

Healing and Preaching

The eschatological and legitimizing perspectives on healing constitute
a unity that has important implications for the Church

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Abstract

According to the Pentecostal tradition, miraculous or extraordinary healings confirm the Word being preached. There is, however, an on-going theological debate concerning how this understanding should be viewed in light of modern medical science. This article argues that a discussion of this issue should begin with an analysis of what the biblical texts say about healing. Its purpose is to contribute to laying a biblical groundwork for a further systematic theological discussion of the subject. This article explores the view of healing in relation to preaching in the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. Using Helge Kjær Nielsen's doctoral dissertation as a dialogue partner, this article distinguishes between an eschatological and a legitimizing understanding of healing. It argues that both perspectives are prevalent in Luke and Acts. The eschatological understanding sees healing as a manifestation of the kingdom of God, and the legitimizing understanding views healing as a confirmation of the message being preached. This article maintains that these two perspectives belong together in an essential unity and that both are needed for a biblical view of healing. The last part of this article briefly reflects on the implications this observation has for the healing ministry of the church today in terms of the eschatological as well as the legitimizing aspects. Both aspects require further research.

Keywords: Church, Pentecostal, healing, miracle, preaching, faith, kingdom of God, eschatological perspective, legitimizing perspective, medical science, systematic theology

Introduction

Healing by prayer plays a vital role in the global stream of *Pentecostalism*.¹ In the Pentecostal tradition, healings—especially those that can be considered miraculous or extraordinary—are considered to confirm the truth of the Word being preached. *Power evangelism* is an expression used to describe this kind of missionary approach.²

¹ Vernon L. Purdy, "Chapter Fifteen: Divine Healing", in Stanley M. Horton (ed.), *Systematic Theology: Revised Edition*, 1995; MacNutt Francis, *Healing: Revised and expanded*, 1999; Kevin Springer and John Wimber, *Power Evangelism*, 1992; Allan H. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Second Edition* 2014. *Pentecostalism* is here used in a broad sense, including the classical Pentecostal movement, the charismatic movement and independent charismatic churches.

² Springer and Wimber, *Power Evangelism*.

However, there is an on-going theological debate regarding how we, with the medical knowledge of our time, can truly consider healings as confirming the preaching of the Christian message.³ For me, as a Pentecostal minister who believes in the significance of healings, signs and wonders, this is an issue of great concern. I argue that it cannot, however, be explored without discussing the broader understanding of the healing ministry of the church. According to Pentecostal theology, healing is a part of Christ's salvific work and thus a manifestation of the kingdom of God. In addition, by the empowering of the Holy Spirit, the healing work of Christ is carried on by the church.⁴

Thus, healing is a broad subject in need of broad discourse. Therefore, I find it fruitful to approach it from the angle of systematic theology. However, a discussion of a systematic theological question should begin with an analysis of what the biblical texts say about the topic because the reflections and the conclusions of systematic theology should be biblically founded. Therefore, detailed exegesis as well as biblical theology, in terms of pulling the threads of exegesis together, are necessary parts of systematic theology, I argue. This is my approach and main focus in the present article. Through exegesis and an analytical discussion of texts in New Testament scriptures, I will endeavour to determine the understanding of healing in these scriptures. Thus, the purpose of this article is to contribute to laying a biblical groundwork for a further systematic theological discussion of the subject.

In the present article, I will narrow down the research to the question of the relationship between healing and preaching. In a doctoral thesis, *Heilung und Verkündigung* (Healing and Preaching), Helge Kjær Nielsen distinguishes between two understandings of this relationship. The first perspective is an eschatological perspective, which sees both healing and preaching as manifestations of the eschatological reality of the kingdom of God. The second perspective understands healing as confirming or legitimizing the preaching.⁵

Nielsen's dissertation provides, in my opinion, a good basis for further analysis of the relationship between healing and preaching. Therefore, I find it fruitful to enter into a dialogue with his study. His distinction between these two perspectives seems very clarifying to me, and I will therefore use it as a theoretical conceptual framework and thus as an instrument of analysis for my discussion in this article. This does not mean, however, that I agree with all of his conclusions. On some points, I agree with him, while on other points, I do not.

In his dissertation, Nielsen analyses texts on healing and preaching in different New Testament scriptures, aiming to reach an understanding of their theologies on healing and preaching. In the Gospel of Luke, Nielsen finds an eschatological and legitimizing perspective. In Acts, however, he maintains that the legitimizing aspect dominates to such an extent

³ See, for example, Wolfhart Pannenberg. "The Concept of Miracle." *Zygon*, Vol. 37. No. 3 (September 2002), p. 759-762; Amos Yong, "How Does God Do What God Does? Pentecostal-Charismatic Perspectives on Divine Action in Dialogue with Modern Science", in James K.A. Smith and Amos Yong (eds.), *Science and the Spirit: A Pentecostal Engagement with the Sciences*, 2010; Alvin Plantinga, "Divine Action", Biola University, published 16.02.2012; Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, 2011; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An exegetical Commentary, Volume 1*, 2012, pp. 350-380; Candy Gunther Brown, *Testing Prayer: Science and Healing*, 2012.

⁴ Purdy, «Divine Healing»; MacNutt, *Healing*; Springer and Wimber, *Power Evangelism*.

⁵ Helge Kjær Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung: Das Verständnis der Heilung und ihres Verhältnisses zur Verkündigung bei Jesus und der ältesten Kirche [Healing and Preaching: The Understanding of Healing and its Relationship to the Preaching of Jesus and the First Church]*, 1987.

that an eschatological aspect is hardly traceable.⁶ Moreover, he argues, the legitimizing perspective can be found *only* in Luke's Gospel and Acts.⁷ Nielsen looks upon the emphasis in Acts as the beginning of a negative development in which the legitimizing perspective is underscored at the expense of the eschatological perspective. He does not consider a legitimizing perspective as something negative in itself, but he looks upon what he claims to be a one-sided focus on it as a deviation from the original view of Jesus, which he holds was only eschatological.⁸

I agree with Nielsen that both the eschatological and legitimizing perspectives are found in the Gospel of Luke. He is also very correct in stating that the legitimizing perspective is very strongly emphasized in Acts. However, contrary to Nielsen, I maintain that the eschatological perspective certainly is present in Acts as well. In my view, both perspectives flow together in an essential unity in the Gospel of Luke, as well as in Acts. Furthermore, Nielsen's understanding seems to imply that the eschatological and legitimizing perspectives are expressed in different texts, not the same ones. I will argue, however, that an eschatological as well as a legitimizing perspective can often be found in the *very same* texts or sayings, as two aspects of the same reality—as two sides of “the same coin”.⁹ Additionally, I will argue that this contention implies another one: The legitimizing perspective is much more prevalent in the New Testament texts than Nielsen seems to maintain.

Because of the scope of the article, only a selection of texts can be considered. I have chosen to focus primarily on texts in the two works of Luke—his Gospel and the book of Acts—for the following reasons:

First, this is where Nielsen finds a legitimizing perspective, in addition to the eschatological perspective, and where I therefore can enter a dialogue with his views in the most fruitful manner.

