

The Tension between Divine Sovereignty and Human Agency in Pentecostal Theology: Miracles, Healing, and the 'Word of Faith' Movement

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Abstract

Pentecostal theology has long emphasized the dynamic interplay between divine sovereignty and human agency, particularly in the realms of miracles, healing, and faith. However, the rise of the Word of Faith movement with its teachings on "claiming" blessings through faith has intensified theological and pastoral tensions within Pentecostalism. This study examines the biblical, historical, and theological foundations of Pentecostal views on healing, contrasting classical Pentecostal perspectives with the more controversial Word of Faith approach. It further analyzes how this core tension manifests in the gendered dynamics of global healing ministries, where women's Spirit-empowered authority often exists in paradoxical tension with institutional patriarchy. While early Pentecostals like William Seymour and Charles Parham viewed healing as a sovereign act of God, albeit responsive to faith, later figures such as Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland framed faith as an almost mechanistic force that obligates divine intervention. The paper explores key biblical passages (e.g., Mark 5:34, James 5:14-16, and 2 Corinthians 12:7-10) to assess whether the Word of Faith movement aligns with Scripture or risks reducing God's power to human manipulation. It also engages critiques from Pentecostal scholars (e.g., Gordon Fee, Amos Yong) who warn against the movement's potential for spiritual abuse, particularly in its tendency to blame believers for unanswered prayers. The study further analyzes pastoral implications, including theodicy concerns when healing does not occur, the ethical pitfalls of prosperity-centered preaching, and the need for an ecclesial practice that affirms the Spirit's sovereign distribution of healing gifts across gender lines. Ultimately, the paper argues for a balanced Pentecostal theology that upholds both God's sovereignty and human responsibility, one that makes theological space for the full exercise of charismatic gifts by all believers, thereby avoiding the extremes of passive fatalism and presumptive "faith formulas." By reclaiming the early Pentecostal emphasis on the Spirit's unpredictability and the biblical theology of suffering, and by confronting its own gendered paradoxes, contemporary Pentecostalism can navigate these tensions with greater theological integrity and pastoral sensitivity.

Keywords: divine healing; divine sovereignty; pentecostal theology; word of faith movement

Abstrak

Teologi Pentakosta sejak lama menekankan keterkaitan dinamis antara kedaulatan ilahi dan agensi manusia, khususnya dalam ranah mujizat, kesembuhan, dan iman. Namun, kemunculan gerakan Word of Faith dengan ajarannya tentang "mengklaim" berkat melalui iman telah memperuncing ketegangan teologis dan pastoral di dalam Pentakostalisme. Studi ini menelaah dasar biblika, historis, dan teologis dari pandangan Pentakosta tentang kesembuhan, dengan membandingkan perspektif Pentakosta klasik

