

# WHAT DOES THE Ἐκκλησία HAVE TO DO WITH THE Ἀσκληπιεῖον? A STUDY IN THE HEALING MINISTRY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

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There is an interesting passage in the *Corpus Hermeticum* in which Hermes Trismegistos addressed the grandson of Asclepius (or Asklepios) the god of healing, also named Asclepius, and lamented the coming doom of the pagan religions, ostensibly referring to the expansion of Christianity following the Decian and Valerian persecutions (A.D. 250-253 and 257-260).<sup>1</sup> The naming of Asclepius in the dialogue might not be accidental. Judging from the preserved

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<sup>1</sup> *Asclepius*, 23-25. Walter Scott regards the repeated emphasis on the legitimacy of men's role in making gods as "a defiant justification of the usages of Pagan worship in the face of Christian hostility." See Walter Scott, *Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings which contain Religious or Philosophic Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus* (Boston: Shambhala, 1993; first published, 1924), 59. The standard (Greek/Latin-French) edition of the *Hermetica* is A. D. Nock & A.-J. Festugière, eds., *Hermès Trismégiste* (2d ed.; Paris, 1960), on which is based the current English standard edition edited by Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation, with Notes and Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

evidence, the force and quantity of invective in the writings of Christian apologists in the second and third century easily outstrip similar Christian censure of key Greek deities like Zeus or Apollo.<sup>2</sup> Due to comparable divine features claimed by both the Asclepius and the Christian cults of their respective masters (in particular, as divine healer), it is highly likely that during the second and third centuries Christians realized that in Asclepius they faced the most dangerous antagonist of their Lord.<sup>3</sup> The clash, however, had a much more modest beginning. In this paper, we will attempt to outline a religious competition between the healing ministries of Asclepius and Christ during a stage when Christianity was barely noticeable. The text of interest is 1 Corinthians 12, specifically, the nature and context of the terms *χαρίσματα* *ιαμάτων* (12:9, 28, 30). The study of this phenomenon indicates that it is very likely that the gifts of healing were understood by Paul not only as part of a larger endowment made by Christ to his followers to minister to each other as the body of Christ, but also as a divine measure of self-sufficiency, effectively closing a channel of healing which risks idolatry (committed inevitably on any visit to the Asclepion). To understand the phenomenon of the gift of healing in the apostolic age, we will first need to understand its exercise in the person of Jesus. It will be shown that Jesus' possession and exercise of this power is unique, and this will inform our interpretation of the later use of the gift in the life of the early church.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Justin, *Apol.* 54.10, 22.6; *Dial.* 69.3; Origen, *Cels.* 3.25. For some of the evidence collected see Emma & Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies*, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1945; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1975). Harold Remus devoted half of his dissertation *Pagan-Christian Conflict over Miracle in the Second Century*, Patristic Monograph Series 10 (Cambridge: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, Ltd., 1983) to a case study of the conflict between Asclepius piety and Christianity. For an earlier discussion, see Adolf von Harnack, *Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1924), 133ff.

<sup>3</sup> Edelstein & Edelstein, *Asclepius*, II.133. According to Aelius Aristides (A.D. 117-181), Asclepius had all the powers of god but chose to be men's benefactor by establishing healing places in their midst. He raised people from the dead, restored the damaged limbs of men and women, and delivered countless people from diseases and distresses. He also calmed storms with his outstretched hand. See Louise Wells, *The Greek Language of Healing from Homer to the New Testament Times*, BZNW 83 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 94 and the citations there.

## I. Healing in the New Testament: The Evidence of Matthew

Aside from his speeches, which are generally teaching sayings, the most prominent activities performed by Jesus recorded in the Gospels are exorcisms and healings.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, neither Jesus himself nor the Gospel writers saw him primarily in the category of a healer.<sup>5</sup> This is all the more surprising given the fact that it is likely that the crowd, and the beneficiaries of Jesus' healing, did perceive him in this capacity in one way or another. The afflicted came to him to be healed, sometimes *en masse* (Mt 8:1-2, 5-7, 16-17, 28-32; 9:1-8, 18-19, 20-21, 27-29, 32-33; 12:22; 15:21-22; 17:14-18; 20:29-34),<sup>6</sup> and on two occasions Jesus' antagonists actually requested a miraculous sign to be performed on their behalf (Mt 12:38; 16:1). In addition to Jesus' own healing ministry, he authorized and empowered his disciples to do the same.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Amanda Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 21. Frustrated with the prevalent paradigm of Jesus-as-Teacher in which scholarly constructions are often useless as a realistic social category (as in Jesus as a Jewish peasant Cynic) or simply too minimalist as to be able to tell what exactly Jesus' teachings were, Stevan L. Davis proposed that the category most fruitful for the study of the historical Jesus is that of a healer (or more precisely, a spirit-filled healer, see his *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity* [London: SCM Press, 1995], 15). Ironically, the argument comes full circle again in Keith Warrington's work who argued that the healing and exorcism miracles performed by Jesus almost always had a pedagogical purpose (*Jesus the Healer: Paradigm or Unique Phenomenon?* [Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000]).

<sup>5</sup> The texts closest in doing so are Mk 2:17 (// Mt 9:12; Lk 5:31). However, the saying is proverbial and the usage is allegorical, with "the strong" referring to Jesus' antagonists and "the sick" being the tax collectors and sinners. See W. D. Davies & Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, International Critical Commentary, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), II.103.

<sup>6</sup> These, plus most of the so-called summary statements of Jesus' ministry (Mt 12:15; 14:14, 35; 15:30; 19:1-2; see below). In the former group, the exception appears to be the healing of the man with a withered hand (12:9-13), while among the summary statements, only Mt 11:4-5 does not involve crowd initiative.

<sup>7</sup> Mark, Matthew, and Luke all contain similar mission speeches for the Twelve (the seventy for Luke). The element of healing is always present (Mk 6:13; Mt 10:8; Lk 10:9).

However, in the questioning on the way to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus was variously labeled as either a specific personality<sup>8</sup> or as a prophet (Mt 16:13-15 and parallels), but not as a healer, at least not one whose reputation rests on his having a career of successful healing events.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the most common appellation used in reference to Jesus by both his disciples and the crowd is "rabbi" (Gk. ῥαββί, 4x) or "teacher" (Gk. διδάσκαλος, 12x, often in the vocative). Most significant is the fact that Jesus claimed the title of "teacher" for himself (both in Mt 23:8 as διδάσκαλος and in Mt 23:10, where καθηγητής is used).<sup>10</sup> Matthew signaled the relationship between Jesus in his and his healing activities in two of his summary statements (Mt 4:23; 9:35).<sup>11</sup> These statements are almost identical in wording and appear to bracket intentionally the material of the first major division (chs. 5-9) of the Gospel (the Sermon on the Mount [chs. 5-7] and a collection of healing miracles [chs. 8-9]).<sup>12</sup> The grouping identifies the main components of the ministry of Jesus as seen by Matthew: teaching (announcing the kingdom of heaven) and works of wonder (healing, exorcism, nature miracle, etc.). Healing appears to be

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<sup>8</sup> As John the Baptist or Elijah, with neither having any fame as a healer, although Elijah did perform a healing miracle as the story is passed down to us (1 Kgs 17:17-24).

<sup>9</sup> This claim is no longer true once we move away from the canonical Gospels. Later apocryphal gospels generally contain embellished accounts of Jesus' power to heal (e.g., as seen in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* and the *Acts of Pilate*). While Jewish references to Jesus are rare, they do take notice of his healing prowess (see Josephus, *Ant.* 18.63-64; *b. Sanh.* 107b).

