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EARLY BRITISH PENTECOSTALS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO HEALTH, HEALING AND MEDICINE.

Neil Hudson

As with the majority of Pentecostal doctrines, the accepted teaching concerning the expectation of divine healing was a product of Christians in the late nineteenth century rediscovering elements of what they believed to be New Testament Christianity.¹ Early Pentecostals recognized that their experiences had emerged from the developments of the nineteenth century. Frank Bartleman, one of the earliest witnesses and reporters of the spiritual outpouring in Azusa Street, wrote,

The present Pentecostal manifestation did not break out in a moment, like a huge prairie fire, and set the world on fire. In fact no work of God ever appears that way. There is a necessary time for preparation... men may wonder where it came from, not being conscious of the preparation, but there is always such.²

The practice of divine healing became of central significance to Pentecostals in the twentieth century, particularly in the context of the evangelism of the main revivalists.³ Thousands were attracted to their meetings by the offer of healing. For Pentecostals, this emphasis on healing was never, and could never be, seen as secondary or a distraction from the evangelistic message. Since it was widely accepted that healing

¹ The standard works on the roots of Pentecostalism are D. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987) and V. Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997²). However, it needs to be noted that there has been little work on the specific roots of British Pentecostalism.

² F. Bartleman, *Azusa Street: The Roots of Modern-day Pentecostalism* (Plainfield: Logos International, 1980 [1925]), p. 44.

³ I. Randall, *Evangelical Experiences* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), p. 225.

was provided for in the atonement,⁴ the offer of healing was part of the salvation message itself. The “full gospel” consisted of Jesus being proclaimed, and accepted, as Savior, Baptizer, Healer and Coming King. A natural and logical implication of this doctrine was that the use of “natural means,” i.e. medicine and doctors, should be eschewed in favor of “supernatural means” of healing.

In this paper, the roots of British Pentecostal teaching regarding healing will be traced, along with the relationship between medicine and faith. The paper will conclude with implications for contemporary Pentecostal pastoral practice.

1. The Development of Pentecostal Teaching Concerning Divine Healing.

In general, British Pentecostal theology developed from the nineteenth century Holiness teaching of radical evangelicals. The British Pentecostal understanding of healing emerged from a mixture of A. B. Simpson’s belief in healing being available as a result of the atonement and Alexander Dowie’s pneumatological development of this teaching.

1.1 The Influence of Albert Benjamin Simpson (1843-1919)

Many Holiness teachers had arrived at the conclusion that as Christ’s death had provided deliverance from sin, so his atonement would also provide deliverance from sickness. By propagating teaching that linked a secondary experience of the Spirit with power to live a sanctified life, the Holiness teaching also, by implication, provided “a theological milieu for divine healing.”⁵ This teaching was transatlantic in scope, its main proponents being Charles Cullis, Kelso Carter and William Boardman.⁶

⁴ William Kay, “Approaches to Healing in British Pentecostalism,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14 (1999), pp. 113-25 (113) notes that the Elim Pentecostal Church is the exception within British Pentecostalism in not holding to this doctrinal position as part of its official statement of faith.

⁵ P. G. Chappell, “Healing Movements,” in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. S. Burgess, G. B. McGee, P. H. Alexander (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 353-74 (357).

⁶ However, it also included European influences. Boardman published the book, *The Lord That Healeth Thee* in 1881 after extensive consultation with the Swiss Holiness teacher, Otto Stockmeyer. Boardman’s influence was mediated through the Keswick Convention and through the establishment of Healing homes where

The transatlantic connection found its way into British Pentecostalism most directly through the ministry of A. B. Simpson, founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, via Alexander Boddy, the father of British Pentecostalism. Simpson was a typical product of the nineteenth century evangelical developments. Nienkirchen, in the standard work on Simpson, suggested that Simpson's "personal spiritual pilgrimage and multifaceted ministry embodied several of the major currents of spiritual awakening that determined the course of evangelical Protestantism throughout the second half of the nineteenth century."⁷ Having been totally persuaded of the need to enter a "higher and deeper" life of full sanctification in 1874 after reading Boardman's *The Higher Christian Life*, he added to this basic premise an expectation of divine healing after being prayed for by Charles Cullis in 1881.⁸

Two years later, he established a healing home and after visiting Boardman's healing home in London in 1885 returned to America to found the Christian Alliance which would hold to the tenets of the "gospel of full salvation."⁹ These tenets included the corollary that if one had total faith that God would heal sickness supernaturally, to rely on medicine would be to live in denial of that faith. This teaching attracted scathing condemnation. In 1890, Grattan Guinness publicly blamed Simpson for the tragic deaths of three young missionaries working in the Sudan, because, under Simpson's influence, they had refused to take medicine.¹⁰ Nonetheless, for Simpson, this teaching was clear and logical. Firstly, if sickness was the result of the Fall, it must be included in the atonement of Christ.¹¹ Secondly, scripture only gave examples of spiritual means of healing, as opposed to natural means. Any other method of dealing with sickness, other than anointing with oil and

people would be invited to go and find a "faith" cure whilst away from their ordinary environments. The first was established in London in 1882 (Chappell, "Healing Movements," p. 360).