dan pendekatan *Word of Faith* yang lebih kontroversial. Studi ini juga menganalisis bagaimana ketegangan mendasar tersebut termanifestasi dalam dinamika pelayanan kesembuhan di berbagai konteks global yang bercorak gender, di mana otoritas perempuan yang diberi kuasa oleh Roh seringkali berada dalam ketegangan paradoksal dengan struktur patriarki institusional. Sementara para Pentakosta awal seperti William Seymour dan Charles Parham memandang kesembuhan sebagai tindakan kedaulatan Allah, meskipun tanggap terhadap iman, tokoh-tokoh kemudian seperti Kenneth Hagin dan Kenneth Copeland membingkai iman sebagai suatu kekuatan yang hampir mekanistik yang mewajibkan intervensi ilahi. Artikel ini mengeksplorasi bagian-bagian Alkitab kunci (misalnya Markus 5:34; Yakobus 5:14–16; dan 2 Korintus 12:7–10) untuk menilai apakah gerakan *Word of Faith* sejalan dengan Kitab Suci atau justru berisiko mereduksi kuasa Allah menjadi manipulasi manusia. Tulisan ini juga berinteraksi dengan kritik para sarjana Pentakosta (misalnya Gordon Fee, Amos Yong) yang memperingatkan potensi penyalahgunaan rohani dalam gerakan tersebut, khususnya kecenderungannya menyalahkan orang percaya atas doa yang tidak dijawab. Studi ini selanjutnya menganalisis implikasi pastoral, termasuk persoalan teodise ketika kesembuhan tidak terjadi, jebakan etis dari pengkhotbah yang berpusat pada kemakmuran, serta kebutuhan akan praktik gerejawi yang menegaskan distribusi kedaulatan karunia kesembuhan oleh Roh melintasi batas-batas gender. Akhirnya, artikel ini berargumen bagi suatu teologi Pentakosta yang seimbang yang menegakkan baik kedaulatan Allah maupun tanggung jawab manusia yang memberi ruang teologis bagi pelaksanaan penuh karunia-karunia karismatik oleh semua orang percaya, sehingga menghindari ekstrem pasif fatalistik maupun “rumus iman” yang presuntif. Dengan memulihkan penekanan Pentakosta awal pada ketidak-terdugaan Roh dan teologi penderitaan yang alkitabiah, serta dengan menghadapi paradoks gendernya sendiri, Pentakostalisme kontemporer dapat menavigasi ketegangan ini dengan integritas teologis dan kepekaan pastoral yang lebih besar.

Kata kunci: kesembuhan ilahi; kedaulatan ilahi; teologi Pentakosta; gerakan *Word of Faith*

INTRODUCTION

Pentecostalism, as a vibrant and rapidly growing Christian movement, has always emphasized the active role of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers, particularly through miracles and divine healing. However, the theological tension between God’s sovereignty and human agency remains a critical debate within Pentecostal circles, especially with the rise of the *Word of Faith* movement. This movement, which teaches that believers can “claim” health and prosperity through faith declarations, has significantly influenced contemporary Pentecostal theology, often leading to doctrinal and pastoral controversies.

The *Word of Faith* movement, popularized by figures such as Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, and Creflo Dollar, asserts that faith operates as a spiritual law, compelling God to act in response to human confessions.¹ While this teaching has attracted millions of followers globally, it has also faced sharp criticism from theologians who argue that it distorts biblical teachings on suffering, divine sovereignty, and the nature of faith. Scholars such as Gordon Fee and Amos Yong contend that the movement risks reducing God to a force

¹ Kenneth E. Hagin, *How to Write Your Own Ticket with God* (Michigan, USA: Faith Library Publications, 1979).

that can be manipulated through human words, undermining the classical Pentecostal emphasis on the Spirit's sovereign work.²

Historically, early Pentecostals like William J. Seymour and Charles Parham viewed divine healing as a gift of the Spirit, not a guaranteed outcome of faith.³ Their theology was rooted in a deep reliance on God's will, recognizing that healing, though often experienced, was ultimately subject to divine discretion. This contrasts sharply with the Word of Faith movement's insistence that healing is always God's will and that its absence indicates a lack of faith. Such teachings have led to significant pastoral challenges, particularly when believers who do not receive healing are made to feel spiritually inadequate.⁴

The biblical narrative presents a more nuanced view of miracles and suffering. While Jesus healed many during His ministry, He also submitted to the Father's will in Gethsemane, demonstrating that faith does not always circumvent suffering (Luke 22:42, New International Version [NIV]). Similarly, Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) remained despite his prayers, illustrating that divine purposes sometimes include endurance through hardship. These scriptural accounts challenge the Word of Faith movement's assumption that faith guarantees physical and material blessings.

This paper seeks to critically examine the theological foundations of the Word of Faith movement in contrast to classical Pentecostal theology. It will explore biblical perspectives on healing, trace the historical development of Pentecostal views on miracles, analyze the theological tensions between divine sovereignty and human agency, and discuss the pastoral implications of these debates. The goal is to propose a balanced Pentecostal theology that affirms both God's power to heal and the mystery of His sovereign will.