<sup>10</sup> The only place where Jesus makes an explicit Christological claim for himself. For the meaning of καθηγητής, see Bruce W. Winter, "The Messiah as Tutor: The Meaning of καθηγητής in Matthew 23:10," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42 (1991): 151-57.

<sup>11</sup> The others are Mt 11:4-5; 12:15; 14:14, 35; 15:30; 19:1-2. These latter summaries only mention Jesus' healing activity with no reference to his teaching.

<sup>12</sup> So H. J. Held, "Matthew as Interpreter of the Miracle Stories," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew*, eds. G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, and H. J. Held (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 249-50; W. G. Thompson, "Reflections on the Composition of Mt. 8:1-9:34," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly (CBQ)* 33 (1971): 366 n. 5; J. D. Kingsbury, "Observations on the 'Miracle Chapters' of Matthew 8-9," *CBQ* 40 (1978): 566-67; John C. Thomas, *The Devil, Disease and Deliverance: Origins of Illness in New Testament Thought*, JPTSupp 13 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 164.

a normal part of Jesus' ministry,<sup>13</sup> but it is also *prima facie* likely that the healing actions performed by Jesus were not ends in themselves, but served to alert both the recipients of the benefit and the observers of the event of the need to respond to him in a proper manner.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the Gospel of John, where the importance of miraculous signs in generating faith seems to take second seat to hearing the word of Jesus, Matthew entertains no such thought.<sup>15</sup> Instead, he highlights the Christological nature of the healing stories by trimming the distracting details of the stories in order to focus on the authority and demands of Jesus (e.g., Mt 8:28-34 // Mk 5:1-20; Mt 9:1-8 // Mk 2:1-12).<sup>16</sup>

The bracketing effect is further emphasized by the placement of two call narratives of Jesus' disciples (Mt 4:18-22; 10:1-2) immediately beyond the summary statements. The calling (Mt 4:18-22) and the sending (Mt 10:1, 3) establish the continuity of Jesus' authority with the disciples'. They have heard the teaching of their master and it is their turn to preach the imminence of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 10:7, 27). They are also given the authority to heal and to cast out demons (Mt 10:1, 8) as an apostolic credential, with one caveat: for them, unlike Christ, the authority to work wonders does not point to themselves. Instead, they will be held accountable for their own obedience to the Messianic teachings (Mt 7:21-23).

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<sup>13</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 203, 205.

<sup>14</sup> This is also why the Gospels writers are often keen on reporting the reaction of those present to Jesus' healing activities. The result is most definitely not uniform, except perhaps for the Jewish leaders, who were united in their hostility. See the discussion by Lidija Novakovic in the case of Matthew, in *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick: A Study of Jesus as the Son of David in the Gospel of Matthew*, WUNT 2/170 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 91f.

<sup>15</sup> The Johannine "bias" is often said to have been derived from the Thomas incident (Jn 20:29) and propagated under the powerful influence of none other than Rudolf Bultmann himself. He titled the first subsection of a chapter on the Gospel of John "Faith as the Hearing of the Word" (*Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols. [New York: Scribner's, 1951, 1955], 1:70-74). For a correction, see Marianne M. Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 101-44.

<sup>16</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, "Healing," 302.

The rest of the summary statements function differently from Mt 4:23 and 9:35. Despite a lack of the symmetry between teaching and healing that is characteristic of the first two statements, the other summaries place the healing activities of Jesus more on the direct path of Old Testament scriptural fulfillments.<sup>17</sup>

The effect of a combined ministry of teaching and healing (or more generally, miracle-working) goes beyond Christological concerns, however.<sup>18</sup> Over the last two decades, scholarship has increasingly turned its attention to the social-scientific aspects of the religious phenomena recorded in the New Testament. In particular, the study of miracles (of which miraculous healing forms a subset) from a social-scientific perspective has yielded a number of insights that complement traditional approaches scholars have employed so far.<sup>19</sup>

John Pilch employed the concept of "health care system"<sup>20</sup> to analyze vast stretches of Gospel narratives dealing with the phenomenon of health and well-being in ancient society. Using a model proposed by Arthur Kleinman,<sup>21</sup> Pilch identifies Jesus

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<sup>17</sup> Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick*, 119-20.

<sup>18</sup> Though they do contribute toward it.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., the historical-critical method, and the avowedly ahistorical literary-critical method. But as we shall have occasion to see, the insights generated by literary criticism and social-scientific criticism are not necessarily incompatible, and in the case of healing miracles, they could actually be complementary.

<sup>20</sup> A term taken over from studies of modern health care. The cultural aspects of such a concept has been utilized by John Pilch in a series of earlier papers: "Biblical Leprosy and Body Symbolism," *Biblical Theology Bulletin (BTB)* 11 (1981): 119-33; "Healing in Mark: A Social Science Analysis," *BTB* 15 (1985): 142-50; "The Health Care System in Matthew: A Social Science Analysis," *BTB* 16 (1986): 102-6; "Understanding Biblical Healing: Selecting the Appropriate Model," *BTB* 18 (1988): 60-66; "Understanding Healing in the Social World of Early Christianity," *BTB* 22 (1992): 226-33; and "Insights and Models for Understanding the Healing Activity of the Historical Jesus," *Society for Biblical Literature Seminar Papers (SBLSP)* (1994): 154-77; collected in *Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000); see also his *Visions and Healing in the Acts of the Apostles: How the Early Believers Experienced God* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> See Arthur Kleinman, "Concepts and a Model for the Comparison of Medical Systems as Cultural Systems," in *Concepts of Health, Illness and Disease: A Comparative Perspective*, eds. Caroline Currer and Meg Stacey (New York: Berg, 1986), 29-47.

as functioning in the folk sector of the health care system model which confirms our own impression based on the data in Matthew.<sup>22</sup> Strangely, however, Pilch is unable to decide whether Jesus was regarded as a teacher/healer in the Matthean world in the way that he was in the Markan world.<sup>23</sup>

A possible reason for such a non-conclusion could be due to the segregation of Jesus' role during the analysis of the data. As we have seen above, Jesus the teacher and Jesus the healer may not be separated in Matthew's portrayal of Jesus (the same perhaps holds true in the other Gospels also). At the same time, competition from Jesus' antagonists is a narrative factor in relation to one of the roles but not the other.<sup>24</sup> The role of Jesus as a miracle worker, then, has the potential to either enhance Jesus' standing as a teacher or embarrass him if the healing were to prove unsuccessful or otherwise be discredited. Reading the text from a cultural point of view and engaging the cultural scripts (in this case, the pivotal practice of patronage-benefaction and the fundamental values of honor-shame) of the players in the stories could enrich our understanding of the motives and purposes of the characters involved.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> According to Pilch, the folk sector is "the non-professional, non-bureaucratic, specialist sector of a healthcare system that often blends into the other two sectors" (*Healing in the New Testament*, 70). The other two sectors are the professional and the popular sectors. See Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 26 for a schematic describing the relationship between the three sectors.

<sup>23</sup> Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament*, 85. This is strange, as the patterns of support and rejection from both Gospels track each other very closely, and the texts listed by Pilch did not show any reason to conclude otherwise.

<sup>24</sup> The Pharisees and the scribes requested a sign from Jesus; they were unable to perform one themselves. This irony is most clearly expressed in the healing of the paralytic incident (Mt 9:1-8), in which the scribes were asked to rank/perform a forgiveness rite and a healing miracle.

