

THE DEVIL, DISEASE AND DELIVERANCE:  
ORIGINS OF ILLNESS IN NEW TESTAMENT THOUGHT –  
AN APPRECIATION AND CRITIQUE<sup>1</sup>

Paul Elbert

John Christopher Thomas' monograph<sup>2</sup> is the thirteenth in the already distinguished series of supplement volumes under the imprimatur of the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*. It treats the origins of illness in NT thought and illuminates how affliction, suffering and healing appear to have been understood in the world of NT spirituality. In this task it is an important step forward, not only in an analysis of the NT documents, but also for our contemporary approach to prayer and management of suffering today.

While the NT perspective is certainly distinctive against the ancient near eastern, Graeco-Roman, and Jewish backgrounds,<sup>3</sup> with a crucified and risen Savior who now heals from heaven as sovereign Lord, it is at

---

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this article was presented at the Society for Pentecostal Studies meeting at Evangel University, Springfield, MO, in 1998, at the kind invitation of Blaine Charette, chairperson of the Biblical Studies Discussion Group. I am grateful for the helpful critical observations made there by Chris Thomas, Michael Dusing, and other participants.

<sup>2</sup> *The Devil, Disease and Deliverance: Origins of Illness in New Testament Thought*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 13 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), paper, 360 pp.

<sup>3</sup> The following help to illustrate these backgrounds for Thomas' book: E. D. Phillips, *Greek Medicine* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973); John Scarborough, *Roman Medicine* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976); John Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970); David L. Balch, Everett Ferguson and Wayne A. Meeks, eds., *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Festschrift for Abraham Malherbe* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); and John R. Levison, *The Spirit in First Century Judaism*, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 29 (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

the same time consistent in that all cultures which left a literary past always supposed or believed that illness and death were somehow bound up with the divine. Even “natural causes” of illness and death are no accident. When God decided to limit the human life span to about a hundred years at the time of the flood (Gen 6:3) and to decrease the life expectancy of the post-flood peoples, perhaps with the explosion of the Vela supernova and associated cosmic rays which cause cell death,<sup>4</sup> the Genesis writer appears comfortable with this sovereign decision truncating the spread of human wickedness. When a Mesopotamian sage dialogued with the gods re the bread of life and the water of life, obvious metaphors for either eternal life or healing which might be sovereignly provided, the question arose how mankind could be worthy of these gifts from the gods.<sup>5</sup> When the deeply inspired spiritual writer of Ps 119 notes that before affliction he went astray, but now he has kept the divine word, he also reveals that not all affliction was gone and deliverance was still needed (vv. 67, 153). In the Roman world of slavery, oppression, and primitive medical knowledge, with the attendant physical suffering and illness in society, doctors were capable of commanding very great respect,<sup>6</sup> so that the healing ministry of the historical Jesus in this context would appear even more spectacular than we could easily imagine today.<sup>7</sup> The expectation that Jesus, whose healings would have

---

<sup>4</sup> So too, Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis* (Colorado Springs; NavPress, 1998), pp. 119-22. The sovereign responsibility for the creation and design of hominids that preceded the formation of Adam from the chemically prepared dust of the ground also provides evidence regarding God’s intentions concerning illness and death, cf. Paul Elbert, “Biblical Creation and Science--A Review Article,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (1996), pp. 289-91, and Allan J. Day, “Adam, Anthropology and the Genesis Record – Taking Genesis Seriously in the Light of Contemporary Science,” *Science and Christian Belief* 10 (1998), pp. 115-43.

<sup>5</sup> J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 101-102.

<sup>6</sup> I have attempted to make this point in another context where I believe it could have had a bearing upon Luke’s credibility with Theophilus, aiding Luke’s pedagogical purpose to set before Theophilus an emblematic model of authentic pneumatology from the apostolic tradition, cf. “Spirit, Scripture and Theology through a Lukan Lens: A Review Article,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13 (1998), pp. 55-75.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald A. N. Kydd, *Healing through the Centuries: Models for Understanding* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), p. xvi, perceptively observes, “The church’s awareness of just how wide-ranging was the nature of Jesus’ healing ministry has

engendered enormous prestige and trust, continues to heal from heaven in answer to prayer was an expectation obviously carried on in the primitive church and was captured in the development of NT texts, like in Luke's choice of the Joel passage for the paradigmatic opening of his second scroll with its inclusion of prophecy, dreams, visions, signs and wonders (all of which can relate to the miraculous).