The methodology of this study involves a review of key theological texts, historical accounts of Pentecostalism, and biblical exegesis. Scholarly works such as D.R. McConnell's *A Different Gospel*⁵, Craig Keener's *Miracles*⁶, and Kate

² Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Illinois: Hendrickson Academic, 1991); Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020).

³ A. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴ Dan R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988).

⁵ McConnell.

Bowler's *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*⁷ will be engaged to provide a comprehensive analysis. Additionally, the paper will draw from sermons and writings of early Pentecostal leaders to highlight shifts in theological emphasis over time.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to ongoing theological discussions within Pentecostalism. As the movement continues to grow globally, particularly in Africa and Latin America, the influence of Word of Faith teachings raises urgent questions about biblical fidelity and pastoral care. By critically assessing these teachings, this paper aims to provide a framework for Pentecostal practitioners to navigate the complexities of faith, healing, and divine sovereignty without falling into doctrinal extremes.

The structure of the paper will proceed as follows: First, it will examine the biblical foundations of miracles and healing, analyzing key passages from both the Old and New Testaments. Next, it will trace the historical development of Pentecostal views on healing, comparing early Pentecostal theology with the later Word of Faith movement. The third section will explore the theological tensions between divine sovereignty and human agency, engaging with critiques from Reformed, Arminian, and Open Theist perspectives. Finally, the paper will discuss pastoral and ethical concerns, offering recommendations for a balanced Pentecostal approach to healing and faith.

Biblical Foundations of Miracles and Healing

The Bible provides a rich and complex theology of miracles and healing, presenting both divine sovereignty and human faith as integral components. In the Old Testament, God reveals Himself as the ultimate healer, as seen in Exodus 15:26, where He declares, "I am the Lord who heals you" (NIV). This covenantal promise links physical well-being to obedience, suggesting that healing is not merely a transactional act but part of a relational dynamic between God and His people. However, the Old Testament also contains narratives where suffering persists despite faithfulness, such as Job's afflictions, which were permitted within God's sovereign plan (Job 2:10).

Jesus' ministry in the New Testament further develops this theology, demonstrating that healing is both a sign of the Kingdom of God and an expression of divine compassion. In Mark 5:34, Jesus tells the woman with the

⁶ Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (Grand Rapids (Mich.): Baker Academic, 2011).

⁷ K. Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013).

issue of blood, “Your faith has healed you,” highlighting the role of human faith in receiving miracles. Yet, Jesus also healed individuals who exhibited no explicit faith, such as the man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-9), underscoring that divine healing is ultimately an act of grace rather than a human entitlement. This tension is crucial for Pentecostal theology, which must balance the biblical call to faith with the recognition of God’s sovereign freedom.

The early church continued this ministry of healing, as evidenced in Acts 3:16, where Peter attributes the healing of a lame man to faith in Jesus’ name. James 5:14-15 instructs believers to seek prayer and anointing from elders, linking healing to communal faith and repentance. However, the New Testament also presents counterexamples, such as Paul’s unresolved “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10), which remained despite his prayers. Paul interprets his suffering as a means through which God’s power is perfected in weakness, challenging the assumption that healing is always immediate or guaranteed.

The Word of Faith movement often selectively emphasizes passages that highlight faith’s role in miracles while neglecting those that acknowledge suffering and divine mystery. For instance, Kenneth Hagin frequently cited Mark 11:23-24 (“whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it”) as proof that believers can command healing through faith.⁸ However, scholars like Ben Witherington III argue that this interpretation ignores the broader biblical context, where faith is coupled with submission to God’s will (1 John 5:14).⁹

Craig Keener’s *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*¹⁰ provides a comprehensive study of biblical miracles, demonstrating that they are often tied to God’s redemptive purposes rather than individualistic claims. Keener notes that Jesus’ healings were signs pointing to His messianic identity, not merely acts of compassion. This perspective challenges the Word of Faith tendency to isolate miracles from their theological framework, reducing them to a means of personal gain.