Second, in Acts, we find a description of the ministry of the disciples, which in several respects are parallel to our situation today. The followers of Jesus are involved in missionary work, fulfilling the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8) after the day of Pentecost, in the era of the Spirit, as the church of today is. However, Acts must be read in the light of part one of Luke's twofold work, his Gospel. These two works belong together and should be read as a literary unity.¹⁰

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

⁷ According to Nielsen, healings are understood as signs in the Gospel of John. However, he finds it doubtful that the author of this Gospel expected the disciples to carry on the healing ministry of Jesus (*ibid.*, pp. 165-166). Here, I disagree with Nielsen and will refer to John 14:12, 17:18 and 20:21.

⁸ Nielsen distinguishes between Jesus's view of healing and the view of the authors of the four Gospels and other New Testament writers (*ibid.* 108-110). I do not, however, agree with the idea of searching for the historical Jesus in such a manner. Nielsen maintains that the legitimizing view was dominant among the church fathers as well, with Irenaeus to some extent being an exemption (*ibid.*, pp. 250-252). According to Nielsen, Jesus's eschatological understanding of healing has also largely been absent during the history of the church until now (*ibid.*, pp. 253-267). I will comment briefly on his views on church history in the chapter “Implications for the Church”.

⁹ I indicate that this seems to be true not only for the Lukan writings but also for other parts of the New Testament, as I will give some examples of from parallel texts.

¹⁰ Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke: Trajectories from the Old Testament to Luke-Acts*, 2012.

Third, the Lukan writings are of special significance for Pentecostal theology. This is particularly true for Acts, which is a key book in the development of Pentecostal theology.¹¹ As Roger Stronstad points out, Luke is not only a historian but also a theologian in his own right, communicating largely through narrative theology.¹²

I have argued for the importance of exegesis and analysis of biblical texts as a basis for a further systematic theological discussion of the subject. Nielsen's dissertation is primarily this kind of study. In addition, other sources are used to shed light on exegetical and textual issues, such as Greek grammars, commentaries and theological dictionaries, as well as various studies of the relevant New Testament texts.¹³

Below, I will first discuss Luke's eschatological and legitimizing perspectives on healing before arguing for the unity of these two perspectives. Then, I explore the relationship between healing and preaching in Acts. First, I will point out the strong emphasis on the legitimizing aspect of healing in Acts, in light of its missionary outlook, and then look at the relationship between faith and miracles. Thereafter, I will discuss the unity of the eschatological and legitimizing perspectives in Acts related to the kingdom of God. Since the focus of this article is the relationship between healing and preaching, it will, however, be beyond its scope to explore more fully the different aspects of the concept of the kingdom of God.

After presenting the concluding remarks, I will briefly reflect on some implications of my findings. An important question is what consequences an eschatological understanding of the relationship between healing and preaching should have for the church's healing ministry today. Another issue is the legitimizing perspective of healing in view of the recent development of science. Last, I present some directions for further research.

¹¹ Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture and Community*, 2009.

¹² Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*.

¹³ Among these works are C. S. Keener's exegetical commentary on Acts, articles from C. Brown's *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, as well as G.E. Ladd's *A Theology of the New Testament*. In addition, I include R. Stronstad's study *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, which has impacted Pentecostal theology in a significant way. G. H. Twelftree's *Jesus the Miracle Worker* also represents a charismatic-oriented perspective on texts of Jesus as healer (see https://www.amazon.com/Graham-H.-Twelftree/e/B001JS7LEA?ref=dbs_p_pbk_r00_abau_000000) - and J.-O. Henriksen's and K.O. Sandnes' book *Jesus as Healer* is a recent study of the subject within a Scandinavian context. (See bibliography.)

The eschatological and legitimizing perspectives in Luke's Gospel

The events described in the Gospels are the basis for what is written in the book of Acts. Therefore, let us begin by looking at Luke's Gospel, starting with the eschatological aspect.

The eschatological perspective

Jesus's healing ministry is based on and is a part of the eschatological arrival of the kingdom of God, a kingdom he himself brings. Luke 11:14-22 is one of the key texts shedding light on this truth. Jesus is accused of driving the demons out by Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Jesus answers by asking, if "Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand?" (v. 18); he goes on to state, "But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (v. 20).

Here, we clearly see the relationship between Jesus's healing ministry and the eschatological presence of the kingdom of God. Even if the kingdom of God has not come in its fullness, it has still arrived in a very real sense through the person of Jesus Christ. We can talk about *an already - and a not yet*.¹⁴ Therefore, Jesus says, "if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you."

It has been debated whether the Greek word that is used here, *epthasen*, should be translated "is near/is dawning" or "has come".¹⁵ However, as Graham H. Twelftree argues, "the plain sense of the word *epthasen* and its accompanying saying is that the longed-for reign of God had actually arrived..."¹⁶

Generally, the Gospels, including Luke's, distinguish between healing and setting people free from demons. However, these two kinds of ministry are two aspects of the same healing or liberating mission of Jesus. Luke 6:18 says that those "troubled by evil spirits were cured" (gr. *therapeuo*). In Luke 9:42, it is stated that Jesus rebuked the evil spirit and healed (gr. *iaomai*) the boy. In Acts 10:38, the work of Jesus is summarized this way: "he went around doing good and healing (gr. *iaomai*) all who were under the power of the devil". When Jesus sent out the twelve disciples, he gave them power "to drive out all demons and to cure (gr. *therapeuo*) diseases" (Lk 9:1).¹⁷ Raising the dead, understood as restoration of a dead person back to the earthly life, belongs to the category of healing as well.¹⁸ In the ministry of Jesus, there are three examples of this. He raised the widow's son, the daughter of Jairus (the ruler of the synagogue) and Lazarus (Lk 7:11-17; 8:49-56; Jn 11:1-44).

¹⁴ There is currently a broad consensus about this double aspect (see, e.g., George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 1974, pp. 64-69.; Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*, 2008, pp. 41-79.).

¹⁵ Aorist of *pthavo*.

¹⁶ Graham H. Twelftree, *A Historical & Theological Study: Jesus the Miracle Worker*, 1999, loc., 2365. See also Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 66. Referring to Rom 9:31; 2 Cor 10:14; Phil 3:16, Ladd states that "the verb connotes actual presence, not merely proximity".

¹⁷ Twelftree maintains that even if Luke does not say that all sickness is caused by demons, he blurs the distinction between healing and exorcism (Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, loc., 2597-2601).

¹⁸ Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung*, p. 137.

The liberating ministry of Jesus is a fulfilment of prophetic words of Isaiah, quoted by Jesus in his speech in Nazareth: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me... He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoner and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed” (Lk 4:18). This speech can be read as a heading of the events in the following part of the Gospel, and this promise is to be understood not only spiritually or metaphorically but also literally.¹⁹ This is illustrated, for example, by Luke 7:21, where it is stated that Jesus healed (gr. *therapeuo*) “many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind.”