Pentecostals, as a movement, not concerned to protect the concretized sacramental, liturgical and ritualistic practices which did not stress expectancy beyond bare informational claims and which did not adequately or intentionally make room for experiential interactions with the divine, attempt to capture and attune to the ethos of genuine NT expectations regarding healing and deliverance from heaven with their emphasis on "inspiration rather than information."<sup>8</sup> But another NT expectation, that as the Savior entered into his glory through suffering (e.g., Luke 24:26) so too would suffering belong to his disciples,<sup>9</sup> was

---

been fleeting at best." In his opening chapter on "Jesus the Healer" (pp. 1-17), Kydd argues that the primitive church understood the healing ministry of the historical Jesus as something of great importance, intrinsic to who Jesus really was, and that "Jesus did not think that either the revolution or the healings would end when he withdrew physically from the planet" (p. 17).

<sup>8</sup> I am indebted to Lee Roy Martin at the Church of God Theological Seminary, my colleague in the post-graduate research seminar there, for introducing me to this pastoral and evangelistic concept. Historically, however, the notion of "inspiration rather than information" has also embraced a passion for the kind of information that attempts to correctly understand, defend and remain open to the activities of the Holy Spirit. Thomas' book is in this tradition, where the following, aside from well-known scholarly Pentecostal pioneers like French Arrington, Howard Ervin, R. Hollis Gause, Stanley Horton, and John Rea, particularly come to mind: J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988-92); John McKay, *The Way of the Spirit: A Bible Reading Guide and Commentary*, 4 vols. (Basingstoke, Hants.: Marshall Pickering, 1988-1993); *When the Veil is Taken away: Biblical Theology and the Spirit-Filled Life* (Horsham, W. Sussex: Kingdom Faith Ministries, 1994); Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* and *Surprised by the Voice of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993 and 1996); Francis A. Sullivan, *Charisms and Charismatic Renewal: A Biblical and Theological Study* (Ann Arbor/Dublin: Servant/Gill and Macmillan, 1982); Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, JPTSup 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994); and Gary S. Greig and Kevin N. Springer, eds., *The Kingdom and the Power* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> E.g., I recall C. S. Lewis' idea that pain is God's "megaphone to rouse a deaf world," *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 93. A sober

not explored with the same zeal by Pentecostal stewards of the mysteries. However, a little information is not necessarily a bad thing and hence it is a pleasure to welcome Thomas' practical insights on infirmity, affliction and death with respect to the three potential sources of illness he finds in the NT worldview: God, evil forces (the devil and/or demons) and natural causes.

Thomas begins with an exegesis of the James 5 material, finding that some illnesses can be the result of sin while others are not, suggesting that the later are "the consequence of living in a sinful world" (p. 37), which I would take to be the result of the Fall and of modern man (the first hominid species infused with the breath of God and the image of God) being driven from the Garden.<sup>10</sup> While sick believers are not to be presumed guilty of sin, sickness which accompanies sin implies God's direct activity (p. 37). But since no one is always free of sin, perhaps life

---

assessment could be expected by a student of Padre Pio's life, "It becomes therefore a grace, 'not only to believe in Christ, but to suffer for him' (Phil 1:29). The philosophical and moral problem, psychologically so difficult, of the suffering which can be found in everyone's life... has only one solution. This calms the spirit and makes it sublime even in enduring the heaviest Cross. Suffering is the precious element in the plan of divine Providence, in a design for salvation," Fernando of Riese Pio X, "The Mystery of the Cross in Padre Pio," *Acts of the First Congress on Padre Pio's Spirituality*, ed. G. Di Flumeri (San Giovanni Rotondo: Edizione Padre Pio of Pietrelciana, 1978), p. 96.

<sup>10</sup> Claus Westerman, *Genesis*, 3 vols., *Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament* 1/1-3 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974), I, p. 25. I take the recent historical Adam to be the spiritual father of humankind, *Homo sapiens*, who, like us, following expulsion from the Garden, lived in a world described by Rom 8:19-22. Spiritual death and its sequel, physical death, was caused by Adam's sin as a spiritual creature bearing God's image, thus initiating the "natural causes" which included illness. It is the curse of Genesis 3 that is paradigmatic of the "natural causes" Thomas refers to several times, paradigmatic of the nature and origin of sin in modern man and of its consequences, cf. Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, 1987), p. 91; Ross, *The Genesis Question*, pp. 69-100. The "natural causes" cited by Thomas as origins of illness are then best understood as the providential and sovereign actions of God working through physical quantum processes (via an undetectable Spirit-matter interaction which preserves God's invisibility, cf. backgrounds for this concept in Philip Clayton, *God and Contemporary Science*, *Edinburg Studies in Constructive Theology* [Edinburg: Edinburg University, 1997], pp. 192-231) and arising from these historical circumstances involving Adam. In this way God is both immanent and transcendent with respect to *all* events that transpire in the cosmos, cf. Donald MacKay, "The Sovereignty of God in the Natural World" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 21 (1968), pp. 13-26.

in a sinful world as an origin of illness should be amended to countenance the possibility that God is ultimately responsible for all illness and to acknowledge explicitly that it can be God's will for a believer to be ill, irrespective of the sinful nature of the old or fleshly man.<sup>11</sup>

