translation of *Elymas*⁵²), attempted to hinder Paul's ministry and was struck with blindness at Paul's word. The apostle accused Elymas of deceit and trickery and of being a child of the devil (Ac. 13.6-12). Thus there is no confusion in Acts between those who really are loyal to Jesus and to the one true God and those who are out merely to improve their own material prospects or social standing.

Just as was true in the Gospels, so also the book of Acts gives evidence that sometimes faith was a key element in a healing miracle (Ac. 14.9).⁵³ But the person being healed was not always the one who expressed that faith, as is evident from resurrection miracles.⁵⁴ Similarly, prayer was a frequent element mentioned in the healings of the book of Acts (Ac. 9.40; 28.8), but it was not always mentioned and sometimes would not necessarily have been offered on that particular occasion or with those particular people in mind (Ac. 5.15f.; 19.11f.).

⁵¹ Ac. 3.6, 16; 4.10; 9.17, 34; 13.11; 16.18. At times, the believers' prayer for miraculous intervention is addressed specifically to God rather than invoking Jesus' name. Cf. Ac. 4.23-30, where the one addressed in prayer is successively noted as God (θεοῦ~), Sovereign Lord (despovth~, Master), and Lord (kuriov~).

⁵² F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3rd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 297, says with regard to Acts 13.8: "Elymas is more probably a word of Semitic origin, akin to Arab. *'alim*, 'wise', 'learned,' which Luke explains by adding οἱ μαγοί~ ...".

⁵³ For the Gospels, see, for example, Mk. 5.34; and in contrast Mk. 6.5f.

⁵⁴ The dead person obviously had no opportunity to express faith in order to be raised to life. Ac. 9.40; 20.9f.; cf. Lk. 7.14f.

We have already noted Peter's statement that Jesus' healing miracles were a means of demonstrating that God had enabled Jesus to break the devil's hold over human beings (Ac. 10.38). It should also be noted that, according to Acts, sickness (and thus the need for healing) is sometimes the divinely appointed consequence of a person's own actions. Such was the case with Elymas, whom Paul cursed (Ac. 13.11), and also with King Herod, who accepted for himself praise that should have gone to God alone. Herod was immediately stricken by the angel of the Lord and died soon thereafter (Ac. 12.21-23).

The following conclusions, then, can be drawn concerning health, sickness and healing in the book of Acts:

- The apostles affirmed the validity of Jesus' ministry of healing but did not often refer to it in their preaching and teaching.
- The apostles themselves carried on a ministry of healing (including raising the dead and performing exorcisms).
- The apostles' healing ministry was carried on in the name of Jesus and in dependence on God.
- The faith of the beneficiary of a miracle of healing and the prayer of the apostle for that healing are sometimes mentioned as factors in healing.
- False healers and magicians or sorcerers succumbed to God's greater power operative through the apostles.
- Some sickness was attributed to the devil's power, some to the consequences of a person's own misguided choices. Some appears to be due to natural causes in a fallen world.

VI. The New Testament Evidence: The Pauline Epistles

We begin here by establishing the major axes of Paul's thought, trends that reflect yet again what was said in the OT. First of all, Paul affirms that everything in life is ultimately under God's sovereignty; and, in that sovereignty, God always acts for the good (Rom. 8.28).⁵⁵ Of great comfort to the believer is the fact that, because of God's sovereignty, nothing at all, including demonic forces and death, can separate the Christian from God's love (Rom. 8.35-39). Here it is important to note that Paul does not say that the believer is forever separated from "*trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword*" (Rom. 8.35).

⁵⁵ The ultimate good, of course, is God's glory, not necessarily a temporal or physical benefit to the believer. See the sermon of Daniel B. Wallace, "Do All Things Really Work Together for the Good? Romans 8:28 in Its Context." The sermon is available at www.bible.org.

Such difficulties may indeed be part and parcel of the believer's experience; he or she may actually fall sick and be in need of healing. What Paul does, however, say in this passage is that the experience of sickness does not demonstrate that God's love has been withdrawn. There is not "*anything ... in all creation [that] will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Rom. 8.38). God is sovereign and thoroughly committed to his children.

A second overarching principle for Paul is that God, in his sovereignty and omnipotence, is able to provide all that is necessary to meet every need the believer has, including of course the need for health: "*And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 4.19). Yet in the very context of this verse of assurance, Paul reminded the Philippians of his own personal experience. God's choice for Paul had sometimes been that he learn to be content in situations of hunger and want: "*I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want*" (Phil. 4.11f.). Certainly Paul's testimony in 2 Cor. 11.23ff indicates that he had ample experience in the area of physical suffering: floggings,⁵⁶ exposure to death, beatings with rods and whips, stonings, shipwrecks, hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness, and more. Yet Paul continued to believe that God met all his needs.⁵⁷ God's provision was possible but did not necessarily mean an avoidance of hardship.

The third major principle undergirding the Pauline theology of health is that, while Paul does not in any way denigrate the physical dimension of life,⁵⁸ he subordinates the physical domain to the higher, spiritual purposes that God has. It is interesting to note that nowhere in the extant Pauline epistles do we have any record that Paul prayed specifically for the physical, financial or material needs of the people to whom he wrote, even though the inclusion of such a prayer would have

⁵⁶ Paul's reference is in fact to what he calls "the forty lashes minus one." The Pharisees, not wanting to exceed the prescribed 40 lashes through miscounting, decreed that only 39 could be given. Such rulings on the part of the Pharisees were considered a "hedge" around the Law of Moses, so that people would not violate its standards.

⁵⁷ The letter to the Philippians was written after the letter we call 2 Corinthians.

⁵⁸ Rather, he rejoices in what God has given. See, for example 1 Tim. 4.3-5, where Paul describes false teachers: "*They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.*"

been considered good form according to hellenistic letter-writing conventions.⁵⁹ Many prayers for the recipients' spiritual health can, however, be found in the Pauline corpus.⁶⁰ Paul put the accent on the spiritual, because he understood that the Kingdom of God is primarily spiritual: "*For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*" (Rom. 14.17; cf. 1 Cor. 15.50). With this perspective and the idea of all eternity before him, Paul can put his life into proper focus. He may suffer now, and his body may be failing; but better things lie ahead. And besides that, his inner spiritual life is being strengthened daily.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Cor. 4.16-18)

These three principles, then, establish the parameters of Paul's thinking about life, health, sickness and healing: God's sovereignty, God's provision and the fact that the most important dimension of life is the spiritual dimension. With that background in mind, we can now look at the details of Paul's theology as it related to healing.

