

Health as *ɖagbɛ* in the Ghana-Eve Context: Lessons from the New Testament



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ABSTRACT

How does the Church in Ghana address the growing concerns of health care delivery especially among the Ghana-Eve from the perspective of Christianity? This is the question that this study sought to answer. Using literature research, this paper argued that holistic Christian health care is nothing short of *ɖagbɛ* in the Eve context. *ɖagbɛ* is holistic well-being. Holistic well-being can hardly be separated from the salvation that Jesus offers. At his incarnation, Jesus brought the gospel of the kingdom of God/kingdom of heaven as holistic well-being for human benefit. While preaching his holistic gospel, Jesus also healed and taught people. His spectacular healing ministry and other deeds did not prove his divine sonship or messiahship but attested to the fact that in his life and ministry, the kingdom of God/heaven had come in power and glory. In Jesus then, one finds the full realisation of God's *ɖagbɛ* to heal the human body, soul and spirit. The study contributes to scholarship in helping to indigenize the meaning of salvation in the Eve context. This wades into the debate on inculturation theology in Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

Jesus Christ brought God's kingdom to the world at his incarnation. His kingdom message requires a response of repentance and belief in his gospel of the kingdom from everyone who hears the gospel call. The gospel of the kingdom embodies preaching, teaching and healing (Matt 4:23-25). It is a holistic gospel that enables people to have *ɖagbɛ*. Healing and health care delivery are part of *ɖagbɛ*. Therefore, healthcare delivery is an important aspect of the Christian gospel. *ɖagbɛ* is an Eve word. It is offered as a well-being wish for the one to whom it is given. *ɖagbɛ ne va* means "may you enjoy holistic well-being." How then do Christian healing and Christian health care delivery contribute to the enjoyment of *ɖagbɛ*?

The interaction of the Ghana-Eve culture with the Christian gospel reveals that the offer of salvation that the Christian gospel embodies is nothing short of a *ɖagbɛ* wish among the Ghana-Eve. Since theologising is a contextual activity, *ɖagbɛ* constitutes a cultural resource that can be employed to articulate the nature of the Christian gospel among the Ghana-Eve. A *ɖagbɛ* wish embodies a state of physical, social, mental, spiritual and psychological well-being which establishes a total equilibrium and harmony between the divine and the human. In order to ensure that the growing concerns of health care delivery from a Christian perspective among the Ghana-Eve remain linked with the enjoyment of the holistic offer of Christian salvation, it is argued in this paper that the Ghana-Eve Christian who enjoys the full status of *ɖagbɛ* has his or her physical and metaphysical needs fully met.

This research is concerned with how the offer of *ɖagbɛ*, a traditional wish of well-being among the Ghana-Eve may be explored to help address the growing needs of health care delivery from a Christian

perspective. It is further to strengthen the view that Christian salvation includes the offer of health and healing. This implies that an appropriate understanding of the Christian gospel among the Ghana-Eve necessitates collaboration of Christian ministries with other healthcare providers to enhance the collective harnessing of efforts to deliver health care to the people of Ghana. It is a wrong notion for people to believe that the health care provision that orthodox medicine provides in clinics, hospitals and other medical facilities has nothing to do with the Christian gospel. Similarly, it is wrong to assume or even believe that Christian health delivery is merely “miraculous” intervention in the lives of those encountering the problem of ill health.

METHODOLOGY

The method employed in this study is a literature study. Through the exposition of some selected Gospel passages in which Jesus addressed the health needs of certain individuals he encountered during his ministry in first-century Palestine among the Jews, this paper argues that modern health care delivery is a collective responsibility in which the Christian gospel as a *dagbe* offer, contributes to the efforts of orthodox medicine in collaboration, to ensure the holistic well-being of the Ghana-Eve. The findings of the literature analysed are discussed under various themes in the next section.