The book ends with a section on "Implications for Pentecostal Theology" (pp. 310-19), and it is here, with respect to James 5, that Thomas makes a real contribution with some penetrating observations: "This investigation suggests that prayer, one might even say fervent prayer, is always the appropriate response to infirmity... based upon the admonition of James 5...further supported by Paul's apparent practice when faced with a thorn in the flesh and the examples of Jesus and others within the narratives of the Gospels and Acts...in the vast majority of cases the writers (and the readers with them) exhibit an extraordinary expectancy with regard to healing" (p. 312). This conclusion is important because it challenges directly the tendency within modern scholarship to emphasize the literary over the contextual perspective of NT writers when it comes to the supernatural, so that NT characters and their narrated interaction with God are not to be regarded as a paradigm for contemporary believers. Don Carson engages in literary reductionism when he argues, against Luke's obvious narrative-theological interests, that "The way Luke tells his story, Acts provides not a paradigm for individual Christian experience,"<sup>12</sup> a claim directly contradicted by Luke himself at one point (Acts 20:34-35);<sup>13</sup> but it is clear that within much Evangelicalism today there is the unarticulated presupposition that, aside from the supposed non-paradigmatic nature of Lukan characters (especially re their involvement with the Holy Spirit), even the historical

---

<sup>11</sup> John Christopher Thomas, "The Devil, Disease and Deliverance: James 5.14-16," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 2 (1993), pp. 25-50 (47), tentatively concluded that "James does not appear to consider the possibility that healing might not be attained." While this is a sober and fair reading, it should be noted also that James does not impose on God's sovereignty, nor is James' optimism unreal. Significantly, James' familiarity with and citation of Job earlier in v. 11 suggest that his optimism is tempered with a sure knowledge of God's sovereignty. This context *should not be overlooked* in our understanding of James' cultural and Christian setting.

<sup>12</sup> *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p. 150. A further assessment of this hermeneutical strategy is offered in note 13 below.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Andrew D. Clarke, "'Be Imitators of Me': Paul's Model of Leadership," *Tyndale Bulletin* 49 (1998), pp. 329-60.

Jesus is not paradigmatic with respect to the activity of the spiritual Lord Jesus, i.e., what the historical Jesus did in his healing ministry should not be expected in prayer for believers today. I believe this approach, with its hidden stimulus towards reinterpretation with respect to the miraculous, is at odds with the understanding of the primitive church and with expectations NT writers had for their readers.<sup>14</sup> Thomas' solid results make this ingrained speculation of a gap between the historical Jesus and the spiritual Jesus who pours forth the Holy Spirit in healing less likely, indeed they reduce it to disfavor, paving the way for new scholarship to

---

<sup>14</sup> Such literary minimalization of authors' legitimate expectations for readers in the presence of the spiritual Jesus and the Holy Spirit, reaches its apogee not just within scholarship dismissive of the supernatural, but equally within dispensationalism, cessationism, and within the Reformed tradition which inherited Luther's gerrymandering of NT emphases and Calvin's fanciful dichotomies of extraordinary/ordinary spiritual gifts, categories long overdue for retirement, as well as his puzzling and deliberate creation of the infamous extra-biblical epoch of miraculous cessation or suspension which he invoked, for example, at Acts 2:38, 39; for backgrounds and corrective suggestions to the defective hermeneutical practice that affects much of Evangelicalism in this regard, cf. Jon Ruthven, "Charismatic Theology and Biblical Emphases," *Evangelical Quarterly* 69 (1977), pp. 217-36, and Paul Elbert, "Calvin and the Spiritual Gifts," *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism, VIII: An Elaboration of the Theology of Calvin*, ed. Richard Gamble (New York: Garland, 1992), pp. 301-31. The Pentecostal tradition is not immune from these tendencies stemming from human weakness in the face of trying times and from the grip of tradition. It would do well to consider the following critique: "Where these rationalist patterns are operative in the realm of theology they can not help but be reductionist in their effects – taking a richer reality and filtering it through a theological grid that eliminates non-rational, non-logical elements, even at the same time protesting vigorously against those who utilize the same *Zeitgeist* in more blatantly unbelieving ways.... Evangelicalism is at one and the same time a wonderful proponent of essential biblical truths that safeguard the vitality of Christian preaching and mission and a thoughtworld that despite the best intentions undermines its supernatural power and its outward expression by its rationalistic spirit... The Evangelicalization of Pentecostalism, as it has been called, represents at one and the same time contradictory tendencies: on the one hand, the acceptance of fundamental biblical principles that are essential for authentic spiritual growth, and on the other hand, yet another attempt to curb and constrain the divine *largesse* into restricted theological categories," Peter Hocken, "A Charismatic View on the Distinctiveness of Pentecostalism," *Pentecostalism in Context: Essays in Honor of William W. Menzies*, eds. Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies, JPTSup 11 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 96-106 (105).