⁷ C. W. Nienkirchen, *A. B. Simpson and the Pentecostal Movement* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992), p. 1.

⁸ Nienkirchen, *A. B. Simpson*, p. 13; Dayton, 122-124

⁹ Nienkirchen, *A. B. Simpson*, p. 15.

¹⁰ Nienkirchen, *A. B. Simpson*, p. 18.

¹¹ A. B. Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1915² [1888]), p. 31.

prayer, was perceived as being invalid for the Christian.¹² For Simpson, the issue was simply whether one could take God at his word as presented in scripture,¹³ and whether one was able to stand against an increasingly rationalistic age which was “constantly endeavoring to eliminate all traces of direct supernatural working from the universe.”¹⁴ To hold to divine healing was to stand against the secularizing trends within society.

Nienkirchen has shown the Pentecostal debt to Simpson by pointing to T. B. Barratt’s connection with the Christian and Missionary Alliance when he received the baptism in the Spirit in 1907, prior to him commencing his world-wide Pentecostal ministry. He also has highlighted Aimee Semple McPherson’s appropriation of the “Foursquare Gospel” leitmotif and George Jeffreys’ reference to Simpson in *Healing Rays*.¹⁵ Jeffreys’ revivalist ministry would be the catalyst for the formation of the British Elim Pentecostal Church.

However, Simpson’s effect on the establishment of foundational Pentecostal doctrine was far greater than these isolated incidents would suggest. The influence was two-fold: Simpson’s articles were used within both the *Elim Evangel*¹⁶ and the *Redemption Tidings*,¹⁷ but the lasting influence was through Boddy’s ministry.

Boddy had prayed regularly for the sick since he had received an overwhelming spiritual experience in 1892.¹⁸ The basis for his healing ministry was set out in one of his pre-Pentecostal “Roker Tract”

¹² Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing*, pp. 20, 67.

¹³ Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing*, p. 39.

¹⁴ Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing*, p. 68.

¹⁵ G. Jeffreys, *Healing Rays* (London: Elim Publishing, 1932), p. 332.

¹⁶ A. B. Simpson, “The Secret of Divine Healing,” *Elim Evangel*, February 28, 1930, p. 132.

¹⁷ A. B. Simpson, “A Talk on Divine Healing,” *Redemption Tidings*, July 31, 1936, p. 13. Readers are also recommended to read Simpson’s “The Gospel of Healing,” in *Redemption Tidings*, November 1925, p. 6. The magazine of the Pentecostal Missionary Union, *Flames of Fire*, also reprinted Simpson’s articles, cf. P. Kay, “The Pentecostal Missionary Union and the Fourfold Gospel with Baptism in the Holy Spirit and Speaking in Tongues: A New Power for Missions?” (An unpublished paper, n.d.), p. 11.

¹⁸ A. A. Boddy, “The Anointing with Oil,” *Confidence*, April-June 1922, pp. 21-22 (21). cf. W. Kay, “Approaches to Healing,” p. 114 suggests that his healing ministry began after his wife recovered from asthma in 1900. This was clearly significant to the Boddys, but the ministry had begun before that time.

publications, "Health in Christ." This continued to be used as an outline of his teaching concerning faith and its relationship to healing. Echoes of Simpson's teaching are clearly heard within Boddy's ministry. The underlying teaching linked the atonement with healing, Boddy noted that "on the cross he bore our sins and on the cross he bore our sicknesses."¹⁹

In 1910, Boddy outlined the process of receiving divine healing: "Get rid of evil and be filled with the life of the Lord."²⁰ This appears to be a conflation of Simpson's suggestions: "See the truth of healing within scriptures, get rid of spiritual difficulties, have faith and draw your life from the Lord."²¹ Despite Simpson's public anti-Pentecostal teaching, Boddy valued his teaching. During Boddy's tour of the United States of America, he was welcomed by Simpson in New York.²² When Simpson visited Sunderland in 1911, Boddy commended his teaching warmly, describing Simpson as "our beloved and honored brother," with whom he "had the joy of happy fellowship...in All Saints' vicarage and at Pastor Scroggie's home."²³

Boddy believed that to overcome sickness one had to:

- 1) Recognize that because one is by nature a sinner, one is liable to succumb to the attacks of the enemy.
- 2) Realize, however, that because of Christ's death one is dead to sin.
- 3) Realize that through Christ's death, one is saved in body, soul and spirit.
- 4) Trust God for divine health and whatever the symptoms may seem to indicate "hold on to" the healing.
- 5) Recognize that symptoms of illness are from the devil.²⁴

He illustrated this belief system in two ways. The first is through the words of a hymn and through the example of what to do when one had a common cold.