DISCUSSION

The Bible and Holistic Health Delivery

The Bible is deeply concerned with holistic health for people — physical, mental, and social. The Bible promotes holistic health. For instance, in John 10:10 Jesus said, “I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly” (NRSV). Even though in this passage, Jesus was not talking about health care delivery, the message, nonetheless, centres on the well-being of those who believe in him. He was commenting on the false ministry of some leaders of the Jewish religious establishment of his day, who had become a great burden on the people, such that in purporting to be leading God’s people they were acting like thieves, whose only concern was to kill, to steal and to destroy God’s sheep. In contrast, Jesus, the Good Shepherd comes to give life in fullness. Life in fullness is found in the gospel of Jesus, which is a gospel of salvation, health, and well-being. It is a *dagbe* gospel.

Matthew 25:31ff (NRSV), suggests that central among the ethical values that will form the basis for judging human behaviour in the future, is care for the sick. Jesus said, “...I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, **I was sick and you took care of me** (emphasis added), I was in prison and you visited me... (vv. 35-36, NRSV)... ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me’ (v. 40). It is noted from this passage that those who will be found wanting, in terms of the appropriate ethical conduct required, will go into “eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life” (v.45).

The various ethical responsibilities listed in the passage, including caring for the sick, visiting the prisoner, feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty and providing clothing for the naked, contribute to the holistic salvation that the gospel of Jesus offers to the one who believes in him. Those activities all amount to the offer of a *dagbe*, a state of total well-being among the Ghana-Eve.

Disheartened Over Health Delivery? A Bible Story

According to Luke 13:10-17, one day a woman with a disability shuffled her way into the synagogue to hear the word of God. It was a Sabbath day and Jesus of Nazareth was the preacher for the day. When he saw the woman, who should have been isolating herself from the view of society because of her ailment, Jesus immediately discerned her troubles. He called her forward and addressed her directly saying, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment” (v.12). Then he touched her and her infirmity was gone. Whereas, when the woman with the issue of blood in Luke 8:44-46 had touched Jesus, it was Jesus who took the initiative and touched the woman, crippled for 18 years, and he touched her with compassion and healing.¹

¹ Paul John Isaak, “*Luke*” in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunbo Adeyemo (Nairobi: Word Alive, 2006), 1231. The ingenuity with which this Bible story is told is the idea of Paul John Isaak.

As was characteristic of Jesus' healing ministry, immediately the woman straightened up and praised God (v. 13). No one wondered whether the person was healed when Jesus healed. There was no hysterical delay. People these days may fling their clutches away during an evening healing service only to pick them up again after two days but when Jesus healed, they never picked them up again.²

Not everyone was happy, however, let alone willing to praise God for the cure. The administrator of the synagogue, a Pharisee, was indignant. He tried to lecture the crowd on how wrong it was to come to the synagogue on the Sabbath to be healed. But Jesus would have none of that. He immediately interrupted the administrator, exposing his hypocrisy with the pointed question, "Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it to water?" (v. 15).

Was the synagogue administrator an enemy of progress? Was he opposed to the administration of health while promoting the administration of the synagogue? But why? Do we, in like manner have elements who are opposed to health care delivery for our people? Are they pastors? Are they politicians? And what do they benefit from the ill-health of the people? What do they benefit from, for instance, seeing a person with a mental health challenge walking the streets of Kumasi at noon naked? The Ghana Health Service (GHS) will, no doubt, be interested in the questions just posed, considering that it has a specific mandate that points in that direction.

The Mandate of the Ghana Health Service

The mandate of the GHS is "to provide and prudently manage comprehensive and accessible health service with special emphasis on primary health care at regional, district and sub-district levels in accordance with approved national policies."³ This mandate further defines the vision and mission of the GHS in addition to spelling out the national strategy for implementing the vision of the GHS.