further challenge this corrosive and unevangelistic impulse from data in the texts themselves. Indeed, the essence and ultimate helpfulness of Thomas' work is that the NT characters are emblematic or paradigmatic with respect to their illnesses and healings or non-healings, so that, properly understood, the NT reality is apropos for application to Christians today.<sup>15</sup> The conclusion that "Healings and exorcisms are attributed to the power of God as it comes upon both Peter (Acts 5:12-16) and Paul (Acts 19:11-12) in ways reminiscent of the Lukan description of Jesus" (p. 294), insightfully balanced by thirteen other reasonable and judicious findings, may serve both to renew Lukan optimism that Jesus can stretch forth his hand from heaven to heal, and to revive an interest in prayerfully seeking related discernment (including the discernment that it is not God's will to heal).<sup>16</sup>

Another penetrating and provocative observation re James 5 is the lost concept of mutual confession: "The fact that there is no place for such confession in many contemporary churches within Pentecostal and charismatic circles is more an indication of the church's superficiality and fragmentation than it is a sign of the early church's naivete or lack of sophistication. Part of the problem with appropriating such a practice today is that in many parts of the world churches (within the Pentecostal/charismatic tradition) are no longer communities, but rather collections of individuals.... Confession on the NT order where community does not exist would, no doubt, be foolhardy. Therefore, the challenge which faces those in the tradition is not to give up forever on this vital dimension of community life, but rather to work for the construction of communities where believers are loved and nurtured in a familial fashion" (p. 316). While the concept of confessing to a priest may have stemmed from this text, or with early attempts to obey it, and while some benefits from that practice can not be discounted, the injunction in James, upon which healing and no doubt other aspects of spirituality--personal and communal--can depend, is virtually non-existent today. How to attempt to recapture it? Coming from an area in

---

<sup>15</sup> With respect to "The Role of Prayer," Thomas, *Devil, Disease and Deliverance*, concludes: "While it is clear that not all are healed in all cases cited in the NT literature, it is difficult to ignore the impression that emerges from reading the texts themselves that in the vast majority of cases the writers (and readers with them) exhibit an extraordinary expectancy with regard to healing" (p. 312, parenthesis his).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Thomas' "The Role of Discernment," *Devil, Disease and Deliverance*, pp. 313-16.

which Thomas is not unknown to have an interest is the suggestion of footwashing, practiced with an emphasis on forgiveness, humility and community involvement (p. 316). I agree that in this practice an atmosphere develops where significant advances in openness and interpersonal confession could occur. An atmosphere of praise and expectancy, perhaps during a common meal where experience<sup>17</sup> of the Holy Spirit is felt commonly, is also a possibility. An atmosphere where one could say, "It is the decision of the Holy Spirit, and ours too" (Acts 15:28),<sup>18</sup> which is an atmosphere which Thomas has already suggested may serve as a hermeneutical paradigm<sup>19</sup> is also a pastoral possibility wherein the injunction of James might be obeyed under the real common perception that the Holy Spirit was present and operational.<sup>20</sup> Although

---

<sup>17</sup> Luke T. Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), pp. 144, 145, is close to this idea; in particular, cf. also Richard Bicknell, "The Ordinances: The Marginalised Aspects of Pentecostalism," *Pentecostal Perspectives*, ed. Keith Warrington (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1998), pp. 218-21, who urges more focus on corporate versus individual significance so as not to marginalize the Lord's Supper, and the pastorally sensitive study of Galen Hertweck, "The Church as Community: Small Groups in the Local Church," in *Faces of Renewal: Studies in Honor of Stanley M. Horton*, ed. Paul Elbert (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988), pp. 249-63. A corporate acceptance and trust in the faithful commitment of fellow believers is obviously needed, a rare form of fellowship with which James must have been familiar.

<sup>18</sup> I agree with this more faithful translation offered by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p. 566, because it is a definite grammatical improvement over the KJV, "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us," and the NAS, "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." A translation is needed that brings out the community involvement with the Holy Spirit in a tangible and concrete way and does justice to Luke's choice of words in their context.

<sup>19</sup> Suggested in John Christopher Thomas, "Women, Pentecostals and the Bible: An Experiment in Pentecostal Hermeneutics," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994), pp. 49-53.