<sup>25</sup> Scholarly literature in this area has been growing rapidly. See the pioneering work of Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), now in its 3rd edition (c2001). For patron-benefaction, see Frederick W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis: Clayton, 1982); R. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); A. Wallace-Hadrill, ed., *Patronage in Ancient*

In antiquity, where social structure was rigidly stratified and little institutional means were available for people of low social status to advance, patron-client relationships became the primary means of obtaining goods and services within the context of social inequality. This explains its ubiquity.<sup>26</sup> The relationship is reciprocal, in which both the rights and duties of each side of the patron-client relationship are spelt out, either tacitly or explicitly.<sup>27</sup> In the ancient world, such relationships spanned the entire spectrum of human social relationships, including god-human relationships. Within the relationship, a patron controls and distributes resources to inferiors as favors (or benefits, making the patron a "benefactor"),<sup>28</sup> and

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*Society* (London: Routledge, 1989); S. Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor: Reciprocity, Strategy and Theological Reflection in Paul's Collection*, WUNT 124 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); J. K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth*, JSNTSup 75 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); D. A. deSilva, "Exchanging Favor for Wrath: Apostasy in Hebrews and Patron-Client Relationships," *Journal of Biblical Literature* (JBL) 115 (1996): 91-116; Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). On honor-shame values, see D. A. deSilva, *The Hope of Glory: Honor Discourse and New Testament Interpretation* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999); F. Gerald Downing, "Honor' among Exegetes," in *Making Sense in (and of) the First Christian Century*, ed. F. Gerald Downing, JSNTSup 197 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); David D. Gilmore, ed., *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (Washington: American Anthropological Association, 1987); K. C. Hanson, "How Honorable! How Shameful!" A Cultural Analysis of Matthew's Makarisms and Reproaches," *Semeia* 68 (1994): 81-112; J. E. Lendon, *Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998); Jean G. Péristiany, ed., *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

<sup>26</sup> This relationship pattern exists even today, despite the degree of egalitarian standards achieved in more advanced (Western) societies.

<sup>27</sup> For an application of honor-shame values and patron-client relationships to ancient healings, see Jerome H. Neyrey, "Miracles, In Other Words: Social Science Perspectives on Healings," in *Miracles in Jewish and Christian Antiquity: Imagining Truth*, ed. John C. Cavadini (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 19-55.

<sup>28</sup> It has been pointed out that the use of the term "benefactor" (Gk. εὐεργέτης was originally limited to disinterested patronage in Greek thought, though later Roman political realities fused the use of "benefactor" and "patron" to a large extent (Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 22-24). In reality, patronage always coexisted with other forms of aid and exchange, such as charity and altruism, and honor was given not as an obligation but as a safeguard for more acts of benefaction to come (Alicia Batten, "God in the Letter of James: Patron or Benefactor?" in *The Social World of the New Testament: Insights and Models*, eds. Jerome H. Neyrey & Eric C. Stewart [Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008], 53-54).



dependent clients reciprocate by gratitude, honor and loyalty to their patrons. Where the resource involved is a more powerful patron (e.g., the emperor, or God) inaccessible to the client directly, the immediate patron assumes the role of a broker. Thus the prophet, the local priest, the charismatic healer, etc., all fall into this category. Upon the completion of a patron-client transaction, the higher patron receives glory and the broker-patron is also honored. The client is indebted to both.<sup>29</sup> It is easy to see how the healing ministry of Jesus might have readily enhanced his status among those he ministered to and facilitated the hearing of what he had to teach them.<sup>30</sup> It is not surprising that the fame (honor) of Jesus spread with his healing ministry, and the remarks about the spread of his fame are closely tied with Matthew's bracketing summary statements of the first major division (Mt 4:24; 9:26, 31).<sup>31</sup> However, the rear bracketing statement already contains the darker side of the dynamics of honor and shame within the patron-client system, when it is reported that the Pharisees attributed Jesus' healing prowess to demonic influence (Mt 9:34).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> A typical situation is recorded in Lk 17:11-19. One of the cured lepers returned to Jesus, praising God and thanking Jesus in public. The loyalty obligation can be so entrenched that even threats from third parties may not be able to dissolve it (cf. Jn 9:13-38).

<sup>30</sup> For an application of the patron/client-honor/shame matrix to the message of the Epistle to the Hebrews, see D. A. deSilva, "Despising Shame: A Cultural Anthropological Investigation of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *JBL* 113 (1994): 439-61.

<sup>31</sup> The so-called Markan messianic secret motif really reflects Mark's pessimism on the crowd's ability to perceive the identity of Jesus without a proper understanding of Christian discipleship. Matthew, on the other hand, held no such scruples. For him Jesus' miraculous benefaction could only enhance his verbal teaching concerning his identity as the Davidic Son of God (Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick*, 188). In the Gospel of John, as in Matthew, miraculous deeds point to Jesus' identity (Jn 20:31), see Neyrey, "Miracles, In Other Words," 29. Neyrey was mistaken in claiming that the Q source does not narrate any healing, when in fact it does (albeit reworked by both Evangelists: Mt 8:5-13 // Lk 7:1-10; see John S. Kloppenborg, *Q Parallels: Synopsis, Critical Notes & Concordance* [Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1988], 50-51).

<sup>32</sup> The action of the Pharisees reflects a hostile and negative use of the miraculous stories against the miracle worker himself (Jesus in this case). For the wider use of miracles as propaganda (both positive and negative) in the ancient world, see Howard Clark Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World: A Study in Sociohistorical Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 252-89.

The nature of the exchange between patron and client makes honor a valuable commodity, but what can be given in one way can also be taken in another, by a process labeled by scholars the challenge-riposte, whereby one party attempts to gain honor at the other party's expense by posing a challenge that he fails to answer.<sup>33</sup> Matthew is full of these exchanges, and these contests served as further occasions for Jesus to teach and to reveal his authority.<sup>34</sup> Thus in Mt 9:1-8, the challenge was taken up and Jesus asserted his authority to forgive via an *a fortiori* argument which actually took the form of a healing demonstration. The upshot was the crowd glorifying God (Mt 9:7a) and the recognition that Jesus' authority came from God (Mt 9:7b). On another occasion the challenge took the form of a halakhic query regarding whether it was lawful to heal on Sabbath (Mt 12:9-21). Jesus took up the challenge, issued an authoritative halakha (Mt 12:12), and promptly performed his healing. His antagonists went out to plot his demise, and no explicit honor was ascribed to God or Jesus: Jesus went on to perform more healings and instructed the crowd not to make him famous (12:16).<sup>35</sup> However, the real honor was ascribed by Matthew, when he cited Isaiah 42:1-4 and provided his audience with "a demonstrable scriptural proof that Jesus' healings properly belongs to the realm of his messianic duties."<sup>36</sup> The text shows that Jesus is God's beloved servant who is endowed with his spirit, and who, though humble and peaceful, is the issuer of right judgment. The next challenge came after the healing of the blind and dumb demoniac (Mt 12:22-37). Honor was ascribed to Jesus immediately after the healing (Mt 12:23). However, the exclamation of the crowd induced a

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<sup>33</sup> Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. John G. Péristiany (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 27.

<sup>34</sup> See Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, 44-52.

<sup>35</sup> Gk. μή φανερόν αὐτόν ποιήσωσιν.

<sup>36</sup> Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick*, 151. So also D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) 33A (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 339.