There is hardly anyone who would consider contemporary health care delivery in Ghana to be adequate, especially when measured against the well-known World Health Organisation (WHO) definition of health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being rather than the mere absence of physical disease or infirmity."⁴ Ghanaian politicians, who make the policies, would admit that while Ghana has succeeded in expanding access to health care and the quality of health care in health delivery, compared with a few decades ago, there is still a long way to go. How much budget allocation in Ghana goes to healthcare? Why are the medical personnel leaving the shores of Ghana for the so-called greener pastures? Have the citizenry even paid enough attention to what "health" means? In 2001, the African Union, meeting in Abuja, Nigeria agreed that its members, African nations needed to increase their percentage budget allocation to at least 15%. Twenty-three years down the line Ghana has not even come close to this target. For instance, the 2019 allocation was merely 1.4%⁵ and in the year 2024, the government is still being urged to pursue the Abuja commitment.⁶

Holistic Health

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. For Christians, this complete well-being has physical, mental and spiritual dimensions, because they correspond to the well-being of the body, soul and spirit respectively. The human is tripartite (body, soul and spirit, cf 1 Thess 5:23). This is *ḡagbē*, holistic well-being. To wish someone *ḡagbē* is to be concerned with the person's "psychological, anthropological, socio-economic, medical and theological" well-being.⁷

² Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars* (Zondervan Academic, 2010).

³ Ministry of Health, "Ghana Health Service," accessed July 21, 2024, <https://www.moh.gov.gh/ghana-health-service/> accessed 23/01/2023.

⁴ WHO, "Health and Well-Being," accessed July 21, 2024, <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/major-themes/health-and-well-being#:~:text=The WHO constitution states%3A%20Health,of mental disorders or disabilities.>

⁵ Doris Sasu, "Domestic General Government Health Expenditure as a Share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Ghana from 2008 to 2020," Statista, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1124307/ghana-domestic-general-government-health-expenditure-as-share-of-gdp/>.

⁶ Ghana Business News, "Ghana Government Told to Increase Health Sector Budget to 15%," 2022, <https://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2022/07/05/ghana-government-told-to-increase-health-sector-budget-to-15/>.

⁷ Stuart C Bate, "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding and Assessing Religious Healing in South African Christianity," *Missionalia* 29, no. 3 (2001): 361–86.

Consumers of faith healing abound in Africa and it is usually the first point of call for many health seekers in Africa.⁸ Health and healing in Africa are intertwined with African spirituality. Chammah J. Kauda and Isabel A. Phiri observed that “In African traditional society, the search for healing and health is deeply entrenched in religious beliefs and practices and manifest in greetings, in the kind of food people eat and every aspect of life.”⁹ It is further observed that the provision of healthcare in traditional African societies is also communitarian, in that the pursuit of health and well-being are not isolated processes. Holistic health is pursued by men and women in the community in harmony with nature because when nature is violated and offended, human beings suffer the consequences.

The Role of Religion

Since the Christian gospel is holistic salvation including the provision of health care, it is thus valid, at this stage, to examine the assertion: Is the role of the Christian religion in health care delivery in Ghana one of facilitation or hinderance? Religious institutions in Ghana are well-known active partners with the central government in the delivery of health. They, in general, and Christian denominations in particular, have contributed immensely to the provision and delivery of health care in Ghana and other parts of Africa.¹⁰ Mission education and health care provision in Ghana began long before the country became independent. The irony is that while the Church in Ghana actively participates in health care delivery, behind the scenes as well, in some other ways, the church also frustrates health care delivery, through some of its beliefs and practices.

The phenomenon of prayer camps and the harrowing experiences that their patrons go through in the name of healing is one area of serious concern. There have been, for instance, reports of people with mental health challenges who have been chained like animals in some Ghanaian prayer camps. There have also been instances in which someone with cancer was kept at a prayer camp until the cancerous cells spread throughout the body in such a way that no healthcare provider was able to do anything to save the victim. It is often at such critical times that desperate family members rush such victims to a hospital. There have been reports of some Ghanaians still unwilling to take the free COVID-19 vaccines. These are the people who believe in the conspiracy theories against vaccination and the so-called 5G threat.