<sup>20</sup> A. W. Tozer, "The Forgotten One," in *The Divine Conquest* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1950), pp. 64-75, bemoans the absence of the Holy Spirit. However, see the wonderful historical descriptions of his presence in Steve Summers, "'Out of My Mind for God': A Social-Scientific Approach to Pneumatology," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13 (1998), pp. 77-106 (85, 86), a presence in the form of a "dew from heaven," which has occasionally been manifested at my home church (but we do not have mutual confession with respect to healing there). For good pastoral guidelines regarding confession in James 5, cf. John Rea, *The Holy Spirit in the Bible* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation



we cannot create the threat of outside persecution which probably assisted unity and trusting relationships among those in the first century, this aspect of mutual confession is a very neglected NT theme which pastors should take an experimental interest in.

With regard to John and the man born blind in chapter nine, Thomas observes that “It is difficult not to take this verse (9:3) to mean exactly what it says. This man was born blind in order that the works of God might be done in him” (p. 117). While the connection between sin and illness exists elsewhere (John 5:14), the responsibility for blindness here lies with the sovereignty of God.<sup>21</sup>

With regard to Peter, 1 Pet 2:24 is lumped with Paul’s healing gifts (p. 23) to imply that the “Petrine community” experienced healings. But note that 1 Pet 5:8, 9, 10 suggests that the devil is the origin of sufferings, which could include afflictions and illness. If so, 1 Pet 2:24 might carry more weight as reminding readers of their healings from this source of illness--and is not just making the spiritual point in its context that is obvious.

With regard to Paul, I would like to make three points. First, his experiential detection and ultimate categorization of *charismata* into “gifts of healings” (pp. 39-43) within a spiritual framework of sovereignty<sup>22</sup> suggests that he understood God to be the origin of healing if such a gift was transmitted from one believer to another; and also he understood that if the gift was not actuated, then the responsibility for, if not the origin of, the illness lies with God. This observation is compatible with Thomas’ that “Paul is not hesitant to assign the origin of certain illnesses to God” (p. 89).<sup>23</sup> Second, regarding 1 Cor 11:27-30, Marshall observes that Paul “believed that divine judgement could overtake those

---

House, 1990), pp. 316-19, but Rea overlooks the contextual Job material (cf. note 11 above).

<sup>21</sup> Particularly helpful for students, Thomas, himself a Johannine specialist, offers a compendium of thirteen conclusions wherein all the various details appropriate to this topic in the Johannine corpus, including the notoriously misused 3 John 2, can be conveniently perused, *Devil, Disease and Deliverance*, pp. 128, 129.

<sup>22</sup> Williams, *Renewal Theology*, II, pp. 367-75, as well as Sullivan, *Charisms*, pp. 151-68, are pastorally valuable on the “gifts of healings.”

<sup>23</sup> Similarly, “Paul has no qualms about attributing illness and death to God.... The purpose of such affliction is pedagogical/disciplinary,” *Devil, Disease and Deliverance*, p. 54; and “Providential intervention in the form of illness sometimes occurs in order that the gospel might be proclaimed,” p. 89, and so such illness can therefore be a normal part of Christian experience.

who participated unworthily in the sacraments; it is not a view that is generally shared in most western Christendom which holds that, whatever may have happened in the first century, this kind of connection cannot be drawn today.”<sup>24</sup> While Thomas rightly concludes that if the Corinthians examined themselves, they “would avoid such divine afflictions in the future” (p. 54), he notes that “Marshall moves from Paul’s world-view to that of his own, and such an interpretive move is quite a proper one to make” (p. 53), whereas in fact Marshall is moving from his contemporary context to that of Paul’s, reducing Paul’s revelation to the level of his own experience. Happily, Thomas makes no exegetical use whatever of Marshall’s apparent restriction of Paul’s awesome revelation to believers at Corinth, a restriction motivated by the claim that afflictions in Marshall’s experience cannot be detected as stemming from unworthy participation in the Lord’s Supper. The stimulus to reinterpret based upon contemporary experience or non-experience with respect to the miraculous often leads to disagreement with collateral evidence, which here is the sovereignty exhibited by God in the distribution of the *charismata* and, in the inverse gift, the visitation of an affliction as in Paul’s thorn.

Thirdly, and this is my only caveat, perhaps a less repetitive question (raised four times, pp. 84, 88, 89, 90) as to whether Paul’s Pastoral Epistles are possibly unreliable and untrustworthy would have been appropriate. Granted, Thomas may want to minister to those who do not trust or use the Pastorals in their own ministry because they reside in a tradition which has accepted the claims of unreliability of these important NT documents,<sup>25</sup> a tradition that is now, for the most part, uncritically protecting that established position rather than taking the necessary scientific steps to explore its validity. However, the impression that might be conveyed here is that this lack of trust in the Pastorals is an

---

<sup>24</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980), p. 115.

