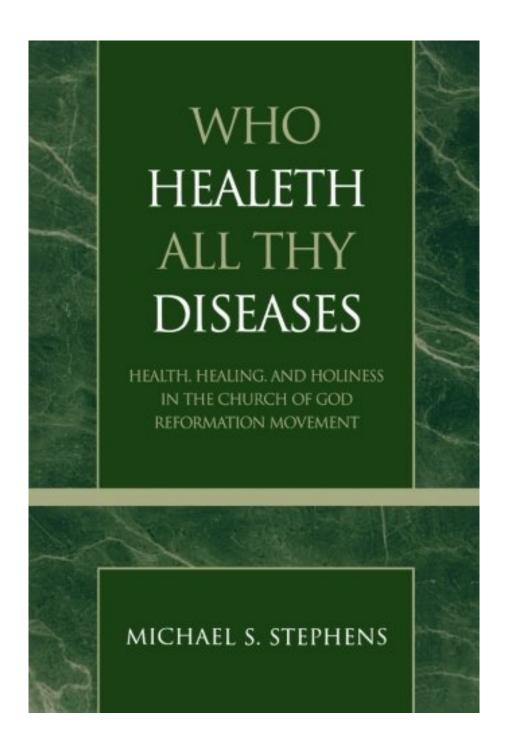


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Review

Readers interested in divine healing, health reform, the Holiness movement, the Church of God reformation, Pentecostalism, and related issues will find Stephens' book a fascinating, well-researched volume and a good read. (H-Pentecostalism, July 2009)

The book is clearly and elegantly written. Chapter divisions and signposting of sections within chapters organize the material effectively.... Stephens has written a stupendous history, based on in-depth research and replete with analytical insights. This work ought to be read by scholars, students, and others interested in divine, medical, and alternative healing whether or not they are concerned with the Church of God, for this denomination offers a fascinating case study for asking broader questions. (Pneuma)

About the Author

Michael S. Stephens is Adjunct Professor of Church History for the online campus of Asbury Theological Seminary.

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Who Healeth All Thy Diseases is a history of divine healing and 19th-century health reform in the Church of God, one of the earliest and most influential pre-Pentecostal radical holiness movements. The Church of God taught that Wesleyan entire sanctification was creating a visible unity of saints that restored the New Testament church of the apostles.

As the movement grew and experimented with the implications of visible sainthood, physical healing?miraculous divine healing and the physical perfectionism of health reform?became integral to the life and theology of the Church of God, shaping everything from proof of membership and evidence of ministerial authority to childrearing practices and acceptable clothing styles. Physical healing manifested and embodied the movement's claim that God was healing the universal church (the Body of Christ) by cleansing individuals from the corruption of inbred sin. By 1902, the prevailing opinion in the Church said that divine healing was an essential aspect of the gospel, use of medicine was sinful, and every minister had to exhibit the gifts of healing.

In the early 20th century, the Church's theology and practices of healing became increasingly problematic. Tragic failures of divine healing, epidemics, medical advances, court trials, mandatory inoculations of schoolchildren, and general opprobrium combined to prevent a simplistic equation of the Church of God and the church of the apostles. By 1925, the Church had reversed its radical, anti-medicine doctrines. Church members continued to affirm that Jesus answered prayers for healing, but they no longer claimed to know exactly how he would answer prayers. With that loss of certainty, healing lost its power to serve as evidence of holiness and its central place in the history of the Church of God.

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About the Author

Michael S. Stephens is Adjunct Professor of Church History for the online campus of Asbury Theological Seminary.

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The errors of interpreting God's Word without wisdom

By Prodigal Knot

I must first qualify myself as a person who grew up in the midst of this kind of teaching. The churches I attended as a child and young man greatly skewed my view of church, God, grace and mercy by preaching a very law based "gospel". While I believe that God can heal anyone, of anything, anytime He chooses, the fact remains that all of us will die someday, so healing is not a never-ending promise to believers. Something or someone will kill you in this life.

For those who were raised in any congregational setting that was influenced by Daniel S. Warner, E.E. Byrum and the like, this is a very revealing book. Mr. Stephens uses extensive research on articles from the "Gospel Trumpet" by Warner, Byrum and others and shows how much the culture of the time and radical views of medicine and "natural" healing from many others, including unbelievers, affected the Church of God Restoration movement's views.

There are extensive notes, approximating 40% of the book, that refer to newspaper articles, letters and other personal and public notes by the parties involved. It was very surprising to find out that Warner was an adherent of the thoroughly debunked study of Phrenology! (this is substantiated by another book on this movement by Thomas Fudge as well as Warner's own journal. Warner at first repudiated the so-called "Second Work of Grace" when he witnessed the pride it engendered in others who testified of it. Later, we see that he was greatly influenced by his in-laws and first wife to pursue this teaching and experience it for himself.

However, the primary focus of this book is how the church incorporated the many secular health doctrines of the day into the teaching of sanctification of both the body and the soul. As time went on the emphasis became more and more focused on divine healing through prayer as a means of identifying those who were "truly reborn". Thus, the outward evidences of healing became a litmus test for ministers in order for them to be considered qualified to preach or pastor a congregation. It, in turn, became a kind of test of the sincerity of the faith of the laity.

Stephens does a superb job of showing how flawed and subject to necessary change this teaching was, and remains, to the circumstances of the times (influenza, tuberculosis, infant deaths, unhealed ministers, etc.) He also shows how it became necessary to deal with the Pharisaical view that those not healed, or could not heal, became suspect believers. This, in turn, literally served to derail the unity and the growth of this movement.

A "must read" for anyone who has been influenced by or discouraged in their Christian walk by the perfectionist and, ultimately, the theological errors of Warner, Finney and others of that ilk.

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