



Dauntion-Fear, Andrew.

Healing in the Early Church: The Church's Ministry of Healing and Exorcism from the First to the Fifth Century

Studies in Christian History and Thought

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

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Andrew Dauntion-Fear lectures in church history and pastoral subjects at St. Andrew's Theological Seminary, Manila, Philippines. In *Healing in the Early Church* he has written an intriguing and what I believe to be important monograph in which he comprehensively surveys healing and exorcism in the early Church. Having personally done some research on miracles in the first four centuries of the Church I welcome the additional information provided by Dauntion-Fear (hereafter D-F) and its impact on debates concerning cessationism. His thesis is quite simple: healings and exorcism occurred well after the apostolic period. D-F labors intensively to provide and interpret quotations from primary sources that give witness to these practices.

There's a general structure to D-F's study although he's not enslaved to a particular form. In general he documents records of healings, views on medicine (or magic) and demons, and records of exorcisms and then draws general conclusions from the cumulative picture painted in the primary sources. At times he ventures into the attitudes of certain Christians toward suffering or health & wealth (to steal a modern term). The first two chapters survey the miracles in the NT and some early apocryphal works concluding that Jesus' healings were in a class different than that of physicians and magicians in that he "offered no questionable course of treatment, and provided almost invariably instant cures free of charge," and "he coerced no reluctant powers into his service, and his activities were beneficent not malicious." (15) The apostles "patterned themselves quite closely on their master." (38)

Chapters 3-5 span the second through fourth centuries covering a variety of early Christian writers from various geographical locales (e.g., North Africa, Rome, Syria, Asia Minor, Egypt, and Palestine). Chapter 6 covers the Post-Nicene Church and goes into the fifth century breaking from the author/locale format of the previous chapters, opting rather to proceed thematically. One thing is apparent in D-F's survey: throughout all of these periods exorcism was prevalent in the Church. Views on demons varied to some degree but there is widespread attestation to demonic possession (even of Christians, contra much of modern Christendom's opinion!). I was intrigued by the fact that there were orders (i.e., specific ministries) devoted to exorcism from the early third century onward. One thing that wasn't as surprising was that the highly educated weren't as confident in healing and miracles as the common churchgoers (see e.g., Bardaisan or Eusebius of Caesarea). D-F says: "It is chiefly the uneducated people, it seems, who are interested in healing and perform exorcisms. For the educated Fathers interest lies rather in other spiritual gifts and rationalizing sickness." (110) That seems an apt description of the modern Christian landscape!

Healings, while continuing throughout these periods, decreased over time and "by the late third and early fourth centuries... are... mentioned only by our Eastern sources." (131) This statement is somewhat perplexing since in the chapter following D-F goes on to recount a number of miraculous healings from the mid to late fourth century and many of them from the West! He does note however that "[r]emarkable though these miracle stories are, in quite a few the methods of healing are complex and the time protracted, contrasting with the simplicity of earlier years." (143) Healing was mainly relegated to the clergy, bishops and deacons, while exorcisms were a stepping-stone to becoming ordained. In the late fourth and fifth centuries the relics of martyrs became popular for their healing effects. Hilary of Poitiers and Augustine both explain this phenomena by saying that they bear witness to the power Christ and to his death and resurrection. In this same period D-F points out how various sources "testify to the fact that Church members of this period, perhaps a considerable number, were crossing the boundary between acceptable Christian practice and illegitimate magical means in their quest for good luck, health and safety." (144) He later says, "it seems, the clear distinction between the 'right' touching of a sacred bone and the 'wrong' use of an amulet or even an exorcistic spell containing Christian elements, escaped some of the less educated Christians." (151) Again, this seems an apt description of segments of modern Christianity!

D-F closes with a concluding summary of his research and an appendix in which he lists some pointers for today's Church drawn from both his research and experience. These 9 pointers summarized are:

1. Healing can demonstrate the power of the one proclaimed.

2. Large rallies should be for evangelistic preaching and healings may sometimes perhaps play a subsidiary part.
3. We should pray for spiritual gifts which are granted to those who will use them with humility.
4. The laying on of hands and anointing with oil should be common practice in our churches and we should pray for every area of pain and incapacity, leaving the outcome to God.
5. We should recognize the existence of evil spiritual forces without exaggerating them.
6. Faithful and prayerful saints should be those who are engaged in exorcism and they should pray until the demons are gone, while recognizing that at times this might require baptism.
7. Healing and deliverance ministry in the name of Christ should not be supplemented by resorting to magic.
8. Modern medicine should not be discounted as a means of healing but we must also realize the reality of sin and the need for repentance.
9. When prayers for healing seem to go unanswered we shouldn't sink into despair. Rather remember the love of God and realize that the ultimate healing comes when we are glorified.

One drawback to this work is that there are a number of typographical and grammatical errors throughout:

- “forHanina” should read “for Hanina” (6)
- “thousands thousands” should read “thousands” (47)
- “would” should read “wouldn't” (54)
- “interested healing miracles” should read “interested in healing miracles” (67)
- “ask” should read “asks” (72)
- “can its expulsion assured” should read “can its expulsion be assured” (80)
- The numeral 0 appears in a quotation where it should be a capital letter O (91)
- “strongly” should read “strong” (120)

But these minor mistakes aside, *Healing in the Early Church* is probably the most fascinating book I've read in a while. It's amazing to see just how much continuity our present Church (at least in the Charismatic and Pentecostal circles I travel) has with the early Church in matters of healing and exorcism. I highly recommend this work to all cessationists looking to wrestle with the record of history and all continuationists looking to see just what was happening in those first few centuries of the Church.