<sup>25</sup> In this tradition Second Thessalonians, Second Peter, Ephesians, and Philippians are also challenged or dismissed, based on a quite similar set of presuppositions, not all of which are literary. Historically, the end result of the denial of authenticity and trustworthiness of the Pastorals by scholars in this tradition has been that pastors, trained by these scholars, lose confidence in the veracity and ministerial importance of documents which become perceived implicitly deceptive and unreliable. This waning interest should not be unexpected, given that these letters, if they exist in the NT (and I believe they do not), were written to deceive their readers, cf. Terry L. Wilder, “New Testament Pseudonymity and Deception,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 50 (1999), pp.156-58 (158).

assured result of NT scholarship based upon reliable detailed studies, which would be a quite unwarranted impression. In fact, this sector of NT scholarship has yet to carry out scientifically designed comparative investigations to see if various speculative claims of supposed seams, patchworks of separate traditions or schools,<sup>26</sup> theological conflicts, inconsistencies, compilations, or supposedly anomalous frequencies of different words and concepts, e.g., do indeed even suggest, much less prove, that *one* writer in different circumstances, with a different topical agenda in hand, could not be found via a controlled and defined contrast with a known set of attributable writings to be the *same* writer of a test document with all the postulated literary “differences.”<sup>27</sup> With respect to

---

<sup>26</sup> The supposed discrimination between written or oral tradition and an author’s own thinking is of course highly speculative, but without critical examination of constraints or strict controls in method, almost any Pauline document could be found, via procedures difficult for other academic disciplines to understand or appreciate, to be a multi-authored composite document of a supposed “Deutero-Pauline” school. Such an assured result, generated within the tradition, was then ideologically embraced by the tradition because it “confirmed” that the information in the letter was for the most part a creative composition of the second century with tenuous roots to the historical Paul, consistent with dogmatic adherence to non-supernatural causation of textual events, and with the gratuitous assumption of delays in writing, allowing time for supposed layers of tradition to evolve.

<sup>27</sup> Such a straightforward scientific methodology to establish the validity or weigh the probability of speculative literary and syntactic claims could be done in a series of well-supervised Ph.D. theses with respect to classical or NT contemporary authors using controlled variables. If the NT scholarly community which pursues the question of authenticity for the Pastorals had based its literary and syntactical speculations solely on data in these texts alone, one would have to assume that the comparative methodology I suggest would have been demanded and carried out years ago. A technically detailed comparative program would have to be pursued. However, these speculations, at least in their origins, were certainly not based on literary variables in the texts alone, but also upon an entire set of other unexamined presuppositions as well. These hidden persuaders in turn go back to anti-supernaturalism and professional denial of revelatory/inspirational input with the wrongheaded and influential unscientific Bultmannian dictum that the natural world is immune from the interference of God, which led, in turn, to questions of motive and integrity of NT writers with their Graeco-Roman context; for helpful encapsulation of the current muddle due to numerous questionable rationalistic methodologies and unverified assertions over the years which have been associated with this tradition within some NT scholarship, seeking “solutions” based on a shifting set of untried and untested assumptions, cf. James D. Miller, *The Pastoral Letters as Composite Documents*,

the Pastorals, aside from the fact that the cases of Trophimus<sup>28</sup> and Epaphroditus bolster Thomas' position re sovereignty and natural causes of illness, there is far too much valuable wisdom and spiritual insight in the Pastorals, all quite consistent and harmonious with the thoughts of the historical Paul, in addition to the quite non-trivial idea of inspiration, trustworthiness and reliability of Scripture, for these texts to be routinely questioned as non-Pauline and untrustworthy *without some explanation*<sup>29</sup> of why and how a tradition (certainly not all NT scholars)<sup>30</sup> has developed with this view. Thomas is not, of course, rejecting the Pastorals; my difference with him is that in consistently questioning their authenticity for an audience within the Pentecostal and Charismatic tradition, some background and critical evaluation of how this position came about ideologically might have been appropriate. But, of course,

---

Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 93 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>28</sup> The pastoral thoughts of Donald Gee, *Trophimus I Left Sick: Our Problems of Divine Healing* (London: Elim Publishing, 1952) are harmonious with Thomas' scholarship. Gee's concerns foreshadowed the outbreak of cultish and heretical healing practices, cf. Thomas Smail, Andrew Walker and Nigel Wright, "'Revelation Knowledge' and Knowledge of Revelation: The Faith Movement and the Question of Heresy," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994), pp. 57-77.

<sup>29</sup> An explanation is germane because many thoughtful readers of Thomas' book will believe that the Holy Spirit has borne witness to them that the Scriptures are reliable, trustworthy and inspired, e.g., George Martin, ed., *Scripture and the Charismatic Renewal* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1979), and Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, pp. 74, 126. They have not come to this belief via unthoughtful adherence to dogmatic propositions, and they are also well aware of the internal testimony of Scripture itself as to its authenticity. These important intellectual and experiential factors need not be overlooked or unmentioned in deference to a sector of NT scholarship which certainly has its own set of literary conclusions which are certainly questionable.