Among the Ghana-Eve, like other Ghanaian people, this phenomenon of frustrating health care delivery on the basis of strange religious beliefs also exists. The Ghana-Eve live in different parts of Ghana but as an ethnic group, they occupy the Volta region of Ghana to the southeast of the country. They are predominantly peasant farmers involved in crop cultivation, animal rearing, and fishing. There are also petty traders, artisans, government employees, transport operators, and craftspeople among other workers.

Addressing the growing concerns of health care delivery in Ghana especially among the Ghana-Eve, from the perspective of Christianity, in the midst of all these practices is the challenge of this research. In this light, the paper tries an examination of some selected New Testament passages to highlight their implications for health care delivery in Ghana. These passages are mainly from the Gospels, the first four writings of the New Testament, which present many instances of spectacular works by Jesus including healing wonders, which people often call “miracles.” David Hume once defined a miracle as “a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent.”¹¹ Hume’s definition has lingered on among some Christians but it probably does not account for what people describe as “miracle” in the Gospels or other New Testament writings.

The New Testament (in Greek) often uses the three words/phrases of *signs, wonders and powerful deeds* (see Acts 2:22) to describe the ministry of Jesus. Some English Bible versions use “miracles” to translate the Greek *dunamei* but this is more appropriately translated as “powerful deeds.” Thus, *semeia, dunamei* and *thauma*, ought to be translated as “signs, powerful deeds and wonders”, not “signs, miracles and wonders” as they are commonly translated.

⁸ Prince Peprah et al., “Religion and Health: Exploration of Attitudes and Health Perceptions of Faith Healing Users in Urban Ghana,” *BMC Public Health* 18, no. 1 (December 10, 2018): 1358, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-6277-9>.

⁹ Chammah J. Kauda and Isabel A. Phiri, “Healing and Health in African Traditional Society,” in *Ontology of African Christianity*, ed. Isabel Apawo Phiri, Dietrich Werner, and Chammah J. Kaunda (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2016), 1150–53.

¹⁰ Susan Parry, “African Christianity, Public Health and Pandemics,” in *Anthology of African Christianity*, ed. Isabel Apawo Phiri, Dietrich Werner, and Chammah J. Kaudan (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2016), 1154–1158.

¹¹ David Hume, “An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding,” in *Seven Masterpieces of Philosophy* (Routledge, 2016), 183–276.

The Ministry of Jesus

In the ministry of Jesus, the spectacular divine deeds included exorcisms, healing, raising the dead, and the 'nature miracle' of walking on water. The researcher's interest here is in the healing "miracles" and how they reflect health care delivery in Ghana. The most difficult questions that critics often raise against the Christian claim of healing through Jesus is the question of historicity and religious significance. Opinions differ on this but "to accuse the gospel evangelists of indiscriminately submerging historical fact in a flood of miracle-mongering to serve the interests of theological propaganda", as some have charged, "would be outright injustice."¹²

The three aspects of Jesus' ministry preaching, teaching, and healing have already been mentioned. His holistic message centred on the in-breaking of God's kingdom, and the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus is akin to the reign of God, God's rule over the hearts and minds of Christ-followers in the present, and God's physical rule in the Messianic Age in the future. With the arrival of the kingdom, God has come to be with God's people. After all, God is Emmanuel (Matt 1:23). God came to his people because God cares for God's people. Thus, the good news that Jesus preached offered freedom, hope, restoration, healing, peace, and above all eternal life with God the Creator. With the ministry embodying relief and freedom from sickness and ailment, some Christians attempt to reduce the value of the entire ministry to spectacular deeds of healing.