Pharisaic accusation that Jesus cast out demons by Beelzebul.<sup>37</sup> Jesus' rebuttal was effective, as some of the Pharisees and scribes requested a further miracle by way of confirmation of what Jesus said. Jesus' rebuttal anticipated Matthew's fulfillment quote, which came later. In it Jesus claimed that he worked by the power of God's spirit and he threatened his opponents with universal judgment if they continued on with their evil words and deeds.<sup>38</sup> Thus whether in honor or in riposte, the healings invariably led to a further clarification of Jesus' identity as God's Messiah.

A few preliminary concluding remarks are in order. While a careful reading of the literary signals of the Matthean narrative led one to conclude about the importance of the healing ministry of Jesus readily enough, the relationship between Jesus' two major groups of activities (teaching and healing) is by no means clearly articulated. Matthew's use of the Old Testament forms an important conduit for the reader to understand the role of the healing miracles, but it is by looking at the text through a cultural lens that Jesus' healing activities, his teachings, and his identity are finally integrated. The upshot is that the healing acts of Jesus are part of his messianic credentials (cf. the more friendly challenge issued by John the Baptist in Mt 11:2-5, in which again Jesus' portfolio included both teaching and healing). In this sense these healings are unique to Jesus. They are a part of his messianic marker, and perhaps not to be repeated, or at least not to be understood as having the same significance when performed by others. Nevertheless, we still have to contend with the missionary text in Mt 10 which, as we have seen, may be looked at as establishing the continuity of the Jesus' authority with the disciples'.

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<sup>37</sup> The aorist participle in οἱ δὲ φαρισαῖοι ἀκούσαντες εἶπον implies a disagreement with the crowd's assessment of Jesus rather than with the healing itself.

<sup>38</sup> Useful discussion from a cultural-anthropological angle of the Beelzebul incident may be found in S. Guijarro Oporto, "The Politics of Exorcism," in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. W. Stegemann et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 159-174.

In a recent article, Giovanni Battista Bazzana examines the missionary text Q 10 (reworked as Mt 10 and Lk 10 according to a current Mark-Q source theory)<sup>39</sup> and concludes that the early Christian preachers were portrayed as Greco-Roman physicians, a role they took up as an accommodation to the contemporary social structure which facilitated the diffusion of the Christian message.<sup>40</sup> Bazzana notes a number of parallels between the prescriptions in the Q 10 Mission Discourse for the "Q missionaries" and the practice of Greco-Roman physicians. First, the language used (θεραπεύετε τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς/ἀσθενοῦντας θεραπεύετε) reflects medical practice, but Bazzana regards Matthew's reference to exorcisms as redactional. Second, the missionaries receive payments (the Lukan μισθός is again preferred over the Matthean τροφή), in line with Greco-Roman medical practice. Third, the Roman physician often is required to combine his rhetorical and medical skills in his practice; the former to communicate his skill and perhaps piety to his potential patrons and the latter for obvious reasons. The Q missionaries are also preachers even as they are instructed by Jesus to heal the sick they encountered.<sup>41</sup> Bazzana then goes on to differentiate the practice of these early Christian preachers from Greco-Roman physicians by labeling them as really "folk" practitioners (vs. the professional sector from which the Roman doctors operated).<sup>42</sup> Moreover, their refusal to be paid placed them outside of the usual patron-client arrangements and constituted a critique of the system.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See Kloppenborg, *Q Parallels*, 66-81, particularly 72-73.

<sup>40</sup> Giovanni Battista Bazzana, "Early Christian Missionaries as Physicians: Healing in its Cultural Value in the Greco-Roman Context," *NovT* 51 (2009): 232-51, here 245-46.

<sup>41</sup> Bazzana, "Early Christian Missionaries as Physicians," 235-38.

<sup>42</sup> Utilizing Kleinman's model mentioned above.

<sup>43</sup> Bazzana, "Early Christian Missionaries as Physicians," 250.

For our purpose, Bazzana's insights are useful in what he affirmed but off track in what he denied. It is true enough that both Matthew and Luke recorded Jesus' Mission Discourse as including a healing ministry on the part of his disciples. However, by denying that Jesus himself ever practiced healing in the same fashion (and was thus regarded as a folk healer of some sort),<sup>44</sup> Bazzana has destroyed the integrity of the Gospel accounts and severed the historical connection between what Jesus did and what his disciples practiced. Matthew's placement of the calling and sending accounts of Jesus' disciples certainly is intended to indicate the continuity of the preaching-healing ministry between Jesus and the Twelve.<sup>45</sup> The anticipated stigmatization from the group's antagonist was the same whether it was in reaction to Jesus or in reaction to the disciples (Mt 10:25), indicating that there could not be a substantial difference between the healing practices between Jesus and the disciples. We could safely assume that the healing activity was charismatic, for the Twelve as it was for Jesus.<sup>46</sup> The counter-cultural current in the practice of the Twelve was significant because it was derived from Jesus' own conduct, which served as a visible evidence of his messianic credentials.<sup>47</sup> In this sense the healing miracles were never ends in themselves for Jesus. They announced the kingdom of heaven, and manifested the identity of the Messiah who fulfilled the scriptural

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<sup>44</sup> Bazzana, "Early Christian Missionaries as Physicians," 239 n. 24.

<sup>45</sup> E. Schweitzer, "Observance of the Law and Charismatic Activity in Matthew," *New Testament Studies (NTS)* 16 (1969-70): 219-20.

<sup>46</sup> Twelftree claims that Matthew's account of the Mission Discourse has a wider context and relates to the church of Matthew's day and shows the important role these activities are intended to play in its evangelism (G. Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism among Early Christians* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 164-67).

<sup>47</sup> For further discussions of the counter-cultural aspects of Jesus' healing ministry, see S. Guijarro Oporto, "Healing Stories and Medical Anthropology: A Reading of Mark 10:46-52," *BTB* 30 (2000): 102-112.

promises of help and deliverance from above.<sup>48</sup> By extension the Twelve's own preaching-healing ministry served to present their apostolic credentials as the Messiah's emissaries.

Scholars have noticed that the Gospels are unusual for their density of healing miracles. The frequency of such reports drops rapidly once we move beyond the pages of the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>49</sup> The same phenomenon can be detected in the writings of the Fathers. Writing in the middle of the third century, Origen indicated that although miraculous healings continued in the church beyond the apostolic times, they were less numerous than before.<sup>50</sup> It is very likely that a transformation in theological outlook has taken place towards the end of the apostolic times, in which the link between healings and the arrival of the kingdom of heaven gave way to emphasis on doctrines like the Pauline justification or the Johannine eternal life, both demanding a more explicit Christology than the more primitive Messiah-healer paradigm registered earlier. The eschatological perspective of healings gradually faded away, replaced by the importance of corporate fellowship and the concern

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<sup>48</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, "Your Faith has Made You Whole: The Evangelical Liberation Theology of Jesus," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, eds. Joel B. Green & Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 75-93, here 86. For the view that acts of healing and the announcement of peace (Mt 10:12) are conceptually related and both indicated the presence of salvation to those affected, and thus the power of the kingdom of heaven, see John K. Ridgway, "*Let Your Peace Come Upon It*": *Healing and Peace in Matthew 10:1-15* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 143-301.

<sup>49</sup> Blomberg, "Faith," 83-84. See also the conclusions of Warrington after a comprehensive analysis of the healing accounts of the Gospels (Warrington, *Jesus the Healer*, 161).