Was Paul himself a healer? Although the book of Acts clearly states as much,⁶¹ Paul himself never mentions the healing aspect of his ministry in his writings, at least not directly. Allusions to God working through Paul with power may, however, include oblique reference to miracles of healing that were performed.⁶² Certainly Paul believes in the ability of God to heal and to work through believers as channels for miraculous healing. This is demonstrated by the fact that he himself asked God for a miracle of healing (2 Cor. 12.7f.).⁶³ Paul also included the gift of

⁵⁹ On wishes for good health, cf. Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Library of Early Christianity 5; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), p. 73.

⁶⁰ Cf., for example, Eph. 1.15-23; 3.14-19

⁶¹ Cf., for example, Ac. 28.7-9.

⁶² Rom. 15.19; 1 Cor. 2.4; 2 Cor. 12.12; 1 Th. 1.5.

⁶³ The "thorn in the flesh" has been variously interpreted, but it seems best to understand it as a physical difficulty of some sort. Cf. Colin Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*

healing in the lists of spiritual gifts he outlined for the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 12.9, 28, 30). Healing of a sort that clearly demonstrated God's power was integral to Paul thinking and not to be shunned. But neither were miracles to be shamelessly sought after, as Paul accused the Jews of doing (1 Cor. 1.22).⁶⁴

Despite the fact that God could and did heal, Paul's theology did not claim that healing was necessarily the norm. As mentioned above, Paul himself sought relief from his "thorn in the flesh." God, however, did not relieve him of that problem but instead taught Paul how to understand the "thorn" as a part of God's pedagogy for him.

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12.7-10)

In addition, as another example of the fact that God does not always heal, Paul's colleague Trophimus had to be left at Miletus because he was too ill to travel (2 Tim. 4.20). Clearly, Trophimus had not experienced a miracle of healing. As for Epaphroditus, the envoy of the Philippian church to Paul at Rome, he too was ill but recovered sufficiently to be able to travel (Phil. 2.25-30). The tone of Paul's letter, however, gives the impression that Epaphroditus had not experienced a sudden and dramatic miracle of healing but rather that he had gone through a rather lengthy recovery period. Such is also the impression given in Galatians, where Paul describes the time when he himself was sick and had to be cared for by the people of Galatia (Gal. 4.13-15).⁶⁵ Healing occurred, but it was a healing in which time was a major factor. Miraculous and instantaneous healing is not necessarily to be the case for every believer, according to Paul's theology.

(Tyndale NT Commentary; Leicester/Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press/Eerdmans, 1987), p. 206.

⁶⁴ The reference here may be to the Pharisees (Mk. 8.11f.) who were unwilling to commit themselves to Jesus unless he first astounded them with what they considered to be sufficiently clear signs from heaven.

⁶⁵ Cf. the discussion of this passage in Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 308-313.

Furthermore, Paul speaks in positive terms of Luke, the doctor (Col. 4.14; 2 Tim. 4.11; Phm. 24), never disparaging his coworker's professional training. Doctors and medical means of healing are also useful and do not contradict Paul's belief in miraculous healing. Paul himself suggests a medicinal remedy to Timothy, to treat a chronic illness, rather than advising him to seek a miraculous cure (1 Tim. 5.23). In Pauline theology, then, healing is real and may come through a miracle, but it may also come through time and medicine—or it may not come at all.

Physical care for one's own physical body is a normal human function (cf. Eph. 5.28f.). Giving the body undue consideration and priority, however, can lead one astray, as when Paul says that the opponents of the gospel have their stomach as their god (Phil. 3.19). The body is an instrument to be honed for use in this present life ("*physical training is of some value...*"); yet godliness is even more important, since it looks forward to eternity as well ("*...but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come*"; 1 Tim. 4.8). This perspective means that physical health (or sickness) is not the most important consideration for a believer. The Christian's relationship to God is far more significant.

Finally, we can note that Paul sees life as a spiritual battle.⁶⁶ In that battle against "principalities and powers,"⁶⁷ false miracles propagated by Satan and his agents may play a part, in order to lead people astray (2 Th. 2.9-12). Although Paul described these counterfeits as particularly characterizing the time of the "lawless one," he also acknowledged that his own time could be called "the present evil age" (Gal. 1.4) and said that in "later times" there would be people who would "follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (1 Tim. 4.1). Finally, as an indicator that sickness can have spiritual causes, Paul also warned the Corinthian church, where the practice of fellowship meals and the Lord's Supper were problematic, that disregard for spiritual principles had already led some of them into sickness and even death:

For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. (1 Cor. 11.29-32)

⁶⁶ Eph. 6.10-12; 2 Cor. 10.4.

⁶⁷ Eph. 6.12, KJV.

We can now briefly summarize Paul's contributions to a theology of health, sickness and healing in the NT:

- Healing itself as well as the spiritual gift of healing are real and have their source in God.
- Counterfeit miracles emanating from Satan also exist.
- God can and does heal any disease or sickness, but in his sovereignty he does not *always* heal.
- Normal physical and medical care of the human body should be undertaken as well as the soul's spiritual care.
- One's spiritual life needs to take precedence over the physical aspects of life.
- Sickness and suffering can be part of the normal vicissitudes of life in this fallen world, or they may represent God's discipline or Satan's buffeting.

These six points, then, give a brief résumé of Paul's position on healing, at least to the extent that his letters reveal his thinking on the subject.

VII. The New Testament Evidence: The General Epistles

These eight letters and tracts are often studied together as a set, but each one is actually distinct. Therefore we will treat them separately by author.

A. The Epistle to the Hebrews

Apart from references to Jesus as fully participating in "flesh and blood," even to the point of death (Heb. 2.9, 14; cf. 10.5), the (anonymous) author of the Epistle to the Hebrews shows little interest in the topic of the human body and health. It is possible, however, to understand Jesus' (and the apostles') miracles of healing in the more general reference to the evidentiary nature of the "signs, wonder and various miracles" that took place to corroborate the message of salvation (Heb. 2.4). The "gifts of the Holy Spirit" mentioned in the same verse may also include the gift of healing, but there is no specific delineation of what the author has in mind as to the content of those gifts.

The book of Hebrews does, however, make the point that what is difficult in the present may be a sign of God's discipline. Hebrews 12.13 may have implications for physical healing, for physical maladies may indicate a spiritual problem that God is correcting through his discipline:

Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. (Heb. 12.10-13)⁶⁸

Finally, the author of the letter to the Hebrews, as was also the case with Paul, reminds the readers that better results are to be expected from what is spiritual than from what is merely physical. To concentrate exclusively on what pertains to the body (health and healing) would be a mistake: *"Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for your hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them"* (Heb. 13.9).