When, in this regard, Christians seek to demonstrate the lordship of Christ by appealing to the "miracle" narratives of the New Testament, they are apologetic in a manner that Christ himself probably rejected. In the temptation account (Matt 4:1-11 & Lk 4:1-13), for instance, Jesus rejected all three offers of the devil to get him to prove that he was the Son of God. He would not change stones into loaves of bread just because he was famished, for it amounted to trying to live by bread alone; he would not throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple just because he is aware of God's promise to protect his children (Ps 91:11-12), for it amounted to putting the Lord to the test; and he would not bow to the devil even if only briefly to possess the whole world and its splendour, for it amounted to neglecting to worship God alone. Jesus would have readily grabbed those "opportunities" if he truly believed that supernatural deeds were required to prove that he is the Son of God. God had already affirmed that Jesus is his Son at the baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:17). Some demons even knew Jesus as the Son of God merely on seeing him (Matt 8:29).

This view compels one to comment on those passages in the New Testament that suggest that Jesus believed his overwhelming power over demons, mental disorders and all manner of diseases was additional proof that the Spirit of God was upon him to authenticate his divine identity as the Messiah and Son of God. For instance, Christian healing is often associated with the presence of divine power, signs, and wonders. In translating Acts 2: 22, the following Bible versions use the terms listed below:

KJV: miracles, wonders and signs

ESV: mighty works and wonders and signs

NLT: powerful miracles, wonders, and signs

The three Greek words involved are *dunamis*, *teras* and *semeion* (powerful deeds, wonders and signs). In this regard, ESV seems to have got it right. The translation of *dunamis* as "miracle" is clearly influenced by the modern mindset. Some Christians assume and some often argue, that Jesus' mighty deeds are what make him uniquely the Son of God. Such a view fails to take cognisance of the fact that Jesus was not the only person in ancient times to perform such deeds, as he himself suggests in Matt 12:28 (cf Lk 11:20). Jesus' comments in Matt 12:28 implies that other exorcists were known to the Pharisees and other Jews. Matthew 12:22-28 reads:

Then they brought to him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and he cured him, so that the one who had been mute could speak and see. All the crowds were amazed and were saying, "Can this be the Son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons, that this man casts out the demons." He knew what they were thinking and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how, then, will his

¹² I. T. Ramsey et al., *Miracles and the Resurrection* (London: SPCK, 1964), 39.

kingdom stand? If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do **your own exorcists** (emphasis added) cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you (vv. 22-28, NRSV).

Jesus believed that his unusual powers over mental disorders and other types of illness confirmed the operation in the special measure of the Spirit of God in and through his life.¹³ Here also, the connection of the Christian gospel with holistic well-being, including health and healing is seen. It is a wrong assumption to claim that Jesus did these spectacular deeds, signs, and wonders to prove that he is the Son of God, the Messiah.

The purpose of the spectacular works, deeds of power, signs and wonders of Jesus was to show that in his ministry, the kingdom of God/heaven was present in power and glory. The power of the Holy Spirit to effect all the positive changes associated with the coming of the kingdom of God/heaven is revealed in the fact that he empowered Jesus, being fully rested on him, to do what he did. Because of the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit upon the life of Jesus as the *Christos*, God's anointed and accredited envoy, he is able to show those who believe in him how to live their lives to please God.

The State of Ghana's Healthcare and Delivery

The Ghanaian government strategy through the GHS includes the building of Community-Based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) compounds, district and regional hospitals, the elevation of some hospitals to the status of teaching hospitals and even the use of drones for medicine delivery but the shortfalls persist. Training and recruitment issues and their concomitant brain drain constitute one of the biggest challenges to healthcare delivery in Ghana. Currently, in Ghana, there are many people who have been trained in various health facilities as health professionals yet have remained unemployed for several years. The GHS notes that "Ghana faces a double burden of disease. There is a high prevalence of communicable diseases, including malaria, HIV/Aids, tuberculosis (TB) and diarrhoea as well as a rising incidence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as cardiovascular disease, cancers, chronic respiratory disease, diabetes mellitus and sickle cell diseases. Each year, over 86,000 Ghanaians are estimated to have died from lifestyle diseases with over half of these being under the age of 70."¹⁴ It is clear that Ghana is far away from meeting its health care and health delivery goals.