<sup>50</sup> See *Cels.* 1.2, 46; 2.8; 7.8 and Comm. Jo. 20.315. Origen uses the word ἵχνη (trace) or ἵχνη καὶ λείμματα to describe the amount of miraculous signs still present in the church to his day. In another passage he says, "to this day people whom God wills are cured by his name" (*Cels.* 2.33), implying that the healing gifts are not always successful. See Andrew Dauntton-Fear, *Healing in the Early Church: The Church's Ministry of Healing and Exorcism from the First to the Fifth Century* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 104-05.

for protection from the fundamental sin of idolatry as the number of Gentile believers grew.<sup>51</sup> It is in this context that we come to examine our text in 1 Corinthians 12.

## II. Healing in the New Testament: The Evidence of the Pauline Epistles

Paul did not mention explicitly in his letters any specific miracle he had performed; he normally referred to any such deeds in general terms, all in the context of either validating his apostolic status or having to do with his evangelistic efforts to reach the unsaved.<sup>52</sup> Thus in 2 Cor 12:12, in defending himself against the "superlative" apostles, he reminded the Corinthians he had performed the "signs of a true apostle." In Romans 15:19, he drew the Roman Christians' attention to his evangelistic efforts in an area where the Gospel had not been previously preached, winning converts by the power of signs and wonders, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. The same may perhaps be said of his entrance at Thessalonica and Corinth.<sup>53</sup> Thus far the pattern coheres with what we saw earlier, in which the

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<sup>51</sup> See the argument in detail in Helge Kjør Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung: Das Verständnis der Heilung und ihres Verhältnisses zur Verkündigung bei Jesus und in der ältesten Kirche*, Acta Theologica Danica 22 (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 124-252. In an analysis of miraculous interventions in the Book of Revelation, David deSilva notes a lack of "expectation that God intervenes amidst the 'burdens of life' to relieve disease, distress, or other typical conditions relieved by miraculous interventions in the Gospels, Acts, ..." ("Toward a Socio-Rhetorical Taxonomy of Divine Intervention," in *Fabrics of Discourse: Essays in Honor of Vernon K. Robbins*, eds. David B. Gowler, et al. [Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003], 315) This fact no doubt signals John's concern and rhetorical purpose in writing Revelation. It also, however, belies John's attitude toward the utility and role of miraculous healing in the life of a Christian communities under stress: miraculous relief is seldom given for its own sake.

<sup>52</sup> σημεῖον, τέρας, δῖνάμις. See Ro 15:19; 2 Co 12:12.

<sup>53</sup> 1 Thess 1:5 (ἐν δυνάμει καὶ ἐν πνεύματι), 1 Co 2:4 (ἐν ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως). Twelftree (*Name of Jesus*, 69-71) made the reasonable observation that Paul's references to "power" have to be distinguished from "word" or "wisdom" in these two passages (also 1 Co 4:20).

exercise of miraculous power for someone attached to Jesus primarily served as that person's apostolic credentials, in addition to being part of effort to make Christ known.<sup>54</sup> It would appear that his converts also experienced miraculous gifts apart from Paul himself in Galatia,<sup>55</sup> but even there it was tied to the hearing of the Gospel. One could reasonably assume that such manifestations of miracles and power would include, among other things, healing activities.

On the other hand, a survey of the Pauline texts where illnesses are mentioned provides only meager references to miraculous healings.<sup>56</sup> For example, in Gal 4:13-15, Paul recalled the Galatians' reception of him when he first preached the Gospel to them because of a bodily ailment (δι' ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκός),<sup>57</sup> which he referred to as a trial to the Galatians. No information was given as to how (or whether) the illness was cured, although Paul apparently viewed the occasion as a providential arrangement. In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Paul confessed to having an illness which he unsuccessfully petitioned God to heal. Moreover, he attributed the origin of the illness to Satan, although God no doubt was regarded as the ultimate cause (2 Co 12:8).

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<sup>54</sup> So Howard Clark Kee, *Medicine, Miracle & Magic in New Testament Times*, SNTSMS 55 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 129.

<sup>55</sup> Gal 3:5, ὁ . . . ἐνεργῶν δυνάμεις ἐν ὑμῖν, . . . ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως; The present tense would indicate that such activities were current until perhaps they went astray with the false gospel (Dauton-Fear, *Healing*, 24).

<sup>56</sup> See Thomas, *The Devil*, 38-90 for a comprehensive survey for all the incidents where illnesses were mentioned in Paul's letters. Thomas, however, was more interested in the origin and etiology of the illnesses recorded in the New Testament.

<sup>57</sup> Perhaps because Paul's original intention was to merely pass through the region without stopping. The illness caused a stopover (Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Pauline Missions Before the Jerusalem Conference," *Revue Biblique* 89 [1982]: 71-91; here 80). Some commentators regard the "weakness" as something other than an illness. E.g., "weakness in outward appearance" (Calvin), "physical exhaustion" (H. N Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956], 166), or "disfiguration due to injuries sustained in persecutions" (C. H. Cosgrove, *The Cross and the Spirit: A Study in the Argument and Theology of Galatians* [Macon: Mercer University Press, 1988], 78-79), etc. However, it is generally accepted that ἀσθένεια and its cognates most frequently refer to illness and disease in the New Testament (G. Stählin, "ἀσθενής, κτλ.," *TDNT* 1.492). For our purpose, it is the healing process that matters.



The repeated petitions for healing indicate that praying to God was his normal mode of response to illness. If a miraculous cure is regarded as divine intervention, then Paul obviously did not have an "on-demand" gift of healing. In Philippians 2:25-30, the emissary from Colossae, Epaphroditus, was found ill while staying with Paul. Apparently he was healed despite his near-death condition earlier (Php 2:27). It is not clear how he was cured, except that the cure was a manifestation of God's mercy on all of them. Prayers for recovery were no doubt offered. The cure was thus certainly an occasion for thanksgiving, but there is no indication that it was the result of a powerful miracle than ordinary therapeutic care available. In 1 Timothy 5:23, Paul resorted to perhaps a folk remedy to treat Timothy's gastric problem.<sup>58</sup> Assuming that Paul (or Timothy) would have offered petitions for the cure of common ailments like a gastric disorder, the text at least indicates that Paul was not inimical to trying what might pass as human curative measures of his time. Another case where the sick person did not receive a miraculous cure was mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:20; Trophimus was apparently still under the weather at the time of 2 Timothy's writing. There are also two cases where the physical infirmity under consideration was actually a form of divine chastisement. In the case of 1 Corinthians 11:28-34, a sinful attitude and behavior during the Lord's Supper was the direct cause of illnesses, even death, among the Corinthian congregation.<sup>59</sup> To avoid judgment the Corinthians must reexamine the understanding of their fellowship in Christ and behave accordingly.<sup>60</sup> However, Paul did not

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<sup>58</sup> For medicinal use of wine in ancient sources, see I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastor Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh, 1999), 624 n. 173.

<sup>59</sup> C. K. Barrett thinks the disease was really caused by demons since at least some of the Corinthians were in the habit of eating at pagan banquets held in temples, although there is really no evidence for it. See C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: A. & C. Black, 1968), 275.

<sup>60</sup> For a reconstruction of the Corinthian dinner scenario that takes into account of the social conventions current at the time among private banquets, see Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 142-63.

mention a remedy for those who were already under divine judgment. Most commentators are silent on this issue. Presumably prayers would be offered for repentance and recovery. We are including 1 Corinthians 5:5 because Paul's thinking here is akin to what he expressed in 11:32: "But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world" (NRSV). Here we have almost the reverse of a miraculous healing.<sup>61</sup> The person is put under a judgment and handed over to Satan in what may be termed an excommunication ritual.<sup>62</sup> In this case, miraculous healing is not likely unless preceded by repentance.