Claim the promise of His healing, "It is done,"
Trust, without a sign or feeling, "It is done,"

¹⁹ A. A. Boddy, "Health in Christ," *Confidence*, August 1910, pp. 175-79 (175).

²⁰ A. A. Boddy, "Faith Healing," *Confidence*, January 1910, pp. 8-11, 14-15 (10).

²¹ Simpson, "A Talk on Divine Healing," p. 13.

²² A. A. Boddy, "Across the Atlantic," *Confidence*, September 1909, pp. 197-200 (199).

²³ A. A. Boddy, "Sunderland," *Confidence*, April 1911, pp. 88-89 (88).

²⁴ Boddy, "Health in Christ," p. 179.

Hark! a voice from heaven proclaiming, "It is done,"
 Faith repeats the echo, claiming, "It is done,"
 Hear the message from the throne,
 Claim the promise, doubting one;
 God has spoken, "It is done,"
 Faith has answered, "It is done,"
 Prayer is over, praise begun,
 Hallelujah, "It is done."²⁵

The significant elements in the hymn stressed the claiming of the promise from God, trust that did not depend on signs of vindication or feeling but one based in God's word.

The example of dealing with a common cold attempted to bring the teaching down to the readers' common experience. Boddy suggested that the following should be appropriated by sick Christians:

- 1) Know that you are in Christ.
- 2) In Christ there is no disease, you are bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh.
- 3) A cold is not within the will of God because it cannot bring glory to Him.
- 4) A cold must, therefore, be from Satan.
- 5) Even though Satan makes you sneeze or cough, hold on to the truth that you are whole.
- 6) Satan will flee and the cold will vanish, either instantaneously or gradually.

Despite the final concessive clause undermining the total structure of the argument, he claimed that a number of ailments had been cured. These ranged from relatively trivial cases, such as headaches, to life-threatening cases of cancer and diabetes, as well as easily-verifiable cases of "pain in childbirth." These had "all given way alike as the member of Christ has rejected Satan's lies."²⁶

The natural implication of Boddy's teaching was that one should dispense with orthodox means of treating illness. Boddy accepted that medical staff were necessary, but only for those with insufficient faith to claim healing directly from God. However, he acknowledged that, at times, he had used them himself to cure various ailments, suggesting that

²⁵ Boddy, "Health in Christ," p. 177.

²⁶ Boddy, "Health in Christ," p. 172.

“only a few patients out of hundreds have faith enough to lean only on the Lord. It must be Holy Ghost-given Faith and Spirit-given Light.”²⁷

Taylor has commented on the similarity between Boddy’s teaching on “the denial of sense perception” with Christian Science practitioners before him and Kenyon’s writing and the subsequent school of Positive Confession that followed him.²⁸ He is clearly correct in identifying such similarities.

1.2 The Influence of John Alexander Dowie (1847-1907)

Dayton has concluded that Dowie’s radical proclamation of healing was not a specifically new theology, but came out of the Holiness themes that had permeated nineteenth century evangelicalism.²⁹ However, Dowie did extend the teaching into a more pneumatological direction. For Dowie, healing was an indication of the presence of the power of the Spirit. This, combined with the teaching of healing being in the atonement, became the dominating themes in British Pentecostalism.

Between 1900 and 1907, Dowie attracted international renown as the founder and leader of Zion City, a Christian utopian society established on 6,800 acres of farmland, north of Chicago. Increasingly eccentric and unstable, in 1902, Dowie pronounced himself “Elijah the Restorer,” the one who would restore apostolic Christianity as a preparation for the second coming. His outlandish claims and radical actions caused most in the Holiness movement to disassociate themselves from him or his teaching.³⁰ However, his influence on Pentecostalism was notable through his publications, his public ministry and the number of Pentecostal leaders who came from Zion City.³¹

Dowie’s practice of total reliance on God for healing was first put into practice during the time of his third pastorate in Sydney, Australia. During 1875, his parish was being ravaged by a plague that had claimed thirty members of the parish. It was while Dowie was praying for a young woman dying from the plague, that a doctor commented on God’s

²⁷ Boddy, “Faith Healing,” p. 8.

²⁸ M. Taylor, “Publish and Be Blessed” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1994), pp. 268, 296-97.

²⁹ Dayton, *Theological Roots*, p. 137

³⁰ Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, pp. 82-83.

³¹ 500 Pentecostal leaders are said to have come from Zion City. See Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition*, p. 138.

mysterious ways. Reacting violently, Dowie answered, "That is the devil's work and it is time we called on Him who came to destroy the work of the devil.... No will of God sends such cruelty."³² With that Dowie prayed, the woman was healed and his ministry of public healing was launched.

