

Book Review

Two Paradigms for Divine Healing: Fred F. Bosworth, Kenneth E. Hagin, Agnes Sanford, and Francis MacNutt in Dialogue

Pavel Hejzlar

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Jesus is “our Savior, Baptizer, Healer, and soon coming King.” By way of these cardinal doctrines, the early Pentecostals accentuated their unwavering commitment to divine healing. Over the course of the twentieth century, the emergence of the Charismatic renewal would continue this emphasis upon healing, but also produce complex and controversial theologies and practices.

Given such diverse approaches, Pavel Hejzlar provides a timely historical and theological analysis of two specific paradigms driven by distinct theological foundations for healing. Hejzlar discusses a quartet of healing agents, two who adhere to the doctrine of healing in the atonement and two who utilize an alternative paradigm that wrestles more with the pastoral complexities of faith and time as well as the medical and behavioral sciences.

For the former paradigm, Hejzlar turns to Fred F. Bosworth (1877-1958), a link to early Pentecostalism with a fairly well-developed doctrine of divine healing, and the influential and often controversial Kenneth E. Hagin (1917-2003). For the latter paradigm, Hejzlar examines the pioneering ministries of the Episcopalian, Agnes M. Sanford (1897-1982), founder of the popular “School of

Pastoral Care,” and Roman Catholic, Francis S. MacNutt (1925-), proponent of “soaking prayer.”¹

Hejzlar begins with a helpful biographical survey of each individual by weaving their life stories alongside the role of healing in their spiritual formation. For example, Bosworth, often noteworthy more for his challenge to the infant Assemblies of God Fellowship concerning tongues as the biblical evidence for Spirit baptism, loses his four-year-old son and then his wife only a few years later. Similarly, the young Hagin suffers from numerous physical and emotional ailments including a malfunctioning heart and near paralysis by the age of fifteen when he receives complete healing. For MacNutt, as a seminarian, he ponders the common place of healing in the lives of saints and wonders why his superiors choose not to instruct students to pray for it. For each protagonist, personal experience launches theological interest and subsequent ministry.

In the following chapters, Hejzlar charts and evaluates the answers given by the four protagonists to classic weighty questions such as human cooperation in healing; the role of faith, sin, and repentance; the role of Satan and demons; the use or rejection of

medicine; and body care. He links Bosworth and Hagin to the Holiness Pentecostal tradition due to their strong restorationist impulses and promotion of a “double cure for (a) double curse.” According to Hagin, “Healing the sick is God’s will because Christ bore our infirmities and carried our diseases. Just as He purchased our salvation through His death on the cross, so He has purchased our healing ... I believe we can live our full length of time out on the earth without sickness, disease, or poverty.”²

In contrast to the former protagonists, Sanford and MacNutt come to their respective understanding with little or no connection to Holiness Pentecostals and, early on, they show no awareness of healing in the atonement, all or nothing healing, or the early Pentecostal (theological) disdain for medical science. Unlike Bosworth and Hagin, who often ministered to large crowds, Sanford and MacNutt typically favor individual ministry based upon pastoral and sacramental approaches as well as keen awareness of the specific social and psychological contexts of those needing healing.

Though the four protagonists engage in distinct ministry approaches, they share numerous impulses. For example, they survive and thrive in the midst of an intense twentieth century battle surrounding cessationism. Where cessationist conclusions are overcome, they (particularly Sanford and MacNutt) begin to challenge historic claims that miraculous cures should be limited to saints, relics, and the mass.

Hejzlar delivers an even-handed approach to a difficult subject. He does not hesitate to chastise Hagin for falling prey to the New Thought teachings of E. W. Kenyon or the penchant of Hagin and Sanford to divinize humans. Furthermore, he examines the

controversy between faith and medical care and laments various tendencies toward an either-or rather than a both-and approach. At the same time, while Hejzlar deems certain faith teachings overzealous, he remains open to learn from and qualify their teaching. He celebrates the sensational healings found in the gospels and Acts without silencing the moving biblical testimonies of Paul, Timothy, Trophimus, and Epaphroditus. Though Hejzlar affirms the constructive theologies of Sanford and MacNutt, both of whom address the complexities of unwanted, painful, unpredictable, and often unexplainable experiences, he also admits that their nurturing, counseling, and soaking prayer approaches find little biblical support and, thus, must not become the consistent substitute for the aggressive crisis approaches seen in Scripture and mirrored by contemporary faith teachers.³

This work, first submitted as a Ph.D. dissertation at Fuller Seminary (2009), deserves ongoing recognition. Hejzlar is meticulous in documentation not only with the vast primary sources of the protagonists, but also the important secondary sources. However, he fails to interact with the monumental book, *Healing through the Centuries: Models for Understanding* (Hendrickson, 1998) by Ronald Kydd, who lays out an historical-theological scheme for healing throughout church history, including sections on healing in the atonement and “incubational” approaches.⁴ Though the manuscript should have received better editing (for example, Sanford and Calvinism are misspelled on page 262), Hejzlar produces an engaging narrative and employs a clear structure.

Finally, given the exponential growth of global south Christians with their larger cosmic worldview and unique socio-economic concerns, one wonders why

Hejzlar limits his study only to American protagonists. At some later date, Hejzlar or other scholars may want to pursue the dynamics of healing outside the global north. These quibbles aside, Hejzlar produces an indispensable volume for students and scholars intent on understanding the historical and theological

developments of four influential twentieth-century healing agents. Since these protagonists produced not a few disciples, a look back always proves valuable for anyone interested in the place of healing in current contexts.

¹Sanford launched Schools of Pastoral Care in 1955-1960 to provide residential conferences for ministers, their spouses, and medical personnel opportunities for instruction and practice in the ministry of healing. MacNutt utilizes soaking prayer, extended intercessory prayer sessions, to battle against forces that may keep one from complete healing.

²Pavel Hejzlar, *Two Paradigms for Divine Healing: Fred F. Bosworth, Kenneth E. Hagin, Agnes Sanford, and Francis MacNutt in Dialogue* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 55.

³Ibid., 258-260.

⁴Ronald Kydd, *Healing through the Centuries: Models for Understanding* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998).