Nielsen points out that Jesus’s ministry of teaching and preaching, as well as his healing ministry, manifest the reality of the presence of the kingdom of God.²⁰ Karl Olav Sandnes expresses the same view: “The breaking in of the kingdom of God is already making its presence felt in the healings wrought by Jesus and in his freeing the people from the power of evil. The arrival of God’s kingdom brings a salvific power extending to both troubled minds and bodies.”²¹

This can be seen in passages such as Luke 4:31-44, which describes how Jesus cast out demons, healed, and preached the good news about the kingdom of God. Jesus also sent out his twelve disciples “to preach (gr. *kerusso*) the kingdom of God and to heal (gr. *iaomai*) the sick” (Lk 9:2). As Nielsen points out, the same reality is, in the most profound sense, expressed in two different manners: by preaching and by healing. Nielsen describes it as “eine Wesensgemeinschaft” – *an essential unity*. The presence of the kingdom of God manifests itself in the proclamation of the kingdom, as well as in liberating acts such as healings, deliverance from demons and even the raising of the dead.²² The healings are not just signs that symbolize the presence of the kingdom, they themselves being qualitatively different from the reality of the kingdom. No, healings as signs of the kingdom are also themselves a part of the kingdom—just as snowdrop flowers are signs of spring as well as a part of spring.²³

Another text expressing the eschatological perspective is Luke 7:18-23²⁴: John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask him if he was the one to come or if they should expect someone else. Jesus answered by referring to what happened. Many were healed and set free from evil spirits. “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised...”, Jesus stated (v. 22). Here, Jesus pointed out that the prophecy of Isaiah 35:5-6 was being fulfilled. The promised time of salvation had come, the kingdom God manifested itself, the eschatological reality could be seen—even if not in its fullness, yet in a real way.

¹⁹ Ibid. pp. 138-139; Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, loc., 2113-2125.

²⁰ Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung*, p. 149.

²¹ Karl Olav Sandnes, *Jesus as Healer*, 2016, loc. 273/p. 85.

²² Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung*, p. 149.

²³ Ibid., pp. 44-45; Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, loc., 2795.

²⁴ Sandnes, *Jesus as Healer*, loc.273/p. 85.

The legitimizing perspective

In addition to the eschatological perspective, however, we also find a confirming or legitimizing perspective in Luke's Gospel.²⁵ This perspective is indicated by one of the Greek terms used to designate Jesus's healings, *dunamis*. This term, having the general meaning of *power*, can be translated in different ways depending upon the context. One of these meanings is a mighty deed, miracle, or miraculous act.²⁶ *Dunamis* is used in this way in Luke 10:13; 19:37.²⁷

However, as Nielsen argues, the legitimizing perspective in Luke's Gospel is mostly seen in the way he describes the healings of Jesus. Luke often underscores the reaction of those watching the healings to emphasize how unusual and unexpected these events were. After the healing of the paralytic who was lowered from the roof, Luke writes that the people were "filled with awe" (gr. *ekstasis*), and they said, "We have seen remarkable (gr. *paradoxos*) things today" (Lk 5:26). Similarly, when Jesus had healed the woman who had been crippled for eighteen years, Luke tells that the people rejoiced because of "all the wonderful (gr. *evdoxos*) things he was doing". Luke is the only Synoptic who uses the terms *paradoxos* (incredible, unusual) and *evdoxos* (glorious, wonderful). These terms underline the miraculous character of the healings. Both terms are used in plural, thus giving them a more general meaning.²⁸ These healings are just examples of the incredible and wonderful deeds of Jesus.

Nielsen also notes how Luke focuses on the miraculous aspect of these healings by emphasizing how serious the sicknesses were. Peter's mother-in-law suffered from a "high fever" (Lk 4:38). The parallel narratives in Matthew 8:14 and Mark 1:30 simply say "fever". In Luke 5:12, the man with leprosy is described as "full of leprosy". Matthew 8:2 and Mark 1:40, however, just use the Greek term *lepros* (leper). The news about the healings of Jesus spread, and crowds of people gathered to hear him and to be healed by him (Lk 5:15). As Nielsen points out, this illustrates how Luke looked upon the miracles of healings as "Missionsaktiva" – as having an important function for missionary work.²⁹

The unity of the eschatological and legitimizing aspects

I argue that the legitimizing aspect is based on, and follows from, the eschatological aspect. This is illustrated by the story in Luke 10 about the seventy-two disciples³⁰ who were sent out

²⁵ For the sake of clarity, I use Nielsen's expression "legitimizing" (Ger. *legitimieren*). A term such as "confirming" might, however, be preferred, in accordance with the traditional language of biblical translations. In Mark 16:20, the Greek word *bebaioo* is used, which often is translated to the English term "confirm". In Acts 14:3, we find the Greek word *martureo*, which in this context should be translated to "testify to", "bear witness to" or "confirm".

²⁶ Otto Betz, "Might, Authority, Throne", in Colin Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2, 1976, pp. 603-606.

²⁷ The term *dunamis*, in the sense of miracle, is, however, more frequently used in the other Synoptic Gospels.

²⁸ Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung*, p. 150.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 152-153.

³⁰ Some Greek manuscripts say seventy and others seventy-two. For a discussion of this difference, see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 1971, pp. 150-151.

to heal and preach that the kingdom of God was near. In this story, I maintain, we find both the eschatological and legitimizing aspects.

First, in the description of the ministry of these seventy-two disciples, we clearly see the eschatological perspective. Regardless of whether the disciples are welcomed or rejected, it is emphasized that the kingdom of God has come (gr. *engiken*³¹; Lk 10:9 and v.11). This statement must be interpreted in light of the expression *ephthasen* (has come) in Luke 11:20. “The perf. *engiken*... thus expresses the end of the time of preparation. God’s kingdom *has* drawn near, i.e. in the proclamation and work of Jesus it *is* already in the present time.”³² As in the sending of the twelve disciples, the presence of the kingdom is manifested in two different ways, in healing and in preaching (Lk 9:1-2.6; 10:1-11). As already stated, it is the same reality, the kingdom of God, revealed in two different manners, but these two manifestations belong together in an essential unity.

However, as we read in Luke 10, we also find the confirming or legitimizing aspect emphasized. The kingdom of God is near. Therefore, for those who reject it, a judgment will come, even more severe than the one Sodom will get (10:11-12). Jesus goes on to declare woe to Korazin and Bethsaida. “For if the miracles (gr. *dunamis*) that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago”. Capernaum, Jesus says, will go down to the depths (10:13-16). It is the rejection of the combined reality of the miracles and the preaching that leads to such a judgment. This clearly tells us that the miracles, in addition to the eschatological aspect, also have a legitimizing function. The legitimizing aspect follows from and is, in a sense, a consequence of the eschatological aspect. The way Jesus speaks indicates that these miracles were extraordinary. They had such a quality that they confirmed the truth of the message that was preached. Nielsen comments on the parallel text in Matthew 11:11-23 and points out that the people of these cities had been brought into a situation of decision (Ger. *Entscheidungssituation*) because of the healings they had seen. The woe declarations and the references to Tyre and Sidon underscore the perspectives of judgment (Ger. *Gericht*), he says.³³ I argue that Nielsen’s observation here, contrary to his own view, tells us that this text in Matthew indeed expresses a strong legitimizing perspective. The people are confronted with a truth claim to which they must respond.