While health care provision in the country is inadequate, proper education for Ghanaians could forestall the situation where Ghanaian people hesitate to take advantage of the little that is available. It is not that those who manage the country do not know that there are health needs that must be addressed but that they are not proactive in prioritising health delivery for the people. Again, it is not as if they do not know that it is better to be proactive, or as if they do not know how to be proactive, it is mainly a question of priority on the part of the central government. The central government may have reasons this is so but that does not diminish or take away the need.

Ghanaians, in this case, may be guilty of taking minimal care of themselves through such irresponsible actions as eating junk food, polluting their minds by watching useless TV and social media programmes, newspapers and magazines, or accepting as normal the blaring and senseless noise in the name of "all night prayers" coming from churches located in residential areas. People are often not mindful that these bad choices are health-compromising behaviours.

The situation may be worse for religious people who often neglect to pursue physical, mental and spiritual health for themselves. From demonic attacks to drug and alcohol abuse to the neglect of exercise and the pursuit of inordinate wealth, there are numerous threats to the healthy life of the Ghanaian. Oftentimes, it is when people experience physical sickness that the desire to obtain healing arises. In that case, most people would not care whether healing comes from a doctor who practices orthodox medicine, a traditional healer who uses herbs, or a minister of faith healing.

Christian Salvation and Good Health

¹³ Ramsey et al, *The Miracles and the Resurrection*, 42.

¹⁴ Key Health Challenges in Ghana, *The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants* (Accra: ACCA, 2013).

How does Christian salvation impact health? Christian salvation is transformational. The salvation message of Jesus includes the transformation of the mind, body, and soul.¹⁵ Jesus' preaching, teaching and healing were aimed at transforming the whole person into his image. Holistic healing and for that matter health care delivery, from the perspective of the Christian religion, therefore requires an understanding of the purpose of life itself. It is only when people understand the purpose of their lives that they are able to relate appropriately with Jesus which in turn enhances their healing.

For some Ghanaian Christians, a positive confession of health and life based on God's word is a great source of healing and health (Ps 118: 17 & Jer 29:11). This is, however, debatable. Some Bible students reading these same passages may come to a different conclusion. Through the Spirit of God, Satan's corrupting, enslaving, and sinful-bonding hold on people is broken as an integral part of the gospel of the kingdom, a gospel of liberation and healing (see Lk 4:18f). This is further supported by Jesus' healing of a paralytic in Mark 2 and its parallels. Jesus implies in Mark 2:10 that physical healing is a sign of spiritual healing. Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic and when his opponents protested that only God could forgive sins, he appealed to his messianic authority to further order the paralytic to rise up, take up his mat, and go home. This is because the real "human distress is sin in the human heart."¹⁶

The point is that, if unrelated to eternal life in Christ, "laying on of hands, anointing with oil, even prayer for the sick, can have no meaning or purpose at all."¹⁷ Said differently, Christian healing must be ministered and administered always in the context of the gospel of Christ crucified and risen with confession and absolution, in faith in the word of God in pursuit of God's ultimate salvation.¹⁸ When God declared, "I am Jehovah Rapha, the Lord who heals you" in Exodus 15:26, God was probably not pointing to physical healing only. God was referring to salvation, healing of the human predicament of bondage to sin. That is why the blood of Jesus, responsible for the representative atoning sacrifice, procures eternal life for the one who believes. As Hebrews 9:22 puts it, without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sin.