The subject of healing is not prominent in the Epistle to the Hebrews, but we can summarize our findings as follows:

- Miracles were part of God's way of confirming the testimony of the gospel.
- Problems in life (including sickness) may be part of God's discipline.
- A healthy spiritual life is more important than the present physical life.

B. The Epistle of James

As for a theology of health, sickness and healing in the Epistle of James, one rather general statement occurs in chapter 4 and then a longer and more significant passage appears in the final chapter.

In James 4.14, the author comments on the brevity of life: *"What is your life? You are a mist that appears a little while and then vanishes."* James' point here is that the believer needs to recognize his or her dependence on the Lord and on his sovereign plan. God himself is in control of life and death. Sickness or death could strike at any moment. That is part of the reality of life in a fallen world. Our lives ultimately depend on God's grace.

The final chapter of James has a didactic passage that directly addresses the subject of healing, with clear implications for pastoral theology:

Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the

⁶⁸These verses echo texts from the OT and the Apocrypha: Isa 35.3; Prov 4.26; Sirach 25.23.

Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. (James 5.13-18)

The context of these verses in chapter 5 of James is prayer: prayer when one is in trouble (“experiencing bad things,” kakopaqevw, v. 13), when someone is in poor health (“experiencing weakness,” ajsqenevw, v. 14), when sins are confessed (vv. 15f.) or when a major demonstration of God’s power is needed, as in the days of Elijah (vv. 17f.).

The basic elements of the situation described by James in verses 14-16 are as follows:

- ❖ A believer is sick (“weakened”).
- ❖ He or she calls on the elders of the church.
- ❖ They come and anoint the sick person with oil.
- ❖ They offer a prayer of faith over the person.
- ❖ The sick person becomes well because the Lord raises him or her up.
- ❖ Mutual confession of sin is made.
- ❖ Mutual prayer is offered.
- ❖ The sin is forgiven.
- ❖ The forgiven person is healed.

Although each element is, in and of itself, simple enough to understand, the difficulty comes in attempting to establish the proper connections among them. Is the sinner the same as the sick person? Is the sickness physical or spiritual or both together? Is confession made to the elders at the time they come to anoint or to another person at a separate occasion? Is there physical healing, spiritual healing, or both? Does James consider that what he is stating is true for all believers in all circumstances? What exactly is “the prayer offered in faith” (v. 15), and how much faith is needed, and on the part of whom?

The questions multiply because James appears to be combining two different things—physical sickness and sinfulness. Verses 14-15a seem to deal with the physical aspects, whereas verses 15b-16 (beginning with “If he has sinned...”) discuss what seems to be a different aspect, namely, sin and forgiveness. Yet the

Greek text joins v. 15a to v. 15b with a conjunction “and if,” “even if” (ka[n]) that indicates a genuine linkage between the two parts.⁶⁹

Some basic comments can be made concerning the theology of healing in these verses. In the first place, James acknowledges the reality of sickness, sin, and healing as having both physical and spiritual causes and results. Furthermore, James does not say that only unbelievers are sick. Nor does the conjunction ka[n] necessitate the idea that everyone who is sick has sinned. Rather, James is mentioning problems, both physical and spiritual that may show up in a believer’s life—sometimes even simultaneously—and for which the Lord’s touch is needed.

Secondly, in these verses James puts forth his perspective on the corporate nature of the Christian life. The physically weak believer,⁷⁰ recognizing the need of divine intervention, calls on the church elders to pray with him or her. They come with the visible symbol of God’s presence to act and direct, the anointing oil,⁷¹ and having applied the oil they then pray over the sick person. The elders, along with the patient, acknowledge their need of God to intervene and heal the sick person. Together the believers make this appeal to God. Similarly, in a case of sin, believers join together in prayer before God, though this latter case may not necessarily involve the elders.

Thirdly, James underlines the fact that all healing ultimately comes from God. It is the Lord who raises up the (formerly sick) person.⁷²

Fourthly, although James has stated the case very broadly, the larger context of this passage demonstrates that he is not, in point of fact, implying that physical healing is automatic if these steps are followed. After all, he has already spoken of the necessity of enduring in trials (Jas. 1.12), of the brevity of life (Jas. 4.14), and of

⁶⁹ Cf. the NASB translation, which (unlike the NIV) preserves the sense of the Greek conjunction: “... and if he has committed sins...”. The same wording appears in the RSV.

⁷⁰ “Weak” is to be taken here in the sense of “physically weak” or “sick.” For this reason, the elders have to come to the person rather than the person being able to meet them elsewhere, probably an indication that the person is homebound or an invalid somewhere.

⁷¹ Nystrom, *James*, p. 306, notes the similarity to the ministry of Jesus’ disciples in anointing and healing the sick (Mk. 6.13). The oil itself is not considered a medicinal remedy but a symbol of God’s presence and action.

⁷² Of course, the healing is ultimately to be understood in terms of a “temporary” healing, since the world is still under the regime where “death reigns” (Rom. 5.14) on the physical plane. All people still die physically.

the need for patience in suffering (Jas. 5.10f.). Rather, in 5.14-16, James highlights the procedure to follow. Healing, if granted, comes when God himself chooses to act favorably and restore the person.

Thus, in summary, we see these lessons from the Epistle of James:

- It is God who heals, but he does not always choose to heal.
- In difficult cases, the sick person can call the church elders for anointing with oil and prayer.
- Spiritual and physical healing are both needed in life, sometimes at the same time.
- Confession of known sin, prayer, faith and dependence on God are all expressed.
- God, rather than the person, controls the parameters of life, including its length.

C. The First Epistle of Peter

First Peter is the only letter in the Petrine corpus (generally understood as 1 and 2 Peter and Jude) that has, at least on the surface, some relevance to the topic of health, sickness and healing.

The letter deals extensively with the topic of suffering, and Peter makes sure his readers realize that suffering is not something unusual for a faithful believer (1 Pet. 4.12). Even Jesus himself suffered—to the very point of giving his life for those who were unworthy and unrighteous (1 Pet. 3.18). Nor was Jesus' suffering ephemeral; it was in his body: he died physically. Only a resurrection could bring him back to life.

In a section concerning servants who suffer unjustly (1 Pet. 2.18-25), the apostle draws on the OT prophecies (Isa. 53) that allude to the Servant of Yahweh receiving blows that he did not deserve, and yet accepted, on our behalf.