Dowie believed that healing should be instantaneous and based his theology on two basic presuppositions: firstly, Jesus is the same today as he was in biblical days; secondly, disease is God's enemy, never having been part of his will. It is, therefore, an affront to him. Logically then, it was absurd to believe that Christians should accept that illness could be part of God's plan for their lives. Therefore, it was necessary for Christians to claim their healing from God. And if having done so, they remained unwell, he assumed it to be due to a lack of faith on their behalf. Faith, not medicine, was to be the only remedy open for Christians to use as a remedy for all illnesses.

The title of his famous sermon, "Doctors, Drugs and Devils: The Foes of Christ" could leave one in no doubt as to the correlation in Dowie's own mind. Within the sermon, he stated categorically, "Doctors, as a profession, are directly inspired by the Devil."³³ This nuanced view of divine healing was not shaken, even when his own daughter died in a house fire. For him, it was not a terrible accident, but an example of "how Satan could penetrate when one let one's guard down the slightest bit."³⁴ Although Dowie's life ended in ignominy,³⁵ a victim of his own misguided delusions, his influence was notable within British Pentecostalism through the work of the Cantels and the ministry of Smith Wigglesworth. The significance of both was that they were key leaders within early British Pentecostalism.

³² D. W. Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 124.

³³ Quoted in Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel*, p. 119.

³⁴ Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel*, p. 130.

³⁵ He was accused of financial misappropriation and having contemplated polygamy. R. M. Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 72. E. L. Blumhofer, "John Alexander Dowie," in *Dictionary of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, pp. 248-49 wrote, "He died in 1907, disgraced and ignored by most of the thousands who had acclaimed him."

Harry Cantel had been one of Dowie's workers in Zion City when he married Margaret Fielding, the daughter of an elder in Zion City.³⁶ They came to Britain in 1890, where they evangelized and led a small church. In 1907, after visiting America and receiving the baptism in the Spirit,³⁷ he became one of the early Pentecostal leaders.³⁸ The Cantel's church in Islington was a center for early Pentecostal national gatherings. They also produced a magazine outlining their teaching.³⁹ His teaching was clear: faith was central to the Christian life and was to be exercised in every area of one's life, including illness. Consequently, when he was ill with peritonitis and in need of an operation, he refused; the result was that he died. Boddy's comment, framing his death in the context of spiritual warfare, reveals early Pentecostal understanding of this stance:

He has died like a brave soldier facing the foe. If he had been operated on and then died, he might have suffered from great darkness of soul. He loved not his life unto the death, and so we trust is among the overcomers who will sit on Christ's Throne.⁴⁰

The second, and more enduring, indirect influence of Dowie was through the ministry of Smith Wigglesworth. Wigglesworth, dubbed the "Apostle of Faith," was to become a legendary figure within Pentecostalism on account of his healing ministry. However, this emphasis on healing had begun long before his Pentecostal experience of 1907. In the late 1880s, a group of Christians, committed to the doctrine of divine healing and meeting in Leeds, invited Wigglesworth, who had hitherto been attending their services regularly, to lead the meetings while the leaders attended the Keswick Convention. It was during these services that Wigglesworth experienced for the first time Christians being healed as a result of his ministry. This encouraged him to

³⁶ D. Gee, *These Men I Knew* (Nottingham: Assemblies of God, 1980), p. 31. Significantly this fact was not revealed in the obituary to Harry Cantel: A. H. Boddy, "Pastor Cantel at Rest," *Confidence*, September 1910, pp. 204-207. In 1913, Boddy visited the Fieldings who still resided in Zion City.

³⁷ Boddy, "Pastor Cantel at Rest," p. 205.

³⁸ D. Gee, *The Pentecostal Movement* (London: Victory Press, 1941), p. 5.

³⁹ The magazine was initially called *A Book of Remembrance*, and it became *The Overcoming Life*. All the magazines produced during this first five years of British Pentecostal life were secondary to *Confidence* in content and circulation.

⁴⁰ Introductory comments to "Pastor Cantel at Rest," p. 204.

incorporate prayer for healing in his own church in Bradford.⁴¹ The group in Leeds had been influenced by Dowie and became part of his world-wide network of healing communities after his tour of England in 1900. It was at one of these meetings that Polly, Smith Wigglesworth's wife, was baptized.⁴²

Wigglesworth was unashamedly and uncompromisingly averse to Christians using the medical services. For him, sickness was Satanic in origin and needed to be dealt with by the power of the Spirit. If Satan was the originator of every specific illness, it seemed absurd to believe that one could defeat him by means of a drug. At the Sunderland Convention in 1912, he gave personal testimony of how he had been healed of appendicitis. Confined to bed because of the condition, he had just been informed by a doctor (it is interesting that a doctor had been called) that he must have an operation when a young man came into his room, "handled him roughly, and said, 'Come out thou demon! Come out of this man,' and that instant the demon did come out and I was perfectly well, that instant."⁴³ That Wigglesworth felt free to acknowledge that the appendicitis had been caused by a demon would indicate that he did not feel that the demon had been able to take control of his body due to his own deficient spirituality. The demonic activity was part of the spiritual warfare that all Christians were inevitably engaged in. Consequently, for Wigglesworth, the answer to illness was simply to have faith in God and the Bible.