We also see the legitimizing aspect in an answer Jesus gave John the Baptist (Lk 7:18-23). When John asked if Jesus was the one to come or if they should expect someone else, Jesus replied by pointing to his miraculous healings. The miracles confirmed who he was. The miracles had, first, an eschatological aspect; they were a manifestation of the time of salvation that had come, the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 35:5-6; the kingdom of God was present. However, simultaneously, the miracles had a legitimizing function; they confirmed the truth of what was declared. I argue that this is also true for the parallel text to Luke 7:18-23 in Matthew 11:1-6.³⁴

³¹ Perf. of *engizo*.

³² Wolfgang Bauder and Hans Georg Link, “Goal, Near, Last, End, Complete”, in Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Volume 2, p. 54.

³³ Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung*, p. 105.

³⁴ Twelftree, commenting on these texts, states that the miracles reveal and confirm the precise identity of Jesus as the Messiah for the disciples of John the Baptist. (Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, loc., 2690-2694.).

I argue that the legitimizing aspect is also present, at least indirectly, in Luke 11:14-22, this key text of the eschatological perspective. (This is also true in the parallel text in Matthew 12:22-29.) When Jesus drives out demons, the reality or truth of what is proclaimed—that the kingdom of God has come—is confirmed. The miracles are a part of the kingdom and express its presence while simultaneously confirming the truth that the kingdom has come. The presence of the kingdom of God is manifested in two ways: preaching and miraculous healings. There is an inner essential unity between these two manifestations. Simultaneously, the miracles confirm the truth of the message that is proclaimed.

Let us now move on to the book of Acts, part two of Luke's twofold work, to see how the relationship of healing and preaching is understood in it.

Acts: the relationship between healing and preaching

The book of Acts gives a description of how the disciples of Jesus continued his healing ministry, and miraculous healings are an important theme in the book. As explained above, included in the concept of healing is also deliverance from demons and raising the dead. Acts 10:38 sums it up: "healing all who were under the power of the devil".

The legitimizing aspect of healing is strongly underscored in Acts. Let us first look at this perspective. I will later discuss the extent to which we also find the eschatological aspect in Acts.

Emphasis on the miraculous aspect of healing

The strong emphasis on healing and miracles in Acts illustrates the focus on the legitimizing aspect in this book. First, there are several detailed stories of healing. Second, there are summaries of healing miracles that tell us how many more occurred than what is narrated in detail and how significant this was for the first church. Both Peter and Paul, for example, were instruments of many more healing miracles than we are told in the more detailed stories (5:15-16; 14:3; 19:11-12; 28:9). This is illustrated by 2 Cor 12:12, where Paul refers to the wonders and miracles (gr. *semeion, teras* and *dunamis*) he performed in Corinth. However, in Acts, these miracles are not mentioned. As Craig S. Keener points out, Luke had to make a selection of stories if the book of Acts should be readable.³⁵

However, Peter and Paul were not the only ones to perform miracles; we are told that the apostles in general performed signs and wonders (2:43; 5:12). In addition, Stephen's ministry was characterized by great wonders and miraculous signs (6:8), and during Philip's ministry in Samaria, people were set free from evil spirits, and many paralytics and cripples were healed (8:6-7). Barnabas also performed miracles together with Paul (14:3).³⁶

Thus, we see that performing healings and miracles was not a ministry only for apostles. As Nielsen points out, healing was not among the signs defining an apostle (1:21-22; see

³⁵ Keener, *Acts*, Vol. 1, pp. 380-381.

³⁶ Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung*, p. 167.

2 Cor 12:12 however³⁷). In fact, Nielsen also notes that in Acts, all significant persons performed healing miracles, except James.³⁸ This tells us that “Luke could hardly imagine a ministry of preaching that was not followed by healing miracles”.³⁹

The significance of miracles of healing in Acts can also be seen in the frequent use of the terms *semeion*, *teras* and *dunamis*. *Semeion* means “sign”. Its more exact meaning depends upon the context. In Acts, it largely has the meaning of miraculous sign, often being paired with *teras* or *dunamis*. *Teras* means *wonder* or *miracle*. In addition, *dunamis* means *power, might, strength, ability* – and, as often in Acts, *miraculous deed*.⁴⁰ The expression *semeion* and *teras* are frequently used together as a pair, often in plural.

The use of the terms *semeion*, *teras* and *dunamis* in Acts is an indication of how significant healings and miracles are viewed in Acts.⁴¹ We can also note that these expressions are used solely in a positive way when miracles are performed by those who preach the message of Christ.⁴² This use is contrasted with the negative evaluation of magical practices opposed to the message of Christ. One example is Simon, the sorcerer in Samaria, who had amazed people with his magic but who was greatly astonished, like the people of Samaria, by the great signs and miracles (gr. *semeion* and *dunamis*) performed by Philip (8:9-13). Another example is the sorcerer Elymas in Paphos in Cyprus who tried to divert the proconsul from listening to the gospel and whom Paul blinded (13:6-11). As Keener notices, “Luke never uses ‘signs’ for the false activity, even when reporting genuine signs in the context (e.g., 8:6, 13).”⁴³

In addition to the examples listed above, I can also mention how sick people were laid in the streets so that Peter’s shadow might fall on them (5:15) and how extraordinary miracles (gr. *dunamis*) were performed through handkerchiefs and aprons that had been touched by Paul (19:11-12).

Healings, including deliverance from demons and raising the dead, are obviously the most common wonders in Acts, but other kinds of miracles are also described. Ananias and Sapphira died in a dramatic way (5:1-10); Paul made the sorcerer, Elymas, blind for a period of time, a parallel to what Paul himself had experienced on his way to Damascus (13:6-12; 9:8-9). In Philippi, Paul and Silas were set free by an earthquake (16:25-28), and on Malta, Paul was not affected by a snake bite (28:3-6).

³⁷ Paul writes in 2 Cor 12:12 about the signs (*semeion*) of an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles (*semeion*, *teras* and *dunamis*). Most likely, we have to understand these signs as typical signs of an apostle but not pertaining exclusively to an apostle.

³⁸ Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung*, p. 167.

³⁹ Ibid., p.167: “... dass, Lukas sich kaum eine Verkündigungstätigkeit vorstellen konnte, die nicht von Heilungswundern begleitet war”.

⁴⁰ Otfried Hofius, “Miracle, Wonder, Sign (*semeion*, *teras*)”, in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2, pp. 629-633. Otto Betz, “Might, Authority, Throne”, in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2, pp. 603-606.

⁴¹ As Keener points out, “Signs and wonders are the primary means of drawing attention to the gospel message in Acts (e.g., Acts 2:43; 5:12-16; 14:3;...)”, *Acts*, Vol.2, 2013, p. 1172.

⁴² Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung*, pp. 180.