<sup>30</sup> E.g., against the tradition (and consistent with historic tradition which holds authentic Pauline authorship), cf. Donald Hagner, "Titus as a Pauline Letter," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers 1988*, 2 vols. (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998), II, pp. 546-58; Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), pp. 381-407; *First and Second Timothy*, Anchor Bible 35A (New York: Doubleday, forthcoming); Colin Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, ed. Conrad Gempf, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 49 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1989), pp. 394-403; and Bo Reicke, "Les pastorals dans le ministere de Paul," *Hokhma* 19 (1982), pp. 47-61.

such a digression could have deflected him from the main agenda. In any event, it seems circumspect to attempt to provide such a contextual critique here, trusting that it may be helpful.

Now, in conclusion, just a few points on our old friend and nugget of disagreement, Matt 8:17. Thomas sees Matthew's decision to use the Hebrew text rather than the LXX and his choice of narrative context for the quote to indicate that Matthew takes it as "an anticipation of the passion, which is the basis of all that Jesus accomplishes. That Matthew considers such activity to be a part of Jesus' atoning work seems to be the best reading.... Matthew considers Jesus' exorcism and healing ministry to be tied to his (future) vicarious death."<sup>31</sup> Thomas cites David Petts' somewhat differing views<sup>32</sup> which were an attempt to correct a misunderstanding of Matthew to the effect that Jesus' death implied that only faith was required of a believer to be well, since healing was already guaranteed, thus negating God's sovereignty. More work needs to be done in order to appreciate the work of the Holy Spirit as Matthew understood it. Even though there is no ascension in Matthew, we are safe in assuming Matthew had an interest in the ministry of the spiritual Jesus. Surely Matthew drives no wedge and implies no disconnection between the historical Jesus and the ministry of the spiritual Jesus through the Holy Spirit, so it is indeed possible that Matthew envisions the continuation of the ministry of the historical Jesus by the spiritual Jesus who now has all power and authority. Since there are a number of clues to this effect, we must go on now to argue the case for a more comprehensive Matthean understanding of his fulfillment quote within a context of Matthew's experience with the post-resurrection Jesus via healings and revelations flowing from his continuing spiritual presence. I agree with Thomas about the potential significance of the quote with respect to contemporary believers that Matthew himself might have been aware of, not just with respect to those literary characters who interacted with the historical Jesus in his text. Going beyond the literary and historical implication<sup>33</sup> towards a possible contemporary significance for Matthew is the current task.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Thomas, *Devil, Disease and Deliverance*, pp. 173, 174.

<sup>32</sup> David Petts, "Healing and the Atonement," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 12 (1993), pp. 23-37.

<sup>33</sup> While noting that Matthew translates independently and distinctively (but overlooking deliberate editorial intent to include contemporary healings), Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 150, is typical of commentators in noting

It has been personally refreshing (given the ecclesiastical and theological fog that has settled around some of these matters) to say a few words on behalf of my colleague's timely monograph; a work I heartily commend for its industrious, straight-shooting and unembellished format. It is indeed a welcome invitation to further research, prayer, critical reflection and discernment. It strengthens the sober and eminently reasonable case for the origins of illness in this present world being either God, the devil or natural causes with the overall responsibility resting with a sovereign and caring creator who can use illness for redemptive, pedagogical, disciplinary, or mysterious purposes. And it also strengthens the case for a distinctive NT spirituality re illness and healing involving the spiritual Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit poured forth by him that is consistent with the uniqueness of Christian origins. The distinctive NT themes of expectant prayer<sup>35</sup> to the

---

that there is no implication that Jesus' vicariously became sick: "Matthew's stopping short with the thought of removal (of sicknesses), and carefully avoiding the connotation of carrying (of sicknesses), point to his recognition that Jesus vicarious physical suffering and death were yet to come... The healings anticipate the passion in that they begin to roll back the effects of sins for which Jesus came to die." Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1993), p. 211, is typical of commentators who quite rightly stress the end points, but, due to the undeveloped state of Matthean pneumatology, make no contextual effort to explore the inbetweens: "During his ministry, the healings performed by Jesus were the fulfillment of prophecy; but Isa 53:4 guarantees no one healing in the present age. What is guaranteed is that Christ's atoning death will in the eschaton provide healing for all without exception. The healings through the ministry of Jesus and those experienced in our day are the first-fruits, the down payment, of the final experience of deliverance." However, Matthew's adaptation and rendering of the 8:17 quote in its overall context may imply a familiarity with and an expectation of the spiritual Jesus sovereignly carrying on his healing ministry from heaven, a ministry Matthew envisions as relating back to the healing ministry of the historical Jesus he writes about, but it is not possible to develop this idea here.