In 1922, reports of his international ministry appeared in *Confidence*. In Denmark, after praying for people, some fell over on the platform, others "walked away as though in a dream," while others were "drunk on the new wine." People were healed from lameness, cancer and

⁴¹ J. Hywel-Davies, *Baptised by Fire: The History of Smith Wigglesworth* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), p. 51

⁴² D. Cartwright, "Some Evangelists" (Unpublished manuscript, n.d.). John Carter, *A Full Life* (London: Evangel Press, 1979), pp. 26-27 has an incidental reference to the influence that Dowie had on early Pentecostals through the earlier visits he had made to England. In 1912, he visited the Sunderland Convention and was given accommodation in the home of two elderly spinsters, members of Boddy's congregation. On arrival they informed him that he could not be expected to be served with pork or bacon as they were followers of Dowie. They had been persuaded by his teaching when he had come to Sunderland some years earlier.

⁴³ "Press Reports of the Sunderland Convention," *Confidence*, June 1912, pp. 125-31, 135-36 (131).

paralysis.⁴⁴ In Australia in the same year, there were several instantaneous healings, of kidney troubles, loss of voice, weak eyesight, rheumatics and deafness. However,

[T]here were a few failures, some deaf persons and some almost blind stating that they could not admit any improvement. "Strengthen your faith in the Lord" was the advice given to them by Mr. Wigglesworth.⁴⁵

Part of Wigglesworth's legendary status developed due to his eccentric healing methodology. For example, the Elim Pentecostal Church was unhappy about some of the methods employed in his services and for a time would not allow him to minister in the Elim churches because of this. At times, he required the minister of the church to repeat things he said. Henderson, Elim's Field Superintendent, called this practice "absolutely tommyrot."⁴⁶ They were also suspicious of his practice of "wholesale healing,"⁴⁷ whereby all the sick were asked to stand and lay hands on themselves.⁴⁸ At other times, he encouraged "congregational healing" whereby all would be invited to pray with him for a particular individual "in order to see the demonstration of God's power."⁴⁹ When he prayed for the sick, he could be very rough; Gee observed, "...very often he made people run up and down aisles, and even out into the street to 'act' faith. His violent laying on of hands would almost send the seekers flying."⁵⁰

⁴⁴ A. Lewin, "The very Same Jesus," *Confidence*, April-June 1922, pp. 22-23, 26-27 (23). A wider question is raised by the cases where people claimed healing of cancer, as to how they could be so sure whilst at the service. Although there are many extant testimonies of people who were healed and proceeded to live a healthy life, those that reverted back to illness or who were not healed as claimed were not documented.

⁴⁵ "Healings in Australia," *Confidence*, April-June 1922, pp. 27-28.

⁴⁶ A letter of W. Henderson to E. J. Phillips (December 26, 1928). Phillips was the Secretary-General within Elim.

⁴⁷ A letter of W. Henderson to E. J. Phillips (December 6, 1928).

⁴⁸ S. Wigglesworth, *Ever Increasing Faith* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971 [1924]), p. 59.

⁴⁹ S. H. Frodsham, *Smith Wigglesworth: Apostle of Faith* (London: Elim Publishing, 1949), pp. 41, 72; C. Whittaker, *Seven Pentecostal Pioneers* (Basingstoke: Marshalls, 1983), p. 38.

⁵⁰ Gee, *These Men*, pp. 90-91.

The other reason for him being revered was his undoubted success in seeing some people recover. His preaching and approach were simple, unqualified and uncomplicated.

The teaching of the two streams, that of Wigglesworth's simple exhortation to have faith and Boddy's more Christological connection between Christ, salvation and sickness, coalesced in the same conviction: If a Christian was sick, they were being attacked by Satan and the victory could be, and should be, won.

During the first twenty years of British Pentecostalism, the place of medicine was clear. Medicine was only acceptable for those who were unable to claim sufficient faith for total healing; total reliance upon the Lord was deemed to be the norm for Spirit-filled Christians. This became the standard response of the healing evangelists to medicine. Aimee Semple McPherson wrote,

Doctors, hospitals and sanitariums, with their wonderful facilities, are just the thing for those who have need of them or have not the living faith in Jesus' promises to make them whole. But we who believe do claim the God-given privilege of praying to our Lord for healing, thus escaping the knife and the pain.⁵¹

Similarly the British evangelist, Fred Squire, wrote,

Nowhere in God's Word does He tell us to resort to earthly means. Of course, if you cannot exercise faith in God for your healing, then the only thing left is to resort to earthly means.⁵²

2. The Relationship between the Spirit and Medicine

This understanding of the relationship between sickness, Satan and the Christian was generally unquestioned, at least in print. The nearest that Boddy came to softening the view was after the death of Harry Cantel. He did not use Cantel's death to universalize the position of the rejection of medical aid, but counseled his readers to be individually persuaded of the Lord's will for their situations. After using the image of Cantel dying a martyr's death, he cautioned, "Each must judge for

⁵¹ A. S. McPherson, *Divine Healing Sermons* (n.p., n.d.), p. 92.