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Pet. 2.21-25)

The quotation of Isa. 53.5 is not exact in 1 Pet. 2.24. Nevertheless, the presence of 1 Pet. 2.22, which is a definite quotation of Isa. 53.9 (“*He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.*”), and the fact that Peter repeats the key ideas from Isa. 53 throughout these five verses makes it clear that the apostle is indeed thinking of Isa. 53.5 when he writes: “... *by his wounds you have been healed*” (1 Pet. 2.24).

Peter puts this quotation from Isa. 53 in a different context from what Matthew used for Isa. 53 (in Mt. 8.17). Whereas Matthew emphasized physical healing, Peter stresses the example of unjust suffering endured without complaint. The context of this passage in 1 Peter has, in fact, nothing to do with physical healing but rather with pleasing God (1 Pet. 2.19, 20, 25) and receiving the forgiveness of sins: Jesus “*bore our sins, ... so that we might die to sins and live to righteousness*” (1 Pet. 2.24). That is why, in the following verse (1 Pet. 2.25), the believer returns, according to Peter, to the Shepherd and Overseer of believers’ *souls* (a spiritual notion), rather than to the Shepherd and Overseer of *bodies*.

Thus, although at first glance, Peter’s allusion to Isa. 53.5 seems extremely relevant, in the final analysis, it is not really significant in terms of physical health, sickness and healing. It does, however, have a clear bearing on the issue of spiritual health.

The summary for this book, then, can be very brief:

- Peter speaks of *spiritual* healing and being pleasing to God rather than addressing the matter of physical healing or well-being.

D. The Johannine Epistles

The apostle John, writing at the end of the first century AD, had to confront the docetic heresy, and his first two (extant) letters reflect this theological challenge to the churches. In these missives, John establishes once again (as he did in the prologue to the Fourth Gospel; Jn. 1.14) that Jesus Christ was fully human, with a fully human body, while at the same time remaining fully God.⁷³

What concerns us here, however, is a brief verse in the Third Epistle of John. This verse has become a cornerstone for the Prosperity Gospel, as its proponents see the verse as a virtual promise from God that good health can be the expectation

⁷³ 1 Jn. 1.1-3; 4.2; 5.6; 2 Jn. 7.

of all believers: “Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well” (3 Jn. 2).⁷⁴

What the Health and Wealth Gospel interpreters have failed to understand with respect to this verse is that John is following normal convention here for writing a hellenistic letter. This gracious sentence represents “a form approximating to the secular conventional health wish, to be found in most secular letters of the period.”⁷⁵

That observation does not, however, negate the fact that John sincerely wanted these things for Gaius. How should we then interpret this verse in order to grasp John’s theology of health, sickness and healing?

First of all and positively, we can note that John recognizes that a human being has not only a spiritual dimension but also a physical one and that both are significant.⁷⁶ John the Elder is already convinced that Gaius’ soul, that is, his spiritual life, is on the right track (eujodovw—to follow a good path, to be successful). This idea is thoroughly confirmed by the following verse (3 Jn. 3), where John says that Gaius is faithful to the truth and walks in the truth. John says, then, that he is praying, not for Gaius’ spiritual health, but for two other things, namely, that Gaius would:

- ❖ go well (eujodovw; be on the right track) in everything; and
- ❖ have health (uJgairnw).

The first of these requests probably concerns the everyday affairs of Gaius personally, as well as perhaps the church administration for which he is responsible.

⁷⁴ See Gary M. Burge, *The Letters of John* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1996), pp. 248-250, for the story of Oral Roberts’ “insights” on this verse and for a brief critique of similarly misinformed exegesis. A more detailed and sustained analysis can be found in Ken L. Sarles, “A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel,” in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 143, number 572 (Oct. 1986), pp. 330-353, and in Moo, “Divine Healing,” mentioned earlier.

⁷⁵ Judith Lieu, *The Second and Third Epistles of John* (Studies of the NT and Its World; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), p. 102. For this reason, Robert W. Funk, “The Form and Structure of II and III John,” in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86/4 (Dec 1967), p. 430, says, “The conventional health wish in III John 2 marks this letter as the most secularized in the New Testament.”

⁷⁶ Cf. Paul’s concern that the Thessalonians be blameless in their entire “spirit, soul and body.” (1 Thess. 5.23).

The second request is for Gaius' physical health. The request does not necessarily have overtones of healing in it, though this verb (*uJgavnw*) could be used in that way if the context permitted (or encouraged) such an interpretation. Here in Third John, however, the meaning seems to point in the direction of "continuing in" (rather than of "being restored to") good or decent health.

In this verse John uses one of the normal (for a hellenistic letter) Greek verbs for a request or a wish directed to a deity: *eufcomai*. He does not use a verb of thanksgiving (such as *eujcaristevw*) as if he were going to say: "I thank the Lord, Gaius, that, because you are a believer, you are in good health." Rather, the apostle asks for that favor to be granted by God.⁷⁷ According to John, then, a healthy spirit (such as Gaius had)—a soul that is on the right track spiritually—does not automatically mean that God will bless that same believer with a healthy body. The Elder asks God for that specific blessing of health for his friend Gaius.

By this time, the apostle John had outlived most, if not all, of the other apostles. He knew well that spiritual health was no guarantee of physical health. Far from supporting the claim of the Health and Wealth Gospel people to the effect that good health is a Christian's (new) birthright, John's letter to Gaius points to the fact that one is continually dependent on God for health.⁷⁸

Thus, the principles drawn from the Johannine literature are the following:

- A healthy soul does not guarantee a healthy body.
- God is the one who has ultimate control over the health of a person.
- Both the physical and the spiritual aspects of human life are important.

⁷⁷ Health and Wealth Gospel partisans tend to emphasize the idea that God would surely respond favorably to such a prayer, particularly from the apostle John. Such a viewpoint, however, neglects the truth that God alone in his sovereignty knows what is ultimately going to bring him the most glory.

⁷⁸ God's higher purposes may be better served by a believer's going through physical suffering and sickness—for the purification of his or her own soul (which can always be further refined) and/or the purification of the lives of those who are around the sufferer and who can then observe how he or she handles misfortune and physical trials. Such was the case for the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 12.7-10) and for all Christians after him who have profited from his insights as a result of his "*thorn in the flesh*."

