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James William Opp. *The Lord for the Body: Religion, Medicine, and Protestant Faith Healing in Canada, 1880-1930*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005. 274 pp.p. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7735-2905-2; \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7735-2906-9.

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## Historicizing the Body: A New Approach to the Study of Faith Healing

In *The Lord for the Body*, James William Opp takes a new approach in Pentecostal studies by framing divine healing as a history of the body and then employing this insight to probe the intersection of religion and medicine. He navigates between two extremes in apologetics and scholarship in this study, resisting assertions that divine healing is either entirely providential or entirely psychological. Opp holds these competing views in tension as he uncovers how religion and medicine engaged and challenged one another in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century English-speaking Canada.

Opp begins by arguing that Holiness and Pentecostal believers viewed divine healing as a “distinctive form of grace, analogous to the forgiveness of sin” (p. 30). His examination of how adherents understood and experienced physical healing gives serious consideration not only to their theology of divine healing but also to its logical consequences. Like others before him, Opp locates the theological foundation for Holiness and Pentecostal understandings of divine healing in the open promise of the atonement (i.e., the promise that Christ’s sacrifice redeemed the body as well as the soul). His analysis, however, extends beyond earlier scholarly interpretations that suggest this distinctive theology merely set the stage for the supernatural manifestations of the twentieth-century Latter Rain revival. Opp insists that divine healing was much more than a sign of the restored church to Holiness and Pentecostal believers. For them, divine healing “transformed the body itself into a site for

an encounter with the divine” (p. 31).

With this theological shift established, Opp continues by tracing the evolution of its influence on practice. He considers informal Holiness networks and faith homes, religious organizations (e.g., the Christian and Missionary Alliance), and evangelistic campaigns (such as those led by John Alexander Dowie and Charles Price). His analysis also addresses the varying degrees to which medical constructions of the body and healing influenced these disparate groups, shifting their theological interpretations and healing rituals in distinct and profound ways. Although Opp offers an extensive treatment of faith healing in the Holiness and Pentecostal movements, one wonders how the inclusion of native French-speaking Canadians or Chinese immigrants might have affected his study. The author hints at possibilities for further research in this area, noting, for example, that Catholic bishops warned against participation in Protestant faith healing campaigns.

By placing the relationship between religion and the body at the center of faith healing, Opp’s study marks a departure from earlier narrative histories on the subject, such as Nancy Hardesty’s *Faith Cure: Divine Healing in the Holiness and Pentecostal Movements* (2003). Opp introduces new insights by examining “outsider” interactions with the divine healing movement. Utilizing often overlooked court records, medical documents, and newspaper accounts, Opp painstakingly analyzes the various par-

allels and divergences between insider and outsider assumptions regarding the body and healing. His treatment of Mina Ross Brawner and Lilian Yeomans—physicians who turned away from traditional medicine to embrace faith healing—is especially adept in this regard. Based on their writings, Opp shows how “medical knowledge is not simply a static collection of facts, but is actually a way of perceiving the body” (p. 200). He then builds on this insight to explain why and how perceptions of the body mattered in Canadian society. Such innovation places Opp’s work within the recent movement among Pentecostal scholars, such as Grant Wacker and Jonathan Baer, to recover sources and apply critical theory to the history of faith healing.

Notably, Opp provides a nuanced treatment of gender and class. His analysis explicitly considers how these social forces shaped the movement’s informal networks and institutional structures. He argues that debates surrounding authority and respectability were not abstract discussions, but embodied experiences. This observation seems particularly pertinent for women, whose bodies represented contested territory for the movement’s advocates and critics. Opp further highlights the “subversive energy” of the divine healing movement, emphasizing the ways in which the experience of healing provided women with the authority to challenge medical construc-

tions of and controls over their bodies (p. 8). Opp also is attentive to often overlooked questions of masculine identity and experience. He stresses, for example, that “men are portrayed as requiring ‘cleaning’ rather than ‘healing,’” citing multiple accounts of men abandoning such social vices as drinking, smoking, and gambling after experiencing divine healing (p. 161). Using such evidence, Opp presents a thoughtful analysis of the ways men defined themselves through “manly,” physical action rather than “womanly,” inward emotion. Again, the scope of Opp’s study necessarily limits his exploration of social constructions of class and gender. By confining his study to English-speaking Protestants, Opp focuses his attention on the closely bounded territory of Victorian and Edwardian-era middle-class culture and largely ignores other groups within Canadian society.

*The Lord for the Body* is a significant addition to the growing field of Pentecostal studies. Opp’s innovative methodology and sophisticated analysis complement the previous works of historians in the field and significantly enhance the historical record on the subject of divine healing. Anyone interested in the history of the Holiness and Pentecostal traditions or the intersection of religion and medicine would be well served by reading this excellent study.

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