⁵² F. H. Squire, *The Healing Power of Christ* (Southend on Sea: Full Gospel Publishing House, 1935), p. 29.

himself, and not by the action of anyone else. The Lord will guide His people.”⁵³

The most poignant attempt to interact with the dichotomy between faith and medicine was presented by a missionary, William Burton, in 1915. Having gone to South Africa to prepare to work in the Congo, he reported that 45 South African Pentecostal missionaries had died of malaria because they had refused to take quinine.⁵⁴ On another occasion, in the midst of Bible conventions in Johannesburg, he wrote, “My head is heavy and my heart also, and it is as though I were in a maze. With one and another I have been fighting the devil and malaria for days.”⁵⁵ In particular, he spoke of the death of Bowie, the leader of the Pentecostal Mission, who had been suddenly attacked by malaria. He was 27 years old, married and “a brilliant interpreter of English and Dutch.”⁵⁶

He wrote,

We prayed and rebuked. We did all we could. I fed him, washed him, prayed—yes fought in prayer—for hours, kept him in bed when he was delirious—spent nights and days, fanned him for hours; 600 or 800 Spirit filled saints prayed for his deliverance, and then, O brother, I cannot unburden myself to many, but feel I can write to you. I have just come back from preaching the Gospel to the crowd gathered around his open grave. *He was faithful to the end. He wouldn't touch a drop of anything medicinal.* I and five other brothers carried him to his last resting place, and I feel just heart-broken over it all. I feel it was all a horrible defeat.... I cannot believe that God wished to take him home.... The “Pentecostal Mission” death roll is terrible. Nine have recently died, refusing quinine to the last, and confident that God would raise them up. Four on one station in Swazi Land since Miss Taylor died there. One man's temperature went up to 110°, and his life is practically burned out. Another faithful preacher is a delirious maniac in hospital, and his condition is most precarious.⁵⁷

Burton's heart-wrenching confusion is heightened because he believed that he was walking within the will of God, seeing many nationals being healed, and yet was powerless to minister effective

⁵³ Boddy, “Pastor Cantel at Rest,” p. 204.

⁵⁴ M. Moorhead, *Missionary Pioneering in Congo Forests* (Preston: Seed & Sons, 1922), p. 12.

⁵⁵ Moorhead, *Missionary Pioneering*, p. 14.

⁵⁶ Moorhead, *Missionary Pioneering*, p. 15.

⁵⁷ Moorhead, *Missionary Pioneering*, pp. 14-15. Italics are mine.

healing to the missionaries. The issue of staying faithful to the non-medical means of treating illness was clearly a contentious issue amongst the missionaries themselves. Burton continued,

Now these malaria victims are dying, and of course some of the Spirit filled missionaries are taking quinine, and they don't die, and they ask which gives God most glory? To take this stuff and live, or refuse it and die? They declare that man cannot live up North without the quinine. When I look at the little tabloids (which they use) I laugh, as I consider such a thought as that God is supposed to be unable or unwilling to support us without that. *Also I would rather die than disgrace His cause.*⁵⁸

The issue was not resolved, and although British Pentecostal missionaries began to use medical support, as their conscience allowed, officially, the "hard line" was retained.⁵⁹ Certainly, by 1927, Burton was still holding to faith as being the only reaction to illness. Any attempt to use medicine to alleviate illness was deemed to be a symptom of human's desire to be independent from God. Furthermore, he argued that the use of medicine was a practice to be repented of, a work of the flesh, part of a "false system" and would result in the user being destined for "the lake of fire."⁶⁰

This perspective was the logical extension of a belief in healing being in the atonement and as such was generally upheld within the Assemblies of God. Parr,⁶¹ in his work, *Divine Healing*, reiterated the standard teaching to healing and its relationship to the atonement. Although he recognized that medicine could be resorted to in the case of children or, interestingly, with some sicknesses that were not responding to prayer, this was not to assume that the doctrine was faulty, but it was "to spare blame and inconvenience."⁶²

⁵⁸ Moorhead, *Missionary Pioneering*, p. 15. Italics are mine.

⁵⁹ P. Kay, "The Pentecostal Missionary Union," p. 14.

⁶⁰ W. Burton, "To Whom Shall We Go?" *Redemption Tidings*, January 1927, pp. 5-6 (6).

⁶¹ John Nelson Parr was the pastor of Bethshan Tabernacle, for many years one of the largest Pentecostal churches in Britain. A key leader within the Assemblies of God he had been the prime mover behind its formation in 1924, and the first editor of *Redemption Tidings*.

⁶² J. N. Parr, *Divine Healing* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1955 [1930]), p. 62. This reference reflects a fear that churches and ministers could place themselves in legal difficulties because of their principles.