VIII. The New Testament Evidence: The Revelation to John

The Gospels and the book of Acts provided narrative accounts of what had taken place in the ministries of Jesus and the apostles, including many examples of healings, a bit of commentary on those healings, and indications of the diversity of reactions to those events. In the Epistles, we see mature reflections by seasoned believers, but the topic of healing is touched on directly only by Paul's comments on healing as a spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12) and by James' prescription of prayer and anointing for the one who is ailing (James 5). Other comments in the Epistles are more tangential, though including significant insights.

When we come to the book of Revelation, we are in a different genre altogether or, in reality, multiple genres. In Rev. 1, John documents poetic visions, and in Rev. 2-3, the genre presents itself as epistolary.⁷⁹ The major section, Rev. 4-22, is apocalyptic, giving supposed narrative accounts of things yet to be. The book ends with exhortation. Other genres are mixed in throughout these larger divisions, and the book of Revelation also manifests a heavy dependence on OT imagery.⁸⁰

As far as the book's relation to the here-and-now question of health, sickness and healing is concerned, the author does not provide any straightforward didactic material. Healing in this present life is simply not a topic that John pursues. We do, however, have a few indicators of John's perspective on the issues.

The first point to be gleaned from the Revelation to John is that God is sovereign (as the OT taught), and his sovereignty extends even to his control over death. The timing and means of death are under God's control.⁸¹ Furthermore, death is so completely under his sovereignty that it does not even have to be the final event. God can—and will—give life to those who are his and who have died;

⁷⁹ Note the comment of David E. Aune, *The NT in Its Literary Environment* (Library of Early Christianity 8; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), p. 159, identifying these so-called letters as "prophetic proclamations patterned after ancient royal and imperial edicts."

⁸⁰ Cf. Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 13f., 26f., 168, 186ff. W. M. Ramsay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, rev. ed. by Mark W. Wilson (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), pp. 36-40, points out the necessity of also understanding the references to the pagan elements that would have been in the background of the readers of the Apocalypse, particularly with respect to chapters 2-3, but scattered throughout the entire book.

⁸¹ Rev. 1.18; 6.8; 8.11; 9.15; 16.10f.

resurrection to everlasting life is a reality. That resurrection has already taken place for Jesus,⁸² and some day believers will experience it.

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. (Rev. 20.4-6)

In Revelation, John often uses analogies to get his point across. Thus, in writing to the seven churches, he describes them as having certain physical maladies, whereas, in point of fact, their problem is a spiritual sickness. The image of the breakdown of the physical body is thus used to denote a problem in the church's spiritual relationship with God.

- ❖ Thyatira is "on a bed of suffering..." (Rev. 2.22)
- ❖ Laodicea is "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked" and will receive "salve"⁸³ for her eyes (Rev. 3.17f.)

These images lead into some of John's comments as to suffering brought on by refusing to conform to God's plan. The plagues from the seven bowls of God's wrath are distributed, John says, to those who richly deserve them because of their sin (Rev. 16.7) or a refusal to repent: "*Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done*" (Rev. 16.11).

Physical suffering and illness, even death, can be disciplinary measures. In that respect, the person can bring on suffering by making bad choices. At the end of the

⁸² Rev. 1.5, 18; 5.6; and others.

⁸³ According to Ramsay, p. 309, Laodicea was the manufacturing center for a tablet that could be used in eye problems. Perhaps the tablet was then ground by the patient and made into a salve.

book, physical plagues are threatened should anyone attempt to add to the book, or death if the person were to remove something from John's testimony⁸⁴:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. (Rev. 22.18f.)

To counterbalance the negativity of those threats, John offers positive eschatological hope to those who will live forever with God:

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. (Rev. 21.4)

On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. (Rev. 22.2f.)

As was the case in the OT vision of the Age to Come, so also here, the curse is reversed. The healing of the nations appears in the context of chapters 21-22 to be a complete picture: spiritual fellowship with God in wonderful ecological conditions in a new heaven and earth, right relationships among all those who are there serving the Lord, and no longer any physical or psychological suffering or death.

The Age to Come will have been fully consummated, fully arrived when these things become a reality.

To summarize the lessons of the book of Revelation given to John, we note the following points:

- God himself controls life and death.
- Foolish choices, sinfulness and/or a refusal to repent can all lead to physical suffering.

⁸⁴ Aune, *Literary Environment*, p. 241, notes that an "integrity formula" is a common hellenistic device, occurring at either the beginning or the end of the many documents.

- The negative effects of the curse pronounced at the Fall will one day be overcome, and sickness and death will give way to eternal life in joyful service to God.

IX. The New Testament Evidence: A Brief Synthesis

Thus, in looking at the entire NT, we can see that, in several points, the various authors agree. At other times, one author or another will contribute additional and unique insights to help construct to a more comprehensive theology of health, sickness and healing.

The points which follow are the basic ideas that the NT proposes. Each one of these principles could, with profit, be expanded and elaborated. The intent here, however, is merely to suggest the general direction and overall scope of the teaching and insights of the NT for a theology of health, sickness and healing, within the guidelines already established earlier in this article.

1. Sickness is a reality of human life after the Fall (Gen. 3), and death eventually takes place for everyone. Some people also suffer from demonic oppression in this life.
2. Poor health or physical disability can be the natural result of life after the Fall, the result of sin (and thus God's discipline for a believer or punishment for an unbeliever) or the result of poor choices, including neglecting normal health procedures.
3. Healing is possible through God's power and in Jesus' name. The NT writers recount many examples of healings and exorcisms in the ministries of Jesus and the apostles.
4. God is the source of all healing and of protection from illness or death, and no situation is too difficult for him. Yet God does not always choose to protect or to heal; his sovereign will may be expressed in other ways.
5. Healing may come through various means (or combinations of means): through medical means (scientific treatments and/or the use of traditional herbal remedies),⁸⁵ including the normal healing activity of time; through miraculous healing with (or apart from) the intervention of a person having the spiritual gift of healing; or through the concerted prayer of faith by the church elders.

⁸⁵ These medical remedies could include scientific treatments and/or the use of traditional medicines and plants or herbs. See the following section on applications.

6. Since God is the one from whom all healing ultimately comes, the actual techniques are not in themselves significant and may vary according to the circumstances.⁸⁶
7. Spiritual health does not imply physical health, though (to look at the other side of the coin) sin may result in a person's physical sickness or even death.
8. Healings and exorcisms display God's power and may thus lead to conflict with those not committed to Christ.
9. Jesus' miracles of healing were demonstrations that he was the fulfillment of the OT promises for a healing Messiah and that he was ushering in the Kingdom of God.
10. God's work needs to be distinguished from that which originates with Satan. Satan can perform (counterfeit) miracles through his agents. Whereas the genuine miracles of healing that come from God are truly helpful and bring him glory, the purpose of Satan is to lead people astray.
11. Physical healings and exorcisms were acts of compassion, and neither Jesus nor the apostles limited the benefits of these healings to any one group; both Jews and non-Jews were healed.
12. Resurrection is the promise for the future for believers.
13. One day, the Kingdom of God will be a fully consummated reality, and then the effects of the curse will be lifted. Sickness, pain and death will be abolished.
14. The believer needs to live in the light of eternity, remembering that one's spiritual life is of much more value and more lasting significance than one's physical life.