⁴³ Keener, *Acts*, Vol. 3, 2014, p. 2240.

People reacted in similar ways when they saw healings as when they witnessed other kinds of miracles.⁴⁴ The healing of Aeneas resulted in conversion (9:35), as did the earthquake in Philippi (16:25-34). The raising of Tabitha led to belief in Christ (9:42), as did the blinding of the sorcerer Elymas (13:12). The healing of the paralyzed man at the temple gate caused wonder and amazement among the people (3:10), the wonders and signs (gr. *teras* and *semeion*) of the apostles caused awe (gr. *phobos*; 2:43), and great fear (gr. *phobos*) came upon the people after the death of Ananias and Sapphira (5:5.11). A similar reaction is described after what happened to the sons of Sceva. People were “seized with fear (gr. *phobos*), and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour” (19:17). “Fear” in these contexts is understood as something positive, a precursor to faith.⁴⁵

The legitimizing perspective on miracles

The legitimizing perspective on miracles can thus be illustrated by many texts in Acts. When the church was threatened with persecution, it came together and prayed. They prayed that they might speak the word with great boldness, asking God to stretch out his hand “to heal and to perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus” (4,29-30). Nielsen argues that this understanding is similar to the one found in Mark 16:20, where it says that the Lord confirmed the word that was preached by the accompanying signs (gr. *semeion*). The miraculous signs legitimized the preaching. He argues that the use of the participle of *bebaioo* (confirm) in Mark 16:20 confirms this legitimizing understanding.⁴⁶

Another text illustrating the legitimizing aspect is Acts 14:3. Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time at Iconium, “speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness (gr. *martureo*) to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders (gr. *semeion* and *teras*) to be done by their hands”.⁴⁷ This is a clear parallel to Mark 16:20. The expression “bear witness” (gr. *martureo*) in the context of Acts 14:3 must be understood as synonymous with “confirm” (gr. *bebaioo*) in Mark 16:20. The bearing of witness, the confirming, is done through signs and wonders (gr. *semeion* and *teras*). As Keener notes, “Paul himself mentions that signs were done through him, supporting his evangelizing of Gentiles (Rom 15:18-19) and attesting his apostolic ministry (2 Cor 12.12; cf. Heb 2:4) and, apparently, his gospel (cf. 1 Cor 2:4-5; Gal 3:5).”⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Nielsen argues that the miracle aspect is the main focus of the healing stories, not healing in itself. I agree with him in finding a very strong emphasis on the miracle aspect, but I argue that this does not exclude an underscoring of the significance of healing as well. See, for example, the emphasis on healing in Acts 9:33-34. (*Heilung und Verkündigung*, pp. 180-181).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 181. However, Mark 16:20 is not representative of Mark’s Gospel, since it belongs to an ending added later, Nielsen maintains. He argues that elsewhere in Mark, we find only the eschatological perspective (*Ibid.*, pp. 122-123). According to Sandnes, however, the healings in Mark’s Gospel “serve to substantiate or confirm his [Jesus’] words”. He refers to Mark 2 as an example (Sandnes, *Jesus as Healer*, loc. 273/p. 86).

⁴⁷ New King James Version, 1982.

⁴⁸ Keener, *Acts*, Vol. 2, p. 2123. Nielsen maintains that in contrast with Acts, we do not find the legitimizing understanding of the relationship between healing and preaching in Paul’s letters (*Heilung und Verkündigung*, pp. 209-210). I will, however, argue that the confirming or legitimizing perspective is certainly also present and emphasized in Paul’s writings. See the quotation from Keener above for example. In Rom 15: 18-19, Paul writes

Acts 11:20-21 is probably also an example of the legitimizing perspective. Some disciples from Cyprus and Cyrene came to Antioch and began to preach to the Greeks, and the Lord's hand was with them. The expression "the Lord's hand was with them" likely implies that the preaching was confirmed by signs and wonders. This is a natural conclusion when we compare 11:21 with 4:30, where we find the expression "your hand", used by the church as they prayed that God would stretch out his hand to do healings, signs and wonders.⁴⁹

Another relevant text is 19:8-12. Paul spent more than two years in Ephesus preaching and teaching. During these years, God did unusual miracles (gr. *dunamis*) through the hands of Paul so that people were healed and evil spirits driven out. Even if the preaching of the gospel and the miracles in 19:8-12 are not directly related in these verses, it is natural, considering the discussion above, to conclude that the miracles confirmed Paul's preaching and teaching in a significant way.

In Acts 15:12, we find the legitimizing perspective expressed in the context of the debate of the Apostles' council in Jerusalem. "The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders (gr. *semeion* and *teras*) God had done among the Gentiles through them." Here, we can see a twofold legitimizing aspect. First, God confirmed his word for the Gentiles through the preaching of Barnabas and Paul, and second, the ministry of Barnabas and Paul among the Gentiles was also confirmed. Both aspects were significant for the acceptance of their ministry at the Apostles' council.⁵⁰

Nielsen holds that miracles of healing can also legitimize the preaching indirectly by legitimizing the preacher, referring to 8:6-7 as an example: "When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. (8:6)" Nielsen argues that texts as 2:22; 5:12-14; 6:8 and 28:7-10 can also be understood as describing the preacher being legitimized. Nielsen also notices that it is interesting that the Jewish authorities found it necessary to take action against Peter and John because the healing of the paralyzed man was an obvious sign (gr. *semeion*; 4:16-18).⁵¹

However, I hold that the difference between legitimizing the preacher and legitimizing the message being preached is fluid. In the context of Acts, it is difficult to distinguish between these two aspects; the preacher and the message he preaches become a unity in these contexts. We could just as well say that the preacher is indirectly legitimized because of the message he preaches and the miracles he does as vice versa.⁵²

from a missionary perspective, talking about leading the Gentiles to faith in Christ. He does so by word and deed, by the power of signs and miracles (*ev dunamei semeion kai teraton*).

⁴⁹ Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung*, p. 182.

⁵⁰ Keener comments: "For Luke, signs confirm the truth of God's message (Acts 14:3); ... although not all signs did so (8:11; 13:8), true apostolic signs would." (Keener, *Acts*, Vol. 3, p. 2240.)

⁵¹ Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung*, p. 182.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 182. Cf. Graham H. Twelftree, "The Miraculous in the New Testament: Current Research and Issues", *Currents in Biblical Research*, Vol. 12 (3), 2014, p. 333.