A few observations are *apropos* here. In Roman Palestine, as well as in the wider Greco-Roman world, healing involves both divine and human agency, often times in concert with each other; simple dichotomy is generally ruled out.<sup>63</sup> The predominance of scientific discourse in medical rhetoric took place only during the modern era. In antiquity, despite the snobbery of the "professionals," the balance tends to shift towards religious discourse as informing the ethos of the physician, particularly in the "popular" and the "folk" sectors.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Commentators are split on the nature of εἰς ὄλεθρον τῆς σαρκός. David E. Garland takes ὄλεθρος to refer to human sinful orientation (David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003], 175-76) whereas others like J. A. Fitzmyer stays closer to the actual physical realm (J. A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008], 239).

<sup>62</sup> Some scholars regard the use of παραδοῦναι as a curse formula (see Adela Y. Collins, "The Function of 'Excommunication' in Paul," *Harvard Theological Review* 73 [1980]: 255-56). However, Paul's concern was for the congregation, not the perpetrator. Excommunication from the fellowship of the Corinthians and, *ipso facto*, from the sphere of God's protection makes more sense.

<sup>63</sup> See Vivian Nutton's discussion of *The Sacred Disease*, a work by a Hippocratic author (*Ancient Medicine* [London: Routledge, 2004], 112-13). She also cites Plutarch, *On Superstition* 7:168C; 12:171A-B. On Galen, see F. Kudlien, "Galen's Religious Belief," in *Galen: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Vivian Nutton (London: The Wellcome Institute, 1981), 117-30. To appreciate the role of religious discourse as part of the construction of the ethos of the ancient physician along with scientific discourse, see Tamsyn S. Barton, *Power and Knowledge: Astrology, Physiognomics, and Medicine under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 133-168.

<sup>64</sup> So much so that Ben Sirach found it necessary to urge his reader to honor the physician and not to despise the medicines created by the pharmacist (Sir 38:1-14).

The same can be said about Pauline practice, where it certainly would be difficult, if not impossible, to imagine him only prescribing either "secular" medicine or the charismatic prayer and laying on of hands for a sick Trophimus, for example. Nevertheless, the explicit report of Paul's direct charismatic involvement in an actual illness does not appear to be forthcoming. The significant implication from 1 Corinthians 5:5 and 11:32 is that Paul's etiology of illness can have a (non-demonic) spiritual dimension so predominant that it makes it amenable to be dealt with almost exclusively by spiritual means, whether by petitioning God as the ultimate source of well-being or pleading for the withdrawal of divine judgment upon proper repentance of the sinner.<sup>65</sup>

This leads us to the curious text in 1 Corinthians 12 where *χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων* (12:9, 29, 30) and *ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων* (12:10) are both enumerated among the gifts of the Spirit conferred upon members of the church. In the 12:28-30 listing, *ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων* and *χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων* are listed in reverse order, just behind the top three gifts of the apostle, prophet, and teacher, probably implying that these spiritual endowments are not confined to the apostles.<sup>66</sup> It is then a legitimate question to ask what might be the rationale behind the giving of such gifts? If, as we have seen both in the Gospel of Matthew and the Pauline epistles, that healing powers served a very specialized purpose both in Jesus' own ministry and in the economy of the early church where apostles were often seen as taking the lead in evangelistic and ecclesiastical endeavors, what kind of change prompted the spread of one of the most messianic and apostolic badge of identity to the laity of a congregation?

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<sup>65</sup> Demon possession being at the other pole of a wholly spiritual understanding of certain illnesses and diseases.

<sup>66</sup> Dauntion-Fear, *Healing in the Early Church*, 25.

In a little noted article Andrew E. Hill proposed an alternative to understanding the source of thought behind Paul's body imagery in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.<sup>67</sup> The fundamental idea is actually quite simple. Paul had lived in Corinth for eighteen months during his first visit there. In subsequent communications with the Corinthian Christians, it made sense that Paul would address a number of their problems using images and examples familiar to the Corinthians.<sup>68</sup> When it comes to the body illustration in 1 Corinthians 12, a number of parallels exist between what Paul was saying there and the practice of the Asclepius cult in Corinth.

Asclepius was a late 6th century B.C. physician from Epidauros famous for his balanced spirituality and empirical medicine, as well as his miraculous healing powers. In the process of deification he evolved from a mortal physician, to a cult hero, to the divine son of the god Apollo and human son of Coronis, and finally became the premier healing god of Athens and Rome. The Asclepian healing cult was widespread in the ancient Mediterranean world and was extremely popular in the city of Corinth.<sup>69</sup> The Temple of Asclepius (Asclepieion) was found adjacent to the northern wall of the city next to the Spring

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<sup>67</sup> Andrew E. Hill, "The Temple of Asclepius: An Alternative Source for Paul's Body Theology?" *JBL* 99 (1980): 437-39. The insight was followed up briefly by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1983), 165-66. See also G. G. Garner, "The Temple of Asklepius at Corinth and Paul's Teaching," *Buried History* 18/4 (1982): 52-58. On the various major proposals of the origin of Paul's "body" image in 1 Cor, see Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 475-76.

<sup>68</sup> Although none was unique to Corinth, Paul's use of a number of urban imageries and institutions common in larger cities certainly makes sense as he dealt with the various issues raised by the Corinthian church. Hill includes the image of the builder (ch. 3), prostitution and slavery (ch. 6), food from the agora, and temple worship (chs. 8), athletic imageries (ch. 9), to which we may also add idolatry and secular banquets held both privately and in temples (chs. 8-10), the sophist teacher (ch. 1), the civil court (ch. 6), etc.

<sup>69</sup> Its shrine was introduced into Athens around 420 B.C. By 300 B.C. Asclepius became one of the foreign gods given official status in Rome. By the 4th century A.D. the cult would have more than four hundred locations throughout the empire (Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius*, 2:71-2). The cult in Corinth began sometime in the early 5th century B.C. and survived into the 4th century of our era. Its following was reduced only after Roman adoption of Christianity.

Lerna, about 500 meters north of the city Forum and only 140 meters away from the Lachaeum Road, the main north-south thoroughfare connecting Corinth to the northern parts of Greece.<sup>70</sup>

For Hill and Murphy-O'Connor, the large number of terracotta models of life-size human anatomical parts unearthed at the Asclepieia at Corinth and elsewhere constituted a clear source of Paul's body imagery in ch. 12. These models were votive offerings to Asclepius, expressions of gratitude and thanksgiving for the treatment undergone and cure effected on the parts of the body represented. At the Corinthian Asclepieion, hands, legs, heads, female breasts and male genitals were found.<sup>71</sup> Ears and eyes were not found at Corinth, but excavated at the Athens Asclepieion. These parts are all mentioned in the body imagery from 12:12 to 12:25. Particularly striking is Paul's mentioning of the less honorable or presentable parts of the body (12:23-24), referring to the human genitalia, which are shown with a special modesty.<sup>72</sup> Murphy-O'Connor remarks that the disjointed terracotta limbs must also have made an impression on Paul as he reflected on the interconnectedness of the body of Christ.<sup>73</sup> We can go

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<sup>70</sup> Carl Roebuck, *Corinth: Results of Excavations, The Asklepieion and Lerna* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1951), summarized in Mabel Lang, *Cure and Cult in Ancient Corinth: A Guide to the Asklepieion* (American Excavations in Old Corinth: Corinth Notes No. 1. Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1977). See picture extract from Lang at back page of this paper.