<sup>34</sup> In this vein, thoughts like Matt 1:23; 16:19; 18:20; 28:20 are obviously relevant, cf. Elbert, "Spirit, Scripture and Theology," pp. 65, 66 nos. 27-29; Blaine Charette, "'Never Has Anything Like This Been Seen in Israel': The Spirit as an Eschatological Sign in Matthew's Gospel," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 8 (1996), pp. 31-51; and David D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel*, SNTMS 90 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 175.

<sup>35</sup> The NT documents are indeed quite distinctive in descriptive language created from Christocentric experience (while working, for example, within categories like conversion, prophecy and healing) against *both* the contemporary Graeco-

---

Roman and Jewish religious backgrounds with regard to the activities of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual Jesus. While the language used to describe various phenomena undoubtedly owed something to the Graeco-Roman and Jewish traditions, it has been completely rethought in light of the resurrection, ascension, and subsequent experience with the Holy Spirit. The activities of this spiritual being were undoubtedly detected, recognized, and subsequently described by Christian thinkers as constituting the great new experiential dimension of the new age. I am unconvinced that an assortment of diverse literary -- literary as contrasted with personal, experiential participation on the part of the writer -- activities attributed to God's Spirit via narrative allusions by speculative Jewish writers formed a conceptual link to a pervasive cultural notion of "Spirit of prophecy." While a range of speculative descriptions of divine activities can of course be found sparsely scattered about in a variety of Jewish texts which comment on the OT, I seriously doubt (as argued with respect to Luke by Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988], pp. 1-56) that this supposed collective notion then somehow served as literary inspiration so as to motivate *either* the description of distinctive experiential understandings of salvation/repentance/forgiveness used by Christians *or* the descriptions of distinctive Christian understandings of prophetic-type phenomena associated with the Holy Spirit and the spiritual Jesus. While neither Luke nor the Lukan Paul refer to this supposedly influential notion, but rather to "receiving the promise of the Father" or "the promise of the Holy Spirit," "receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit," and "receiving the Holy Spirit," it is hardly surprising that this theoretical Jewish composite dubbed the "Spirit of prophecy" might be argued to be consistent with a contemporary notion of "conversion-initiation," or with Lukan conversion, because, in fact, it could be argued, if this notion ever existed in coherent form, to be literarily compatible (in one of its literary manifestations) with almost any reinterpretive description or Christocentric concept. Plugging in Jewish "backgrounds" at arbitrary points to change the meaning of carefully chosen descriptions by Christian writers could be easily accomplished. However, expectant *Christian* prayer for healing from illness (which Thomas endorses) or *for anything else* from the spiritual Jesus (cf. Acts 2:33; 16:7), where the Holy Spirit and the ascended Jesus work in concert, seems very different indeed from, and is *not built upon*, Jewish imagination and speculation regarding *pneuma* in Philo, Josephus and intertestamental texts. Likewise, descriptions arising from Paul's personal experientially-based knowledge, "receiving the Spirit of God" so as to discern "things which the Holy Spirit teaches" or the desire to impart (and by implication to receive) "some spiritual gift," show no obvious phenomenological indebtedness to Jewish literary speculation about possible activities of *pneuma*. While it is possible to put together a collection of Jewish texts suggesting what the Spirit of God might or did do and easily portray a facade of mere literary consistency in vocabulary (*taking no account of differences in conception, operation, or function of the terms*) with some of Paul's ideas, this is indeed insufficient to reconstruct an evolution from a Jewish notion of "Spirit of prophecy" to the distinctive Holy Spirit in Pauline

ascended spiritual Jesus for healing together with the availability of *charismata* to be prayerfully sought and shared in the power of the Holy Spirit are carefully counterbalanced with the central thesis of Thomas' book. Hopefully, every theological student preparing for pastoral responsibilities in any area of ministry will be given the opportunity to prepare an interactive assignment from its richly detailed pages.

---

pneumatology. Citing some similar vocabulary is a far cry from demonstrating "theological development" from a diffuse and varietal literary notion to the Holy Spirit as experienced, practiced, and understood by Paul. Pauline and Lukan pneumatology, which allow for differences, for compatibility, and for development, are not "Spirit of prophecy" clones. Neither is the Holy Spirit a clonal derivative. Pauline and Lukan pneumatology are intentional creations, not nebulous condensations. Thomas, in my view, is to be commended for his sobriety in not following Turner's unsubstantiated and utterly indecisive claim (*Spiritual Gifts*, p.135) that the Holy Spirit in Paul "is still recognisable as a theologically developed version of the 'Spirit of prophecy'." What will lead to further debate is when some component of the "Spirit of prophecy" notion will be used reinterpretedly to justify an ecclesiastically pleasing modification of what Paul writes about how *he* thinks the Holy Spirit's activities are to be described and understood, which is how I believe Turner, perhaps inadvertently, has already employed the "Spirit of prophecy" concoction with respect to Luke.