The legitimizing aspect and the preaching of Christ

The legitimizing aspect is accentuated by the description of the disciples as witnesses of Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection. In Acts 1:8, we find a programmatic declaration for the whole book of Acts.⁵³ “[...] you shall be my witnesses”, Jesus said. The expression “my witnesses” (gr. *mou martures*) can be understood as subjective as well as objective genitive. I argue that both understandings should be considered to express two aspects of the same reality. The subjective aspect of the genitive says that they are witnesses of Jesus Christ, belonging to him, being his instruments. The objective aspect of the genitive tells us that they are witnesses *about* Jesus Christ, witnessing about him. The objective aspect, however, is vital because as witnesses of Jesus, they are witnesses about him.⁵⁴

Throughout the book of Acts, being a witness of Christ is a central theme. The term “witness” (gr. *martus*) is used very frequently (1:8, cf. Lk 24:48; 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39.41; 22:15.20; 26:16). So are terms such as “testimony” (gr. *marturia, marturion*) and “bear witness” (gr. *diamarturomai, martureo*). See 2:40; 4:33; 8:25; 20:21.24; 22:18; 23:11; 26:22 and 28:23. The apostles testified with great power to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (4:33); Paul preached to King Agrippa about the death and resurrection of Jesus (26:22-23). The healings and other miracles confirmed the disciples’ proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus.

A further look at healing and preaching in the Gospel of Luke and Acts

The relationship between faith and miracles

In accordance with the emphasis on the legitimizing aspect of miracles in Acts, we find that, generally speaking, the fruit of miracles is faith in Christ. There are several texts in which we see this: Because of the healing of Aeneas, all “those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord” (9:32-36). When Peter raised Tabitha from the dead, “it became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord” (9:37-42).

Nielsen argues that in the summarizing texts of 2:42-47 and 5:12-16, we also see how the miracles resulted in faith, even if the connection between miracles and faith is not as clearly observed as in 9:32-36 and 9:37-42. Another example is the healing of the lame man at the temple gate (3:1-11). When people saw him walking, jumping and praising God, they were filled with awe (gr. *thambos*) and amazement (gr. *ekstasis*). As Nielsen notes, the terms *thambos* and *ekstasis* are used by Luke in a positive sense about reactions causing awakening and understanding.⁵⁵ Luke 5:26 also illustrates the positive understanding of *ekstasis*. After writing that all were amazed (caught by *ekstasis*), he says that they praised God. In Acts 4, the

⁵³ Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, p. 94.

⁵⁴ Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung*, p. 186.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

further consequences of the healing at the temple gate (3:1-11) are described. We see that the people's reaction gave Peter an opportunity to preach the gospel to them, and as a result of the healing and the preaching, many believed (4:4).

Now, one might object that according to Acts 4:4, people believed only because of the *preaching*, because 4:4 says that "many who heard the message (gr. *logos*) believed". However, there can be no doubt that in this case, the combined effect of the healing and the preaching made people believe. The miraculous healing prepared the ground and people's hearts for the preaching; the miracle made the message trustworthy. From 4:21, we see how people honoured God for the miracle. However, preaching was clearly necessary to create faith. A miracle without the explanation of the preaching would simply cause amazement and bewilderment.

Philip's ministry in Samaria also illustrates how miracles were significant for the Samaritans' reception of the gospel in faith. The sorcerer Simon had impressed them with his magic. However, the miraculous healings performed by Philip made them listen to him instead of Simon, and they believed "Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (8:5-12). The formulation in 8:6 "[by] hearing and seeing the miracles which he did" has a causative sense.⁵⁶

However, misunderstandings are also possible, as the reasoning of Simon the sorcerer demonstrates (8:8-24). However, this story also illustrates the importance of the explanation and exposition of the word of God. The miraculous cannot stand in isolation from preaching and teaching.

Nielsen argues that in the synoptic Gospels, the relationship between miracles and faith is different from that in Acts. Generally, in Acts, miracles lead to faith. However, in the synoptic Gospels, the sequence is the opposite; faith precedes miracles, he says. This can be seen from Jesus's statements about faith (for example, Mt 8:13; 15:28; Mt 17:20; Mk 9:23-25; 11:22-24; Luke 8:48). According to Nielsen, the statement "your faith has healed (gr. *sozo*) you" provides strong support for this understanding (Lk 8:48).⁵⁷

However, there are two examples in Acts in which faith is said to precede the miracle, 3:16 and 14:9. Nielsen, however, holds that these are exceptions; in addition, he claims that it is not obvious that what these texts say is a real parallel to the understanding in the synoptics.⁵⁸

I agree that we should analyse the different situations in which faith is the subject to better evaluate if, or to what extent, there is a different understanding of the relationship between faith and miracles in Acts and the Synoptics. In Mark 6:1-6, we read that Jesus could not do many miracles in his hometown due to their unbelief (gr. *apistia*). The kind of unbelief described in his hometown is rejection. There is a difference between this kind of unbelief, understood as a rejection of Jesus, and the struggle to have faith, as we find described in Matthew 17:14-20 (see the parallel text in Luke 9:37-42). Jesus explains that the disciples could not drive the demon out because of their small faith, *oligopistia* (Mt 17:20). Moreover, it is very significant that Jesus says this to the disciples, to the ministers, not to the boy or the father. According to Matthew 17:14-20, faith is the responsibility of those who minister. I argue

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 182, 185 (gr. *en to akouein autous kai blepein ta semeia ha epoiei*).

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 183.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 183.

that it is also possible to see this responsibility of the disciples as one aspect of Jesus's statement in Luke 17:5-6. The disciples are supposed to move the "mulberry tree" to conduct miracles by faith.

If we read Acts from this perspective, faith is the responsibility of the apostles and those who minister, not—at least not primarily—those who are listening to them. In addition, according to the New Testament, faith seems to be more than a human ability. This may be indicated in Mark 11:22, where Jesus says, "Have faith in God!" The genitive here, *pistis theou*, may be interpreted in different ways. Most naturally, it is understood as objective genitive: *faith in God*. However, it may also be interpreted as genitive of origin: *faith flowing from God*, or as characterizing genitive: *divine faith*.⁵⁹ I argue that these different aspects of the genitive do not exclude each other. They can flow together, as they can be understood holistically. The statement in Acts 3:16 may point in this direction: "[...] It is the name of Jesus and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him..." Literally, it says: "the faith, the one through him".⁶⁰

It can be discussed whether Acts 3:16 speaks of the faith of Peter and John, the man who was healed, or both.⁶¹ Matthew 17:20 talks about the faith of the disciples as ministers, but the synoptic Gospels also clearly describe the faith of those who were healed, as in the case of the woman with a bleeding problem (Lk 8:43-48). In this case, she was very active and took the initiative. According to Acts 3:1-16, however, Peter and John took the initiative, even by helping the man up. However, he responded, and thus, we may talk about all of them having faith—even if perhaps faith in different senses. The man was responding while Peter and John took the initiative.

A similar situation is described in Acts 14:8-9. Paul took the initiative, acting in faith, seeing that the man had faith to be healed. The man responded to Paul's initiative.

Regarding the question of the sequence of faith and miracles, I argue that we have to understand the picture drawn in Acts in light of the perspective of Matthew 17:20. It is the responsibility of the ministers to have faith and to be the instruments of performing miracles. In this sense, faith also precedes miracles in Acts. This understanding, I maintain, is confirmed by the missionary perspective of Acts. The disciples receive power (gr. *dunamis*) from the Holy Spirit to be witnesses about Jesus Christ (1:8:). They preach and perform miracles empowered by the Spirit.⁶² Faith is an essential part of this empowering. Scriptures such as Matthew 17:20; Mark 11:22 and Acts 3:16, discussed above, may indicate this. We can also refer to 1 Cor 12:7-11, where Paul writes about the manifestations of the Spirit, faith being one of them.