These points, then, represent the major NT lines for a theology of health, sickness and healing. They are, of course, founded on the premises that 1) God himself created humankind and is interested in the whole person, and 2) God is sovereign over all that takes place or could conceivably take place.

X. Some Practical Implications of a NT Theology of Health, Sickness and Healing

What bearing then do these theological conclusions have on everyday life for us as believers? A few responses, with African overtones, will be suggested, though a longer treatment of the pastoral theology and ethics of healing is not possible here.

⁸⁶ In the biblical records, not even prayer and faith are always mentioned.

First of all, it is permissible to seek healing—through prayer, through the ministry of someone with the spiritual gift of healing, through the anointing and prayer of the elders of the church, through modern medical science, and through traditional treatments that have no non-Christian (pagan or Muslim) orientation. In all cases, these actions are to be undertaken in faith, believing that God can use those means (and those people) to effect a cure if that is his will.⁸⁷ Believers should never have recourse to a healer who uses any sort of religious ritual or dependence on spiritual powers but who does not confess Jesus as Lord. This stipulation completely and irrevocably eliminates any and all use of charms or fetishes or sacrifices as well as the consultation of sorcerers by a Christian.⁸⁸ The Christian must look to the one true God and not to false gods, spirits or the living dead (ancestors) for protection and healing. Traditional means of healing⁸⁹ that do not have (pagan) religious overtones can be helpful and may be used, but only to the point where the Christian participant is sure that no appeal is being made to supernatural forces and that the plants thus employed do not have otherwise harmful effects (such as what might be induced by hallucinogenic drugs).

Secondly, as Christians, we must recognize that God is sovereign and independent.⁹⁰ He may choose to heal, but he cannot be manipulated. No “technique” can ever force him to heal a person. His purposes are higher than mere physical health. If healing is the best way for God to accomplish his goals of bringing himself glory and of conforming the believer to the image of his Son (Rom. 8.29), then God will so act. But on some occasions, God may, in fact, receive greater glory as the sick person learns to trust him in the midst of the suffering. Because of God’s power, healing is always possible. On the other hand, because of God’s omniscience and his sovereign independence, healing will not always be granted.

⁸⁷ Faith is the consistent heart-attitude of the Christian. It is not a means of “manipulating” God.

⁸⁸ This statement does not eliminate the possibility of consulting non-Christian healers or doctors, provided that no non-Christian religious aspect be implicated in the process.

⁸⁹ An example would be the use of medicinal plants.

⁹⁰ This realization, however, is different from Muslim fatalism, for the Christian will still acknowledge personal responsibility before God to act wisely and carefully within the limits of knowledge and possibility. Cf. point 5 in this section on implications.

Thirdly, and as a natural consequence of the previous point, it is clear that promising good health to believers is, at best, misleading. In reality, such presentations of the gospel message, whether coming through the Health and Wealth (or Prosperity) Gospel proponents or through others, are actually unbiblical and a perversion of the true gospel. To accept such a message constitutes a case of following what Paul described as “*a different gospel—which really is no gospel at all*” (Gal. 1.6f.). These teachings are not helpful and should be avoided by believers. Evangelical churches and pastors need to give their members clear teaching on the theology of health as well as a theology of money and resources, in order to enable them to avoid the pitfalls of these perverted gospel messages.

Fourthly, believers must keep short accounts with God, confessing all known sin immediately, so as to avoid unnecessary disciplinary sickness. Obviously, this step of confessing one’s sins is also significant in order to grow in the Christian life. If, as the NT teaches, one’s spiritual life is more important than one’s physical life, we as believers need to give the highest priority to maintaining a right relationship with the sovereign God who created us.

In the fifth place, a believer must not neglect to care for his or her physical health, using the best possible means and all available wisdom and knowledge. The physical part of life, however, must not be allowed to dominate, either for good (as, for example, by spending too much time playing physical sports) or for ill (by, for example, eating without restraint). God created the human body and has given us the responsibility of using it wisely and of caring for it properly, so as to be capable of serving him effectively, without being hindered by poor health due to our personal negligence.

Finally, another implication of the NT theology of healing is that compassion should mark the believer’s reaction when encountering those who are sick, just as compassion also marked Jesus’ and the apostles’ attitude toward those who were suffering. For the church today, this may mean more involvement with AIDS sufferers, with clinics and primary health care, with interest in helping the physically handicapped and with other means of outreach to those who suffer physically. It may also imply the need to train more lay people for spiritual ministry to the sick, in order to supplement the chaplaincy services and over-committed pastors. And all of this ministry would need to be undertaken, as with the example of Jesus and the apostles, without restrictions as to the needy person’s ethnic background or social class.

XI. Conclusion

Although the NT evidence is scattered and diverse, we have been able to discern several major building blocks of a NT theology of health, sickness and healing. Each of these points could, as we have mentioned, be profitably elaborated further.

What is particularly necessary to keep in mind, however, is the interaction of the different ideas. Neglecting to balance one idea against another has led some groups to extremes in interpretation. Consequently, some groups deny that miraculous healing exists in our day. Other groups, located at the opposite end of the spectrum, say that failure to be healed or to live past the age of seventy reveals a basic failure to believe and claim God's promises.

These pitfalls of extremism can, however, generally be avoided by examining *all* the data of the NT (and not just a few favorite texts), making sure that the biblical evidence is always interpreted from within its proper context. Even though the various NT authors have different perspectives on the issue of health, sickness and healing, they do not contradict each other (if rightly understood)⁹¹ and together present a balanced theology. Taking verses out of context or neglecting certain theological aspects will, however, almost invariably lead to theological errors and sub-biblical practices.

Healing is a positive reality that the NT clearly acknowledges through many examples and through the direct teachings of Paul and James. It is a reality in which believers can rejoice and which they can seek in time of need. But alongside this aspect which encourages the believer to seek healing, the NT also has many other verses that remind us that healing is not something that can be assumed as our legitimate right or heritage as believers, at least not in this life. God, in his sovereignty, may have other paths for the sick person and his or her family and friends to walk down.