By 1952, however, Donald Gee, one of the leaders within the Assemblies of God, was questioning the rigor of the doctrine closely. He acknowledged the “magnificent consistency” of those who had died because of the doctrine, “even if we feel compelled to question their sound judgement.”⁶³ Responding to the pastoral issues of failure and inconsistency of doctrine and experience, he argued,

If a radical doctrinal position is found to be untenable in practice, it calls for proper modification or revision. If it is considered necessary to retain it in its verbal form for the sake of a testimony, then an honourable place must be allowed for those who are prepared to subscribe to it with a reservation of their right of private judgement in its precise application to themselves.⁶⁴

Although this proposed position would have been deemed to be compromise by some of Gee’s Pentecostal forefathers, in reality it was an acknowledgement of what was actually happening amongst many pastors and laity. Aware of the official doctrinal position and the implications, they chose to interpret the implications of such a position as private judgment allowed. For Gee, the gospel did not restrict one’s life, but enhanced it. The implication is that some Pentecostals had narrowed their view of the world to such an extent that in the end they were the poorer for holding on to their doctrinal positions. Gee wrote,

If it be true that trust in God as the Healer of his children automatically shuts them off from all the manifold and merciful means of healing which medical science now makes universally available, then the doctrine of divine healing embodies a doubtful privilege.⁶⁵

3. A Pentecostal Third Way: Maintaining the Tension

Although the views expressed above have been the primary approaches to healing within British Pentecostalism, there has been another theological approach to healing which may provide lessons for contemporary Pentecostals grappling with issues of healing and theodicy. As early as 1915, Jonathan Paul, the German Pentecostal leader, presented an alternative to the rigorism of prevailing views of divine

⁶³ D. Gee, *Trophimus I Left Sick* (London: Elim Publishing, 1952), p. 28.

⁶⁴ Gee, *Trophimus I Left Sick*, p. 29.

⁶⁵ Gee, *Trophimus I Left Sick*, p. 29

healing. His premise was that much of the teaching on divine healing consisted of law, rather than gospel; that in provoking an expectation for healing to take place, people were being burdened with rules, rather than liberated by the teaching of Jesus. He argued that Jesus did not come and condemn people for using medical means of healing, but came and proclaimed that he had come to fulfill the prophecy: "He took our infirmities and bore our weaknesses and by his stripes we are healed."⁶⁶ Paul was clear that to place all of one's hopes in a doctor was an error for the Christian, but he believed that if this needed to be pointed out, then it must be in the context of a message of joy, not condemnation.⁶⁷

He believed that equating all sickness with personal sin meant that one would always play the role of Job's comforters. Not only did he not believe that sickness was inextricably linked to sin, he also recognized that not every sickness could be prayed or believed away. He alluded to Paul's recommendation for Timothy to drink wine because of his digestive problems, rather than explicitly offering prayer or an anointed handkerchief for healing: "No; the apostle knew perfectly well that not every disease is to be got rid of so simply."⁶⁸ Although healing was part of the provision of the atonement, Paul stressed that the "full redemption of our body can only become our possession when our savior comes again."⁶⁹ Therefore, the full redemption of our bodies, which would include total health and healing, is part of our eschatological hope. Paul specifically related this to the reference to this body groaning in the present age in Romans 8:23-24.

This eschatological tension can also be found in George Jeffreys' writings. Jeffreys, the founder of the Elim Pentecostal Church, although a successful evangelist with many healings being attributed to his ministry,⁷⁰ he attempted to walk a tightrope between encouraging people to believe that God could heal and yet explaining why some did not experience full healing. Although he believed that healing was in the atonement, he was aware that there was a need to wait for its full benefits to be enjoyed by all. He widened the discussion away from individuals

⁶⁶ J. Paul, "What Shall We Preach to the Sick (1)," *Confidence*, March 1915, pp. 47-48 (47).

⁶⁷ Paul, "What Shall We Preach (1)," p. 48.

⁶⁸ J. Paul, "What Shall We Preach to the Sick (2)," *Confidence*, April 1915, pp. 73-74 (73).

⁶⁹ Paul, "What Shall We Preach (2)," p. 74.

⁷⁰ See R. E. Darragh, *In Defence of His Word* (London: Elim Publishing, 1932).

and their personal situations, and argued that the atonement reversed the effects of the fall in every area of life—including the creation and the animal kingdom. Just as “the full deliverance from the curse will not take place until Christ takes the throne,”⁷¹ we can claim deliverance from sin and the effects of sin, which would include sickness, but we have to wait for the full benefits.⁷² Therefore, there was not the same antagonism to using medical means to alleviate sickness. He began his treatise on healing by writing,

It is a huge mistake on the part of many devout believers in the truth of Divine Healing to ignore natural healing. Some earnest saints have regarded the work of physicians and nurses who minister in the natural realm as being distinctly evil or carnal.... Such indiscretion has hindered many from taking a stand for the truth, and often resulted in the work of God being brought into disrepute.⁷³

It is important to note that the different emphasis did not hinder an extensive healing ministry, but did mean that the cases of unhealed could be accepted, rather than the individual being excoriated for lack of faith.