⁵⁹ Ragnar Leivestad, *Nytestamentlig Gresk Grammatikk [A Greek Grammar of the New Testament]*, 1972, p. 106. Leivestad points out that genitive often tells us simply that there is a relationship between things. We need the context to know what kind of relationship it is. See also R. Leivestad and Bjørn H. Sandvei, *Nytestamentlig gresk grammatikk [A Greek Grammar of the New Testament]*, 2010, pp. 175-183.

⁶⁰ *he pistis he di autou*.

⁶¹ Keener writes, "The man was healed on the basis of faith; this might refer to that of the healed man (which would better fit the parallel in 14:9) but might be that of the apostles who used the name (3:6). (Keener, *Acts*, Vol. 2, p. 1099.)

⁶² Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*.

Nielsen emphasizes the significance miracles are given in Acts to create faith. At the same time, however, he also says that in most cases, faith is seen as a fruit of the preaching, even if miraculous healings can contribute to faith. It seems to me that this statement is in danger of downplaying the significance of miracles in Acts too much, compared to what Nielsen says elsewhere. Yes, faith is a fruit of preaching, but in many cases, preaching is combined with the miracles that happened. In a list of scripture references given by Nielsen to illustrate how preaching resulted in faith, the combined effect of miracles and preaching can also be found in most of these references. See the following examples: 4:4; 6:7; 8:12; 11:20-21; 13:7-8; 13:48; 14:1; 15:7; 17:11-12.34; 18:8; and 28:23-24.⁶³ Even if miracles are not always explicitly mentioned, it is not unlikely that they have happened, since we see in Acts a strong emphasis on the combination of miracles and preaching. However, this observation does not contradict the statement that faith could be a result of preaching alone; this would certainly differ from situation to situation. However, the general impression we get is that the preaching was followed by miraculous healings.⁶⁴

The kingdom of God—the preaching of Christ

Nielsen holds that in Acts, there is a strong emphasis on the legitimizing aspect, the missionary purpose of the healings—and therefore a focus on the miraculous aspect of the healings. The eschatological understanding, on the other hand, is “hardly traceable” (Ger. “kaum noch spürbar”)—or “has at least no decisive significance for the understanding of the healings of the disciples.”⁶⁵

In accordance with this interpretation of Acts, Nielsen maintains that the testimony of the disciples cannot—as in the preaching of Jesus—be described as a testimony about the kingdom of God. He admits that we are told in some places that the disciples preached the kingdom of God, but we are talking about very few places (8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23.31), “and in addition, these statements lack the pith (Ger. *Prägnanz*)”, he says.⁶⁶

As I have made clear, I agree fully in pointing out the strong emphasis in Acts on the legitimizing aspect and the missionary purpose of healings. However, I argue that to what extent the concept of the kingdom of God, and the eschatological aspect, is found in Acts, is, at least to a large degree, a question of terminology. First, the expression “the kingdom of God” is used several times. Second, it is used in contexts that describe events or traits that are typical for the proleptic presence of the kingdom of God. Philip did the same things as Jesus did and as he sent out his disciples to do: he preached, healed the sick and drove out evil spirits (Acts 8:6-7). As to Acts 19:8, Paul “spoke boldly” in the synagogue “arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God”. He preached, as Jesus did, and the content of Paul’s message was the key person of the kingdom of God, Christ—the one who by his very presence brought the kingdom. Looking at Acts 20:25, Paul speaks here to the elders in Ephesus who had heard

⁶³ Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung*, p. 183.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 187: “jedenfalls für das Verständnis der Heilungen der Jünger keinerlei entscheidene Bedeutung mehr besitzt”.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 186: “und andererseits fehlt diesen Aussagen die Prägnanz”.

him preach Christ and seen mighty miracles through his ministry—the very same manifestations of the kingdom of God that had been seen through Jesus (cf. Acts 19).

Further, we must read Acts in the context of its place in the salvation history, as described by Luke himself. The earthly ministry of Jesus was finished; he had been taken up into heaven and had poured out the Holy Spirit on the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Lk 24:46-51; 2:33). The book of Acts describes the era of the Spirit. As the kingdom of God was manifested through Jesus's ministry on earth and through the disciples he sent out (Lk 11:20; 9:1-12; 10:1-9), it is now, in Acts, manifested through the disciples empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:29-31). Therefore, when the disciples preached Christ, crucified and resurrected, when the sick were healed and demons driven out, the kingdom of God—the eschatological reality—was manifested. As Stronstad argues, “with the transfer of the Spirit to the disciples on the day of Pentecost, they become a charismatic community, heirs to the earlier charismatic ministry of Jesus”.⁶⁷

Thus, I argue that we find both the eschatological and legitimizing aspects in Acts. The eschatological aspect is presupposed; it is the obvious foundation without which there is no Christ to preach about. However, this eschatological reality, which is now also the era of the Spirit, must be preached in the power of the Spirit. The book of Acts describes how this was done in a missionary situation among Jews and Gentiles. The eschatological reality was manifested and experienced through preaching and miraculous healings, and the truth of its presence was confirmed by miracles. Therefore, I hold that the eschatological and the legitimizing perspectives flow together in an essential unity in Acts, as it does in the Gospel of Luke. However, we may say that the legitimizing aspect is the most emphasized aspect in Acts due to the missionary situation described in this book.

Conclusion and implications for the church

Concluding remarks

So far, I have discussed the extent to which an eschatological as well as a legitimizing understanding of the relationship between healing and preaching can be found in the New Testament. Because of the scope of the article, I have limited the study of texts primarily to the Gospel of Luke and Acts. My conclusion is that both the eschatological and legitimizing perspectives are found in these two books. In Acts, we find a very strong emphasis on the legitimizing aspect; this is natural because of the missionary work it describes. However, the eschatological perspective is by no means absent from Acts. The presence of the kingdom of God is presupposed; it is a necessary foundation for the preaching on the risen Christ.

There is no contradiction between the eschatological and legitimizing perspectives. In the very same texts, both understandings can be expressed. They flow together in an essential unity. The kingdom of God is manifested through preaching and healing. The eschatological

⁶⁷ Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, p. 69.

and legitimizing perspectives emphasize the significance of preaching in their own way, as well as healing as a combined expression of the kingdom of God.

Implications for the church

Coming to the end of this article, I will briefly reflect on the implications these findings concerning the eschatological and legitimizing aspects of healing have for the Church of today.