It is not for nothing that Jesus bled during the passion in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he was severely beaten by the Roman soldiers and in the Sanhedrin, the crown of thorns laid on his head caused him to bleed, the scourging after the trial made him bleed, he carried the rugged cross on his bleeding head, he was nailed on the cross and again bled from the spear that was thrust into his side. The atonement removes human sins and restores humanity to the image of God. That is holistic healing. Charles B. Manda even goes as far as to argue that healing is linked with reconciliation as a pastoral mandate.¹⁹

In Mark 5:26, Jesus did what the physicians could not do but never condemned the physicians for their practice. Nor did he condemn the woman for visiting the physicians. Why then do some Christians give the impression that medical practice and Christian healing are mutually exclusive? It is reported that in the early church, the Council of Nicaea in 325 authorised the construction of hospitals to care for the sick. Many church fathers such as Clement and Origen of Alexandria, Irenaeus of Lyon in France and Augustine of Hippo are all on record as having commented at different times on the healing ministry of the church as part of the proclamation of the gospel.

African Christianity seems to affirm this strongly but brings on board a baggage that seems to distort things quite substantially. The African concept of illness and health embodies the social, spiritual, physical and mental dimensions.²⁰ In traditional African societies, mental and psychological manifestations of illness are often understood as "a disruption in the natural order of humans' interactions with the spirit world, or, depending on the specific religion, lack of appropriate connections with God or the Supreme Being".²¹ Furthermore, illness tends to have social causes and social impact on the

¹⁵ Ramsey et al, *The Miracles and the Resurrection*, 9.

¹⁶ Ramsey et al, *The Miracles and the Resurrection*, 53.

¹⁷ Ramsey et al, *The Miracles and the Resurrection*, 63.

¹⁸ Ramsey et al, *The Miracles and the Resurrection*, 63.

¹⁹ Charles, B. Manda, "Healing and Reconciliation as a Pastoral Mandate in African Christianity," in *Anthology of African Christianity*, ed. Isabel Apawo Phiri, Dietrich Werner, and Chammah J. Kaunda (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2016), 1159–63.

²⁰ Nicole, M. Monteiro and Diana J. Wall, "African Dance as Healing Modality Throughout the Diaspora: The Use of Ritual and Movement to Work Through Trauma," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 4, no. 6 (September 2011), 234.

²¹ Monteiro and Wall, "African Dance as Healing Modality Throughout the Diaspora: The Use of Ritual and Movement to Work Through Trauma," 236.

individual's relationship with the community and the world of the spirits.²² The social dimension of ailment has given rise, in Africa to the prevalence of superstition and stigma in the management of infectious, congenital, and unexplained diseases. But what should Christian healing look like?

Christian Healing as *dagbe* in the Eve Context

In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught his disciples to seek first the kingdom of heaven and his righteousness and every other thing shall be added unto them (Matt. 6:33). He meant to say that the kingdom of heaven he offers is a holistic salvation for the human person body, soul and spirit. It is an offer of life in God. This offer embodies holistic well-being for the one who accepts it. In the Eve context, it is similar to an offer of *dagbe*, which is a state of perfect well-being beyond which no improvement could be sought. It is similar to the Hebrew *shalom* which became a daily greeting. *dagbe* is thus a cultural resource capable of fully conveying the meaning and benefits of Christian salvation to the Eve person as healing of body, soul and spirit.

Christian healing is the manifestation of God's creative power of love in that God in Jesus, creates the believer anew. By the same token, Christian healing embodies stewardship of the body, mind and heart, meaning that it operates within the sphere of the believer's ultimate relationship with God. The holistic understanding of healing, for the Christian, implies that the kingdom of God encounters the old creation and transforms and restores it, which is an invitation and access to God's kingdom and its wholeness. Christian salvation and Christian healing are simply inseparable. Youdit Tariku Feyessa has observed from the context of Ethiopia that political expediency tends to frustrate the African church's ability to minister healing and hope.²³ This is also true in the Ghanaian context, where it is common knowledge that the church is gradually losing its voice as the "conscience of society" because of political expediency.