<sup>71</sup> In Corinth, the count includes ten legs with thighs, nine feet to the knee, nine entire arms, three hands to the elbow, one upper arm, five feet with their original finished top, some twenty feet portions had some twenty hands, in addition to some sixty-five female breasts and thirty-five male genitals (Lang, *Cure and Cult*, 15). Complete heads of both male and female were also found, referring to headache cures and perhaps even hair loss cures. Besides clay replicas, cure inscriptions were also found on the walls of the shrines. See Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius*, T. 423, T. 428 and T. 439-42 for a sampling of such inscriptions (Edelstein and Edelstein numbered the inscriptional data and preceded them with "T." to stand for "testimony." See also Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 109-111.

<sup>72</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 596; Fee, *First Corinthians*, NICNT, 613-14.

<sup>73</sup> "Against this background Paul would have seen the dismembered limbs displayed in the Asclepion as symbols of everything that Christians should *not* be (italics his): 'dead,' divided, unloving and unloved" (O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 167).

further: It is also not incidental that suffering of the members of the body is mentioned (12:26). Human experience during illness, injury, or the affliction of disease is no doubt referred to.<sup>74</sup>

Hill also notes that the phrase "the body of Christ" was probably first used in 1 Corinthians.<sup>75</sup> Given the dissension and factionalism that was taking place within the congregation, the use of the organic image of parts different and yet connected and indispensable to the well-being of the entire body is highly *apropos*. The language Paul employed, like the quotation of a body part saying "I have no need of you" (12:21) to the other body parts reflects a scathing critique of more than just an expression of "self-sufficiency," but the Corinthian culture of elitist boasting so deeply entrenched in the Corinthian congregation itself.<sup>76</sup> Thus the Asclepieion provides a ready object lesson for the Corinthians. But more can be said.

Paul's exposition of the spiritual gifts was set within the context of warning against idolatry and the need to express proper gratitude

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<sup>74</sup> As also noted by Hill ("Temple," 438 n. 8) on the use of the verb *πάσχω*. The present tense is often used in referring to suffering due to illnesses and diseases treated at the Asclepieion. For the use of healing language in the Greek speaking world in general and the New Testament in particular, see Wells, *The Greek Language*.

<sup>75</sup> Later uses of the phrase occur in Ro 7:4; 12:4-5; Eph 1:22-23; 4:12, 16; 5:23; and Col 1:18, 24; 2:17, 19. However, the use of specific body parts (hands, legs, etc.) is unique to 1 Corinthians.

<sup>76</sup> The issue of Corinthian boasting is placed at the very beginning of the epistle (implicitly in 1:5-7, 10-13, and more explicitly in 1:18-31 into ch. 4 (4:7) and ch. 5 (5:6). For a penetrating study of Corinthian competitiveness and divisiveness, see Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*. Accordingly, Paul's body imagery is not used to illustrate the interdependence of gifts, but the interdependence and unity of gifted *individuals* in the congregation (note the change to the classes of people in 12:27 and the use of the personal pronoun *ὑμεῖς* in 12:27, *pace* Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, NIGTC, 998-1012, which focuses almost exclusively on gifts rather than people as a category). Attacking from another angle with remarkable insight and comparing Paul's Ephesian text with his 1 Corinthian text here, John McRae considers the entire section from ch. 12 to ch. 14 as expressing Paul's work to build a church of different people groups as the apostle to the Gentiles (John McRae, *Paul: His Life and Teaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003], 426-35. The Gentile issue forms the backdrop to Paul's use of the Asclepius connection.

to Christ (12:2-3).<sup>77</sup> This is exactly the context in which the clay body parts were found. They were votive offerings and testimonies of thanksgiving. On the other hand, suppliants were sometimes found to utter inappropriate statements about Asclepius, perhaps due to a non-cure, perhaps due to a skeptical attitude. These inevitably would lead to punishment from the god himself.<sup>78</sup>

There is another piece of information usually passed over by commentators when considering the background to the body imagery. In 12:13, Paul expresses the fundamental unity of the Corinthian Christians as founded upon the common experience of having been baptized by and drunk from the same the Spirit. Although baptism by the Spirit is a common New Testament theme, commentators are at a loss as to how to handle the meaning of "drinking from the Spirit."<sup>79</sup> The background of Asclepieion again could illumine Paul's meaning. The standard protocol for Asclepius suppliants was to purify themselves at a sacred spring at the shrine before offering a sacrifice. A second purification was required before entering the *abaton* or an *adyton*<sup>80</sup> to begin incubation<sup>81</sup> and receive oracles or healings from

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<sup>77</sup> Asclepius was regularly addresses as "Lord," "Father," or "Savior." A 3rd century mime discovered at the Asclepieion at Kos known as the fourth mime of Herodas begins with the suppliant Kynno's salutation hailing Asclepius as "Lord Paiëon (Gk. ἄναξ Παῖνον, literally "Lord Healer"), ruler of Triikka, who lives at sweet Kos and Epidauros" (cited in Wells, *Greek Language*, 67).

<sup>78</sup> Nutton, *Ancient Healing*, 284, mentions unjustified cursing as part of a group of direct offenses against the gods that can occasion misfortunes, although she does not cite texts. However, Edelstein & Edelstein does contain milder offenses against Asclepius which led to sanction by the god, who later healed the perpetrator upon repentance (*Asclepius*, T. 423, 11; 22; 36; also T. 797). The theme of divine punishment was just mentioned by Paul only verses ago (11: 29-30). Granting that ch. 12 continues to deal with the problem of unity in diversity (a state the Corinthians failed to achieve in ch. 11), 12:1-3 may be viewed as linking verses between two Corinthian phenomena involving similar dynamics.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 478-79.

<sup>80</sup> Literally, "the inaccessible," referring to a building barred to the normal visitor. Nutton, *Ancient Healing*, 109.

<sup>81</sup> I.e., seeking visions while sleeping in a temple. This was one of the key modes through which Asclepius healed or conveyed methods of healing.

Asclepius in dreams.<sup>82</sup> The emphasis on purification is coherent with the understanding of baptism by the early church, where baptism by water and baptism by the Spirit are conceived as a whole and both refer to purification of the believer in the sense of being acceptable to God.<sup>83</sup>

Even the syntactically difficult clause of 12:2, οἶδατε ὅτι ὅτε ἔθνη ἦτε πρὸς τὰ εἰδῶλα τὰ ἄφωνα ὡς ἄν ἤγεσθε ἀπαγόμενοι poses little problem once it is recognized that as pagan Gentiles, the Corinthians were both attracted (ὡς ἄν ἤγεσθε) to the healing cult, and occasionally were being led/carried away (ἦτε ἀπαγόμενοι) to the shrine because of their health conditions.<sup>84</sup>

It would certainly bear mentioning that the significance of the Asclepius cult for the Corinthian situation does not arise only in ch. 12. More importantly, the Asclepius shrine forms one of the contexts of the problem of pagan banqueting Paul tried to deal with in chs. 8-10.<sup>85</sup> In other words, as former pagan Gentiles the Corinthian Christians were still having great difficulty weaning themselves from their old pagan habits, and the Asclepius cult was central to the problem the Corinthians were facing.

Once the plausibility of an Asclepius background is accepted for ch. 12, it is not difficult to see that the terms *χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων* (12:9, 29, 30) and *ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων* (12:10) carry new significance in

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<sup>82</sup> For the nature and function of the Lerna Spring at the Corinthian Asclepieion, see John Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Reconsideration of 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1*, WUNT 2/151 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 54-58.