It is a basic understanding of the worldwide Pentecostal and charismatic movement that the gifts of the Spirit are supposed to be in operation in the Church in all phases of its history. This also includes the Church's ministry of healing and miracles, as illustrated in the book of Acts. This charismatic theology is shared by a large number of churches belonging to different denominations.⁶⁸ This was also the opinion of the Church fathers, such as Irenaeus and Tertullian; they tell about the healings and miracles that were performed through the church of their time.⁶⁹ Augustin, on the other hand, developed a theology that one should not expect a continuation of the healing gift. However, he retracted his view when he became bishop in North Africa because of all the healing miracles he saw there. He himself ministered healing to people towards the end of his life.⁷⁰ Later in church history, however, the Church's healing ministry was significantly downplayed, but it was revived by renewal movements in the 1800s and later by the Pentecostal and charismatic movements.⁷¹

As we have seen, there is an essential unity between preaching and healing. Both healing and preaching manifest the same eschatological reality, the kingdom of God, in two different manners, yet they are parts of the same reality. Through healing and through preaching, people experience the reality of the kingdom.

The task of allowing the kingdom of God to be manifested through preaching and healing presents the Church with a great challenge. The Church is not the kingdom of God, but it is an instrument of the kingdom created by the kingdom.⁷² How can it currently fulfil the task of manifesting the kingdom through healing and preaching? There is certainly much preaching in the worldwide Church. However, to what extent is healing emphasized in the global Church?

We may point to the great work that many local churches do in terms of taking care of sick people, giving them medical care or building hospitals. This is certainly a very significant manifestation of the kingdom of God and of the love and care of the God of the kingdom (cf.

⁶⁸ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*; Øyvind Gaarder Andersen, "Pinsebevegelsen og den karismatiske bevegelsen – Den Hellige Ånds gaver og åndserfaringer" ["The Pentecostal Movement and the Charismatic Movement – the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and Spiritual Experiences"], in Ola Tjørhom (ed.), *Kirkesamfunn i Norge: Innføring i Kirkekunnskap*, 2018 [*Churches in Norway: Introduction to Church Studies*], pp. 191-195.

⁶⁹ Morton Kelsey, *Healing and Christianity: A Classic Study*, 1995, pp. 108-110; Nielsen claims that the eschatological perspective on healing was largely absent among the church fathers (Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung*, pp. 250-252). Whether or not this is correct (a question that is beyond the scope of this article to discuss), they had at least an understanding of the importance of the charismatic activity of the church in terms of healing.

⁷⁰ An early version of cessationism; Kelsey, *Healing and Christianity*, pp.145-148; Francis MacNutt. *The Healing Reawakening: Reclaiming our lost Inheritance*, 2005, pp. 113-116.

⁷¹ MacNutt. *The Healing Reawakening*.

⁷² Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 111-113.

the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Lk 10:25-37). However, more is needed; we see in the New Testament that the kingdom of God should also be manifested through miraculous or extraordinary healings.

In particular, the classical Pentecostal movement and the various branches of the charismatic movement have renewed this truth in different churches.⁷³ However, I argue that there is a need for a further reawakening of the biblical emphasis on healing—most of all, it seems, in the Western churches. Nielsen states, “Luke could hardly imagine a preaching ministry that was not followed by miraculous healings”.⁷⁴ Such an observation is certainly challenging for the church of today! How can it be followed up?

Preaching and teaching the biblical message of healing are an important part of the answer, I argue. In the last chapter of his dissertation, *Conclusion and Perspectives*, Nielsen points out how healing has been downplayed in many sermons by the tendency to spiritualize texts on healing by interpreting them symbolically.⁷⁵

Generally, we harvest what we preach. To quote Paul, “faith comes by hearing” (Rom 10:17). This is also true regarding healing as an aspect of salvation. Let me draw a parallel to the gift of speaking in tongues. Vinson Synan maintains that it was Parham’s teaching of tongues as the sign of being baptized in the Spirit that produced the worldwide Pentecostal and charismatic movement. Speaking in tongues was not something totally new, but it had been looked upon as a peripheral phenomenon.⁷⁶ However, the new emphasis on speaking in tongues in preaching and teaching made people seek this gift in a new way. There are different theological understandings of baptism in the Spirit and how it relates to speaking in tongues, but my point here is that the focus on tongues caused people to seek this gift.⁷⁷ I argue that in a similar way, preaching and teaching on healing are needed in order to experience more healing.

This must, however, be followed up by practicing what is taught. An invitation for prayer for healing should be given. How this actual prayer is done may differ according to church traditions or what is considered the best approach in the situation at hand. People may be invited for prayer in front of the pulpit, as in revival meetings, or invited to a special prayer room, for example. Prayer for healing may also be done individually, for instance, at the home or in the street during evangelism. Most of all, it must be remembered that the Church cannot have a healing ministry through its own human power. It needs to pray for the empowering of the Holy Spirit, as the first church did (Acts 4,29-31).

⁷³ See for example Francis MacNutt, *Healing: Revised and expanded*.

⁷⁴ Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung*, p. 167.

⁷⁵ Nielsen relates this to the dualism between body and soul, which has its background in Hellenism. He argues for manifesting the eschatological aspect of healing primarily through the church’s medical work. He does not seem to have much of an expectation for healing through prayer. I find it puzzling that he speaks quite negatively about the practice of praying for the sick in charismatic movements (*Konklusion und Perspektiven*, *ibid.*, pp. 257-261).

⁷⁶ Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 1997. p. 89.

⁷⁷ Øyvind G. Andersen, “Åndens dåp i den brede pinsekarismatiske bevegelse: Hvor store er egentlig forskjellene?” [“Spirit Baptism in the Broad Pentecostal Movement: How Significant are the Differences?”], in K.W. Sæther & K.I. Tangen (eds.), *Pentekostale perspektiver [Pentecostal Perspectives]*, 2015, pp. 136-137.

The effect of the legitimizing aspect of healing can clearly be seen in the powerful growth of Pentecostalism in the global South. Healings, signs and wonders have played a significant role in the great number of conversions through this movement.⁷⁸ Even though this phenomenon occurs to a lesser extent in the West, there are many examples of conversions related to healings there, too; I have personally been a witness to it.⁷⁹ However, there is a theological and philosophical challenge regarding how we should think about the legitimizing aspect of healing in relation to medical science. This leads us to some further research questions.

Further research questions

In the introduction, I referred to the on-going theological debate regarding how today, with the medical knowledge of our time, we should relate to the legitimizing perspective on healing. This question has to do with our understanding of the biblical texts, of science and of philosophical questions, such as those related to natural laws and the definition of miracles.⁸⁰ Much research has been done here through an impressive amount of contributions. However, I argue that there is still a need for further discussions and reflections concerning these issues. It is my ambition to follow up on these questions in another article.

How the church can more concretely and practically fulfil its healing commission in terms of praying for the sick is also a question for further reflection and discussion.

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⁷⁸ Candy Gunther Brown (ed.), *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, 2011; David K.L. Andersen, *From Victim to Victor: The Rise of Pentecostalism in Brazil – an Empirical Study of Reasons for Growth*, 2012.

⁷⁹ One example is meetings of the evangelist Charles Ndifon in Denmark in 2001, which I attended. Thousands of people came to meetings in the largest Pentecostal church in Copenhagen because of healings they had seen on Danish TV from a meeting in the city of Ringkøbing, and many were registered as new believers.

⁸⁰ See the Introduction, footnote 3.

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