We can pray to the Lord for his intervention, and we can seek healing by any legitimate means. But we must never forget that the Lord himself is the one who knows what is genuinely best in each situation. He is the one who orders events and circumstances according to his infinite wisdom and power, whether for healing or not.

⁹¹ Sound hermeneutical principles and good exegesis of relevant passages are obviously essential to any correct understanding of biblical truth.

And for the blessing of knowing that God is in ultimate and absolute control, we can be truly grateful.

Excursus: The Body in Pauline Theology

The issue of the nature of the material body holds little interest for the majority of the NT writers, although Hebrews 2.9, 14; 10.5; John 1.14; 1 Jn 1.1-3; 4.2; 5.6; and 2 Jn 7 highlight the fact that Jesus was a real human being, having an actual physical body. In the case of the Johannine writings, these remarks were probably in response to docetic influences (possibly mixed with some pre-Gnostic ideas) in his churches. For the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the emphasis falls more on the fact that Jesus was thus totally identified with humankind and able to obey God in a physical body.

Only Paul spends any time considering the body as a topic in itself, and his remarks are wide-ranging and worthy of being developed in a separate study. For the present, we offer simply the following basic overview of Paul's ideas concerning the body. Some of these concepts obviously overlap with the interests of the present study:

- A. The body is not to be despised
 - 1. Everyone cares for his/her own body (Eph. 5.28f.)
 - 2. Husband and wife should rejoice in each other's body (1 Cor. 7.4)
 - 3. Paul expresses an interest in the well-being of the: spirit, soul and body (1 Th. 5.23)
 - 4. The existence of the gift of healing confirms the body's worth (1 Cor. 12.9, 28, 30)
 - 5. The incarnation was part of the early church's creed (1 Tm. 3.16—creed; Col. 2.9—hymn)
 - 6. Christ himself had a real body, one that could die, be buried and rise again (1 Cor. 15.3-8)
- B. In fact, the body is integral to personhood
 - 1. For this reason, we will have a glorified body after the resurrection (1 Cor. 15.20; 2 Cor. 1.9; etc.)
 - 2. The human body will be changed into a glorious one (1 Cor. 15.35-52; Phil. 3.20f..)
 - 3. We long for that even now (Rom 8.23)
 - 4. One day we will be rid of of earthly or bodily limitations (2 Cor 5.1-9)
- C. There is a sense in which the body seems to be a hindrance
 - 1. Paul stresses its fragility and usefulness (as a jar of clay) rather than its glory (2 Cor 4.7)

2. Sickness is frequent enough (Paul: 2 Cor. 12.7-10; Gal. 4.13s; Epaphroditus: Phil. 2.25-30; Timothy: 1 Tim. 5.22; Trophimus: 2 Tim. 4.20)
- D. The body is an instrument or tool
 1. The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6.19)
 2. The body should reveal the life of Jesus to others (1 Cor. 4.10f.)
 3. The believer is to honor God with his or her body (1 Cor. 6.20; 7.34; Phil. 1.20-22)
- E. As a tool, the body needs to be “honed”
 1. The body needs to be mastered (1 Cor. 9.27)
 2. Physical training is of some value (1 Tim 4.8)
 3. Yet physical duress is not a means of spiritual growth (Col. 2.23)
 4. What happens to the body does not necessarily have to have a negative effect on the inner person (1 Cor. 4.16)
- F. The ultimate concern in life is not physical but spiritual
 1. Paul condemns those whose “god is their stomach” (Phil. 3.19)
 2. The Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14.17)
 3. Flesh and blood will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 15.50)
- G. Paul can use “body” imagery for spiritual truths
 1. Images of being dead and alive (Rom. 6.11, 13)
 2. The body of Christ (in celebration of the Lord’s Supper), given for us (1 Cor 11.24)
 3. The body of Christ as an image of all believers (Rom. 12.4f.; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4)

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Theology: Since *AJET* publishes theological reflection based on the authority of Scripture articles submitted for publication should reflect an evangelical perspective.

Relevance: Articles should be relevant to the African Christian church today. Topics may deal with a range of issues, including theology, African church history, practical theology, theological reflection on problems in the church due to traditional African culture or contemporary society, theological and Christian education in the African context and other similar topics.

Scholarship: Articles should reflect serious scholarship based on library or field research. Bibliographic references should preferably be no less than ten. The English composition should be accurate and readable, without the need for extensive editing.

Format: Articles should be typewritten, double-spaced with bibliographic information (of every book used) at the end of the article. Footnotes or End Notes should be properly given, following guidelines of scholarly publications.

Biographic Information Requested: Authors should include a brief biographic sketch of their present vocational work, together with the last degree obtained and name of the institution from which the degree was obtained.

BOOK REVIEWS

Steven A. Hardy

***Excellence in Theological Education:
Effective Training for Church Leaders***

Edenvale RSA: SIM, 2007

[order from: SIM, P O Box 4163, 1610 Edenvale, South
Africa; US\$10 per copy plus shipping]

In his preface Steve Hardy explains that his purpose in writing this book is “to help theological school leadership, especially within the non-Western world, to affirm the excellence of their training institutions, and where excellence may be lacking, to discover ideas that will strengthen the quality of what they have.”

The author is well-qualified to write on theological education in the non-Western world. He has three decades of experience as a theological educator in Ethiopia, Mozambique, South Africa and Brazil. In addition he has visited over a hundred theological training institutions throughout the non-Western world while serving as a consultant with Overseas Council International (OCI). Presently he is the international advisor for theological education for the mission SIM, and senior consultant for the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE). He writes, therefore, out of a wealth of personal experience both as a teacher and as a trainer of teachers.

I found the book to be very insightful and thought provoking. Hardy does an excellent job of addressing many of the key issues that theological schools face. He devotes one chapter each to a wide range of topics, including: leadership, strategic planning, administration, curriculum, teachers, facilities, libraries, fund raising, extended training, evaluation and renewal. The book particularly accents the strategic role that theological schools can play in equipping present and future leaders for work within the Kingdom of God. Hardy writes, “If we perceive leadership as primarily a

functional role into which most of our graduates will someday step, our training efforts should focus on providing practical skill, tools and resources to help the person lead well.”

I appreciate how the author stresses character development as one of main tasks of theological education. Hardy expresses it this way: “The primary task of theological education is to shape the lives of those who are followers of Jesus so that they can be used by God as leaders and influencers for the good of His Kingdom. Character matters, which is why leaders of leadership training programs primarily ‘teach’ by who they are.”