<sup>83</sup> See Peter's argument in Ac 15:8-9. For Paul, see Ro 6:1-12. Cf. Eze 36:25-27 and Joel 2:28 for OT background to Paul's teaching.

<sup>84</sup> And supplicants did travel far and wide to visit an Asclepius shrine, if inscriptional evidence is any indication. For a discussion of the syntax of the phrase, see Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 564-65.

<sup>85</sup> For recent works on this section, see Fotopoulos, *Food Offered to Idols*; Peter D. Gooch, *Dangerous Food: 1 Corinthians 8-10 in Its Context* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993); Joop Smit, *About the Idol Offerings: Rhetoric, Social Context, and Theology of Paul's Discourse in First Corinthians 8:1-11:1* (Sterling: Peeters, 2000).



the context of Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts for the Corinthians.<sup>86</sup> It has been noted earlier that the Asclepius cult was ubiquitous by this time in the Mediterranean world. Its ubiquity testified to its popularity, not only because Asclepius was an "easy-going" god who was satisfied even with the smallest of gifts in return for the benefit of healing, but also because health was considered by the Greeks, as well as the Romans, to be the greatest boon to man.<sup>87</sup> Judging from later Christian protestations against the healing god, it would appear that the primary reason for the uneasiness of the Christians regarding the cult was the fact that Jesus in the canonical Gospels came through clearly as a healer of illnesses. Such a view of Christ inevitably brought the devotees of both cults into conflict with each other, and among all the gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon, it was Asclepius who stood in the foreground of the debates between pagans and Christians in the first three centuries.<sup>88</sup> What we see here in 1 Cor 12 is the beginning of a centuries-long struggle between the two groups.<sup>89</sup> If idolatry was a hot issue for early Christianity, it would certainly make life a lot more reassuring if the church had her own charismatic healers. The fact that Paul nowhere else mentioned the gift of healing except here was most likely due to the Asclepius background of the city of Corinth.

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<sup>86</sup> However, commentators generally distinguish the two, limiting the former to a strictly healing gift. Fee suggests that the plural indicates that the gift is not permanent, but that each occurrence is a "gift" in its own right (*First Corinthians*, 594). The same goes for "works of miracles" that follows.

<sup>87</sup> Even the emperor Marcus Aurelius did not consider climbing the citadel of Pergamum to pray for his teacher's (Fronto) health at the Asclepius temple there an unbearable hardship (see Edelstein and Edelstein, *Asclepius*, T. 577).

<sup>88</sup> See Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict*. It was Adolf Harnack's early work, *Medicinisches aus der ältesten Kirchengeschichte* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1892) which set the debate in the perspective of a competition between two healing deities. See pp. 89-116 there.

<sup>89</sup> This kind of religious rivalries were common between religious groups in the ancient world, the only difference in this case being that Christianity was a late-comer, and thus more effort would have to be expended in expanding its influence and territories. See Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) for a creative thesis that take into account social and cultural data. For inter-religious rivalries, see Richard S. Ascough, ed., *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), particularly ch. 9 for our purpose.

Moreover, all spiritual gifts were given for the common good (πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον, 12:7), in the spirit of Jesus' mission instruction we examined earlier in this paper. The healings were freely performed.<sup>90</sup> A similar social dynamics took place here in Corinth as it did for Jesus and his disciples in Palestine two decades earlier. Given the elitist, competitive culture valuing extensive personal patron-client networks in Corinth, the practice of charismatic gifts inevitably had its counter-cultural significance.<sup>91</sup>

### **III. Concluding Thoughts**

We have come to the end of our investigation. In conclusion, we have seen from the evidence given in the Gospel of Matthew that although Jesus was widely seen as a healer in his time, his healing ministry should be narrowly construed. Jesus' healing ministry, like his teaching ministry, serves to disclose truths about himself. Empowering the disciples to do the same should not be seen as a mandate to popularize the healer-teacher model in the church. Rather, the purpose was similar to Jesus' own work of healing. Healing was not a stand-alone power, but always accompanied teaching and proclamation of the Good News.

In the early days of the church, the apostolic witness continued to produce miracles and works of power in the process of evangelization, both in the preaching of the Word and in the hearing of the Word. Apart from such activities, incidents of miraculous healings decrease dramatically. Paul's own writings reveal that treatment of illnesses

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<sup>90</sup> There is no indication that the exercising of the other gifts were ever remunerated. Certainly speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, prophesying, etc. were not paid activities in the Corinthian church.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. the Pauline practice not to receive financial support from the church he was currently ministering (1 Co 9:11-12; 2 Co 11:7-9; 1 Th 1:9-10; 2 Th 3:8; cf. Acts 20:33-35).

normally settles into a regular regime of a more rational kind, accompanied by actions with religious significance, but not necessarily carrying any curing potency. Nevertheless, gifts of healing existed in the church still, given by God to help Christians avoid idolatry and to allow exercise of charity among each other. It is not clear how often these gifts were exercised or how efficacious the ministry was. It does, however, seem reasonable to assume that apart from its link with evangelism and proclamation, the exercise of this gift was likely to be sporadic and unpredictable. Eventually the healing ministry became non-charismatic and institutionalized in the church (cf. Jas 5:13-16). Along with other works of charity, it is probably one of the reasons why the early church was able to attract a large number of adherents and expanded even as Greco-Roman religions declined (Stark's thesis?).<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> For a response to the theses put forth by Rodney Stark, see Leif E. Vaage, ed., *Religious Rivalries in the Early Roman Empire and the Rise of Christianity* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 197-278.

## ABSTRACT

A major departure of Pauline literature from the Gospel narratives and Acts is the lack of healing accounts, or accounts of healing miracles, aside from the mentioning of "gifts of healing" in 1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30. Paul's attitude to his own physical ailments and the ailments of his coworkers does not reveal much regarding the existence or exercise of a healing ministry. This makes the references to such a ministry within a short span of text all the more interesting. The paper will survey the culture of illness and healing the Greco-Roman world in general and in Roman Corinth in particular. We will argue that the mentioning of "gifts of healing" in 1 Corinthians is not incidental but rather directly related to and in competition with the culture and practice of the healing cult of Asklepius at Corinth. The immediate verbal contexts of idol worship (12:2), cursing of Jesus (12:3) and the use of the body-parts metaphor (12:12-27) all point toward a situation where it is likely that Paul perceived the work of the Spirit as restorative to both the community body of Corinthian believers as a whole and the physical bodies of individual believers, thus displacing and eliminating the need of believers to visit the Asklepeion for cures.

## 撮 要

和福音書及使徒行傳不同，保羅書信裏除了哥林多前書十二章9、28、30節幾處經文外，並沒有提過醫治或醫治神蹟。從保羅對他自己和同工的疾病的態度看，我們也發現不出任何明顯的神蹟醫治服事的存在。這令哥林多前書的經文更顯特別。本文會從希羅和羅馬哥林多的醫治文化看，指出哥林多前書所提的醫病恩賜並非偶然，乃是在哥林多的醫神宗教文化有關。在哥林多前書十二章裏所提到的偶像崇拜（十二2）、咒詛基督（十二3）、和肢體比喻（十二12-27），其實是保羅針對信徒生病時到醫神廟求醫的習慣，指出聖靈的工作，不光把哥林多信徒連成肢體，也能醫治個別信徒的身體。