There is a sense in which the Bible claims that Adam is the head of fallen humanity (Rom. 5:12-14) and that Christ is the head of redeemed humanity (Rom. 5:15-17). In this regard, Christian healing amounts to the "exchange of the character of Adam for the character of Jesus."²⁴ This exchange, in a sense, is the resolution of stresses that plague the lives of the believers to enable them to live themselves as they learn to live with God.

But Christian healing is not magical and it is also devoid of incantations. Christian healing employs God's authority and power to comfort and restore the sick to health or cast out demons. Christian healing is an invitation to restoration and reconciliation, a healing of the body, soul and spirit, which is primarily deliverance from ailment, loneliness, stress and alienation from God. In this regard, praying becomes a conversation with God in which believers trade their diseases, trauma, or burden of sin for God's grace and peace. In the final analysis, the believer is set free from the seven deadly sins of pride, envy, sloth, avarice, gluttony and lust, to enable the believer to bear the fruit of the Spirit such as love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, humility and self-control (Gal. 5).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Christian religion has a lot to offer in addressing the ever-rising challenges of healthcare delivery in Ghana through some of the following means:

1. The intensification of medical missions of various church denominations across the country. This can be arranged to include the promotion of well-organised prayer camps where properly trained and licensed counsellors and clinical psychologists serve to guide people. In addition, the provision of specialised mental health and counselling services attached to prayer camps will prevent abuse of vulnerable clients and promote ministerial care.
2. Healing and deliverance services in churches must be conducted in civilised manner to prevent human rights violations and enhance the administration of genuine healing "miracles", signs and wonders for

²² Monteiro and Wall, "African Dance as Healing Modality Throughout the Diaspora: The Use of Ritual and Movement to Work Through Trauma," 236.

²³ Youdit Tariku Feyessa, "In Search of Cura Vitae: A Theology of Healing and Hope for Ethiopia," *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 34, no. 1 (2022): 50–61.

²⁴ Al. Durrance, "What Is Christian Healing?," in *A Ministry of Christian Healing*, ed. Lance Elliot (OSL, 2019).

the benefit of society. The dignity of those seeking the full benefits of Christian salvation must be protected so that they are not subjected to abuse in the name of ministry.

3. Christians must come together to call attention to the dangers of noise pollution arising from noisy worship services by churches located in residential areas. The example of prospective military chaplains found to be deaf without their knowledge because of the effect of blaring loudspeakers in their churches exemplifies the personal damage caused in churches through Christian indiscipline and superstition.
4. Christian education for children, youth, men, women and the aged as well as the dying must be intentionally intensified as discipleship functions in all churches. Christian education in Ghana must address the problem of stigma, unhealthy cultural practices and misleading theologies (of sects, cults and misguided Christian “ministries”). The problem of false prophets, fake men and women of God, the rising syndrome of celebrity pastors and the challenge of compulsory wealth Christianity must also be addressed to avoid the exploitation of worshippers by the ministers of Christian services.

CONCLUSION

Through literature study, especially by means of the exposition of selected Gospel passages, this paper argued that the Christian gospel is a health message, a whole package that bestows *ɔagbe* on everyone who believes. This explains why Jesus’ kingdom gospel included preaching, teaching and healing to meet the needs of the spirit, the soul and the body respectively. Christian healing is often accompanied by supernatural cures which are not meant to impress people to be convinced that Jesus is the Son of God, but which prove the manifestation of the kingdom of God in power and glory. In the Ghana-Eve context, this holistic gospel of Christian salvation amounts to the offer of *ɔagbe*, a state of total well-being in body, soul and spirit, in harmony with nature and in equilibrium with God and all of creation. This is the gospel that Jesus offers and it is not in conflict with any human attempt through orthodox medicine to deliver health care to people. Orthodox medicine as part of divine providence collaborates with the benefits of Christian salvation to ensure holistic well-being for people, which is *ɔagbe*.

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