I also appreciate Hardy’s encouragement for individual schools to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their programmes in light of their mission statements. By doing this they will be able to “clarify the task of strategic planning” and “give impetus to making the right kinds of changes happen.”

My favourite chapter is entitled “Excellence in Teachers.” Hardy writes, “We need those who know their subject matter well and who model what they know.” He goes on to say, “We aren’t helped by having people on staff with advanced degrees and lots of knowledge if what they know can’t be communicated coherently at the level of the students.” He emphasizes that teachers need to keep on learning how to do a better job of teaching. “An adequate teaching faculty is composed of those who constantly learn new things by listening and observing, with an internal commitment to keep on growing and to do things even better.” “The best teachers,” he says, “are those who keep on learning.”

Another contribution of Hardy’s book is his challenge to theological schools to offer continuing education for their graduates. He writes, “We can offer our graduates seminars and workshops on topics that will sharpen their ministry skills. We can strengthen their relations with other graduates as they are all invited back to campus at least one a year for celebrations of special events, such as graduation or a week of spiritual emphasis.” A good example of this is the Alumni Continuing Education Programme at Moffat Bible College in Kijabe, Kenya. For the past several years, Moffat has

offered annual one week refresher courses for its graduates during times when the college students are on break and the college facilities (e.g. dormitories, library, classrooms, and dining hall) are not being used.

The author challenges those involved in Christian higher education to strive for excellence in our theological colleges, graduate schools, and seminaries. Hardy emphasizes that theological institutions at every level need to have mission statements and curricula that are rooted in reality and are contextually appropriate. One of the major themes running throughout the book is "Excellence in education starts with real people who are being equipped for real ministries."

Each chapter ends with a list of thought-provoking discussion questions, and a "Suggestions for Further Reading" section. There Hardy provides a bibliography of resources and other reading materials that are related to the content of the chapter. I especially liked the illustrations and anecdotes that Hardy includes throughout the book. They help to illuminate his points and make the reading of the book very enjoyable. In fact, my only criticism of this book is that I wish the author had included even more illustrations from real life situations.

Although the book is written primarily with administrators in mind, I believe it would be a very beneficial exercise for faculty members and administrators alike to read the book and meet together periodically as a group to discuss the questions at the end of each of the twelve chapters. The questions will stimulate much good discussion and help put the educational principles into practice that Hardy is so helpfully advocating.

In conclusion, I highly recommend this book especially to administrators and faculty members of theological institutions in the non-Western world. Reading and discussing the book will have a lasting impact.

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Laurenti Magesa

***Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming
the Church in Africa***

Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2004

ISBN 9966-21-939-0 (Nairobi) edition. 312 pages, US\$10,
[also Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004. \$28]

Laurenti Magesa is a Roman Catholic parish priest in Tanzania, already well known as author of *African Religion: the Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (1997). The present volume, written primarily from a Catholic perspective, is a lengthy treatment of inculturation, which he defines as the 'the process whereby the faith already embodied in one culture encounters another culture' (5). It is, he says, a 'primarily instinctive and popular' process, but 'can also be promoted and enhanced by institutional study and direction.' It involves risk, and vital aspects of the message may be lost, but it is nevertheless vital to effective communication.

The book is divided into three sections. In the first Magesa looks at the way in which a sample of people in churches in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda understand and respond to the notion of inculturation. A chapter is devoted to each country, but these chapters are not entirely parallel in either structure or content. The research was carried out through assistants and drew mainly from Catholics, although in the chapter on Kenya members of an African Initiated Church were also consulted. Magesa identifies popular understandings of inculturation with some reference to the possibly divergent attitudes of different groups—in Uganda interviews were mainly with women; plus he notes areas where people felt that inculturation was needed. At the end of the section he draws no overall conclusions from this research.

In the second part of his book Magesa considers the process of inculturation in the Bible and the early course of Christian history. The critical issue in any such discussion is the way in which the author defines the relationship between gospel and culture. Magesa argues that as Christian faith and church encounter new cultures they transform them but are also transformed in the process, and subsequent discussion illuminates his understanding of the way in which that takes place. He finds it exemplified initially in the Old Testament, where Israel 'intuitively incorporated' elements of the religion of their neighbours into their worship of Yahweh. His discussion suggests a somewhat humanistic evolutionary approach to Old Testament revelation: thus, monotheism is 'a culmination of historical process ... the end result of a long development of cultural-religious contact between Israel and its environs in terms of Israel's adoption and rejection of some "foreign" notions of God' (90). In the same way there are grounds for seeing the 'current process of cultural-historical re-evaluation in Africa as the interpretation of and faithful response to God's continuing self-revelation in the African historical experience' (93). As this quotation suggests, Magesa has a high view of culture, which comes particularly into focus in chapter 9, 'The Church in Mission'. Here he claims that 'both the African identity and the gospel identity possess within them an irreducible divine character because both enjoy divine origin ... both are divine in terms of their positive inner values' (142). Magesa thereby rejects the notion that culture is essentially human and therefore contingent. He refers to 'the Word in the gospel' and 'the Word in a culture': 'the revelation of God in the Christian scriptures meets the God who is already present in the values of a culture.' There may be some subtle qualification of this stance when he refers to '*positive* [my emphasis] African traditional religious particularities and identities', which would seem to imply that there are also negative ones, thus raising the issue of the criteria by which they might be distinguished, and perhaps allowing a determinative role for the gospel. However, for Magesa the gospel may also have less than positive elements, since he speaks of '*mutual* [my emphasis] correction and adjustment' between gospel and culture, and equates the Bible and ATR as both 'more or less imperfect expressions of the unfathomable mystery of God' (147). It is therefore no surprise that he speaks positively of syncretism (154), in the case, for example, of a "'staunch Catholic"' who along with family and friends, and 'in the context

of their Christian faith' (90), offered a sacrifice to appease a deceased wife who was troubling his dreams.

In the final section Mageša considers areas within current Catholic Church life where inculturation needs to take place, and makes his own proposals to that end. Much space is given to questions of liturgy and ritual, along with some consideration of experimentation going on in Catholic churches, and reflection on pastoral issues including that of maintaining unity in the context of diversity.

Given its approach to Scripture and culture, *Anatomy of Inculturation* will offer little to evangelicals looking at similar issues, apart from an awareness of some current Catholic thinking. Even in that respect the general approach is not strikingly different from that of others—if perhaps developed somewhat more fully. The principal original element would be the research into attitudes towards inculturation in some East African countries.

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Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology

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