

# STUDIES IN CHURCH HISTORY

EDITED BY W.J. SHEILS

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## THE CHURCH AND HEALING

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For the Ecclesiastical History Society  
BASIL BLACKWELL, OXFORD

## The Church and Healing

Edited by W. J. Sheils

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The relationship between spiritual and supernatural healing on the one hand and scientific medicine on the other has provoked discussion within the churches throughout christian history, and particularly so when those churches have encountered non-christian traditions. However, just as scientific medicine is not confined solely to Western experience, so the popular religious and cultural roots of spiritual healing are affected by time and place, revealing a variety of social and psychological interactions. The relationship between 'folk' and 'learned' or 'traditional' and 'modern' in the early Byzantine empire, in 17th- and 18th-century England, and in 20th-century Africa share common features, but each is affected by its own particular context. The essays in this volume underline the point that spiritual healing cannot be attributed to one thaumaturgic world view. Nor are attitudes to healing to be seen as always deriving from a particular religious viewpoint; these attitudes could themselves contribute to the formation of popular religious sentiment, as indicated here in those papers concerned with the shrines of medieval Europe and modern Sri Lanka or in the studies of the aladura churches of West Africa and the recent charismatic groups in North America. The renewed interest in healing exhibited by these groups and within the main stream churches themselves remind us that there is no easy transition from traditional to modern modes of thought concerning healing. A group of papers focusing on 19th-century England make it clear that 'alternative medicine' and 'alternative religion' were closely connected precisely at that period when scientific medicine was establishing a uniformity of practice which any church might envy. The success of the medical establishment encouraged churchmen to see medicine as a vital support for their spiritual work, particularly in the mission fields. Once there, however, the problem of the relationship between 'the doctor' and 'the holy man' was raised anew, as it had been in Byzantium and in the 19th-century slum. The debates among anglican churchmen over spiritual healing during the 1920s continue today in all religious groupings from the main stream churches to the smallest sects.

THE CHURCH AND HEALING

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PAPERS READ AT  
THE TWENTIETH SUMMER MEETING AND  
THE TWENTY-FIRST WINTER MEETING  
OF THE  
ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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W. J. SHEILS

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## CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	page v
<i>List of Contributors</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	xi
Saints and Doctors in the early Byzantine empire: the case of Theodore of Sykeon PEREGRINE HORDEN	1
The Vision of Tainard, <i>miraculum de quodam canonico Guatenensi per Sanctum Donatianum curato</i> E. S. KARNOFSKY	15
The <i>modus medendi</i> and the Benedictine order in Anglo-Norman England ANNE F. DAWTRY	25
'Rocamadour in Quercy above all other churches': the healing of Henry II EMMA MASON	39
<i>Curate infirmos</i> : the medieval waldensian practice of medicine PETER BILLER	55
The Church, leprosy and plague in medieval and early modern Europe RICHARD PALMER	79
Religion, social change and psychological healing in England 1600–1800 MICHAEL MACDONALD	101
Archbishop Secker as a physician JOHN R. GUY	127
Doctors, demons and early methodist healing HENRY D. RACK	137
Bishop Milner, Holywell and the cure tradition JUDITH F. CHAMP	153
Establishment and dissent in nineteenth-century medicine: an exploration of some correspondence and connections between religious and medical belief-systems in early industrial England JOHN V. PICKSTONE	165

## CONTENTS

Little brother be at peace: the priest as holy man in the nineteenth-century ghetto	191
G. P. CONNOLLY	
Restoring man's creative power: the Theosophy of the Bible Christians of Salford	207
PETER J. LINEHAM	
Anti-establishment healing: spiritualism in Britain	225
LOGIE BARROW	
Social catholicism and health: Dr and Mrs Thomas Low Nichols in Britain	249
BERNARD ASPINWALL	
Healing and evangelism: the place of medicine in later Victorian protestant missionary thinking	271
C. PETER WILLIAMS	
'The heavy artillery of the missionary army': the domestic importance of the nineteenth-century medical missionary	287
A. F. WALLS	
The revival of spiritual healing in the Church of England 1920–26	299
STUART MEWS	
Medical science and pentecost: The dilemma of anglicanism in Africa	333
TERENCE RANGER	
Healing in 'The Brotherhood of the Cross and Star'	367
G. I. S. AMADI	
Shrines, pilgrimage, and miraculous powers in roman catholic Sri Lanka	385
R. L. STIRRAT	
Some aspects of religion and spiritual healing in Cultsville, a contemporary North American city	415
IRVING HEXHAM	
<i>Abbreviations</i>	431