4. Conclusion

This eschatological perspective did not find wide acceptance. The Christological and pneumatological models were more favorable to the Pentecostals. However, the position is surely a correct understanding of the relationship between sin, sickness and healing. It has a number of significant and helpful implications:

First, to take this eschatological view means that one does not have to “explain” the benefits of sickness. This approach can be as pastorally inept as exhorting the sick to have more faith.⁷⁴ The fact that we live in

⁷¹ Jeffreys, *Healing Rays*, p. 29. In connection with this he outlines an interesting theology of the environment, “In the present we have to content ourselves with doing all that is in our power to alleviate the sufferings of the burdened creation and pray on behalf of the activities of all men and women who so nobly band themselves under various banners for the protection of the dumb and suffering” (27).

⁷² Jeffreys, *Healing Rays*, p. 37.

⁷³ Jeffreys, *Healing Rays*, p. 6.

⁷⁴ For Pentecostal suggestions of the pastoral benefits of sickness, see K. Warrington, “Major Aspects of Healing within British Pentecostalism,” *Journal*

the “now/not yet” tension means that one does not have to explain individual cases of sickness, certainly not in terms of the worthiness or otherwise of individual spirituality. Sickness happens because of the Fall, and Christ heals as a token of the atonement which will only become fully realized in the eschaton.

Second, one does not need to dismiss symptoms of illness as devilish lies drawing one away from the expectation of healing. One can live a full life without having to revert to a fantasy world denying elements of reality, in truth operating within a worldview that has more in common with Christian Science rather than orthodox Christianity.

Third, the dichotomy between spiritual and natural means of healing can be collapsed. To take medicines is not to deny the reality of the atonement; it is to put issues into the correct perspective. Medicine, belonging to a “natural” order, is part of God’s creation, which, whilst fallen, is still reflective of God’s glory, character and mercy. Therefore, it should be no surprise that medicine, whether in western “scientific” or non-western “natural” forms, will have positive effects on individuals. This should be expected. The value or scope of the atonement is not thereby limited; it is merely to recognize that the fallen world still contains much that is good within it.

Fourth, equally, one can have a framework for healing that is consistent. Boddy acknowledged that his framework for healing did not work; the level of faith required to maintain life without medical means was too great for most, including himself. In the case of Harry Cantel and Pentecostal missionaries, the framework resulted in early deaths from wholly avoidable causes.

Finally, to place one’s personal health in an eschatological setting is to place one in solidarity with the groaning creation. It is increasingly clear that white western Pentecostalism has lost its eschatological hope as life has become more comfortable and the spiritual expectation has been that God will give all we need now. Macchia has pointed out that if sickness and healing is placed in the context of the perpetual “struggle” in Romans 8, then rather than weakness being an alienating feature, it will cause us to remember that our faith is essentially built on future hope, not present reality.⁷⁵ Just as the early Pentecostal apocalypticism

of the *European Pentecostal Theological Association* 19 (1999) pp. 34-55 (44-45).

⁷⁵ F. D. Macchia, “The Struggle for Global Witness,” in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism*, eds. M. W. Dempster, B. D. Klaus, D. Petersen (Carlisle: Regnum, 1999), pp. 8-29 (23).

caused them to disregard barriers of race, age, wealth and gender because of the urgency of mission, so the struggle with our human frailty can be the basis for a wider proclamation concerning the coming kingdom of God. As an emphasis on healing of the body forces a corrective to an over spiritualization of issues of the soul, it also involves one in issues of justice. Although for most western Pentecostals, ill health is an interruption to the enjoyment of life, for many of our brothers and sisters in the Two-Thirds world (where the majority of Pentecostals reside) illness is due to basic problems such as unclean water, unjust economic situations and corrupt political regimes.⁷⁶ Moltmann has written,

It is often impossible to heal the sick without healing their relationships, the circumstances in which they live, and the social structures of the social systems to which they belong.⁷⁷

To place healing in this context and to pray for healing now is to pray that God will overturn these godless structures. To proclaim that one day there will be a kingdom that will overcome the kingdoms of this world which will mean the healing of the poor and oppressed is to place the gods of this age in a limited time-span. Their end is at hand.

Nonetheless, if this theologizing is to stop us praying for the sick, then we have misunderstood the nature of the problem. Prayer is struggle—and the struggle will continue as long as we have to pray, “Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven.”

⁷⁶ Macchia, “The Struggle for Global Witness,” p. 21.

⁷⁷ Quoted in N. Wright, “The Theology and Methodology of Signs and Wonders,” in *Charismatic Renewal*, eds. T. Smail, A. Walker, N. Wright (London: SPCK, 1995), pp. 71-85 (81).