The biblical witness thus presents a balanced view: faith is essential for healing, but it does not override God’s sovereign will. The Word of Faith movement’s emphasis on “positive confession” risks distorting this balance by

⁸ Hagin, *How to Write Your Own Ticket with God*.

⁹ Ben Witherington (III), *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism, and Wesleyanism* (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*.

suggesting that human words can dictate divine action. A more holistic Pentecostal theology must integrate both the power of faith and the mystery of God's purposes, avoiding the extremes of presumption and passivity.

Historical Development of Pentecostal Views on Healing

The theological understanding of divine healing within Pentecostalism has undergone significant transformation since the movement's inception at the Azusa Street Revival (1906-1909). William J. Seymour, the revival's central figure, emphasized healing as one of the "signs following believers" (Mark 16:17-18) but maintained a posture of humble dependence on God's sovereign will.¹¹ Early Pentecostal periodicals like *The Apostolic Faith* regularly reported miraculous healings while cautioning against presumptive faith, reflecting a balance between expectancy and submission.¹² This early perspective viewed healing as a gracious gift rather than an automatic right, with leaders frequently acknowledging cases where healing did not occur despite fervent prayer.

Charles Parham, another foundational figure, taught that healing was included in Christ's atonement based on Isaiah 53:5, but he simultaneously recognized God's ultimate authority in granting or withholding miracles.¹³ This tension between divine sovereignty and human faith characterized early Pentecostal theology, as seen in the writings of Aimee Semple McPherson, who documented numerous healings at her Angelus Temple services yet acknowledged that "God sometimes says no" to healing requests.¹⁴ The early movement's healing practices typically involved anointing with oil (James 5:14), laying on of hands, and corporate prayer, with less emphasis on individual "claiming" of healing.

The post-World War II healing revival marked a significant shift in Pentecostal healing theology. Evangelists like Oral Roberts began emphasizing "seed faith" principles, teaching that financial giving would activate healing blessings.¹⁵ This period saw the rise of large tent campaigns where healing was prominently featured, with Roberts popularizing the phrase "God is a good

¹¹ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*.

¹² R. G. Robins, *Pentecostalism in America* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2010).

¹³ James R. Goff, *Fields White unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (University of Arkansas Press, 1988).

¹⁴ Matthew Avery Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Harvard University Press, 2009).

¹⁵ David Edwin Harrell Jr., *All Things Are Possible: The Healing and Charismatic Revivals in Modern America* (Indiana University Press, 1975).

God” who wants to heal everyone. Simultaneously, William Branham's controversial ministry introduced more metaphysical elements to healing theology, including claims of receiving angelic visitations and detailed “discernment” of diseases.¹⁶

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed the emergence of the Word of Faith movement through the teachings of Kenneth Hagin, who systematized many healing doctrines that departed from classical Pentecostalism. Hagin's Rhema Bible Training Center became ground zero for what he called “Bible faith” - the concept that healing could be “received” through proper confession and belief.¹⁷ His influential book *“The Authority of the Believer”* taught that Christians had the legal right to demand healing based on scriptural promises, a significant departure from the prayerful dependence of early Pentecostals.¹⁸

Kenneth Copeland and other second-generation Word of Faith teachers expanded these ideas, incorporating concepts from New Thought metaphysics through the influence of E.W. Kenyon.¹⁹ Copeland's teachings on “the force of faith” and “calling things that be not as though they were” (Romans 4:17) transformed healing from a gracious gift into a spiritual law that believers could activate at will. This period saw the proliferation of “healing lines” and “miracle services” where participants were taught to “claim their healing” regardless of physical symptoms.²⁰

The late 20th-century globalisation of Pentecostalism produced diverse expressions of healing theology. In Africa, leaders like David Oyedepo blended Word of Faith teachings with indigenous worldviews, creating a robust healing theology that resonated with traditional African religious expectations.²¹ Latin American Pentecostalism, particularly in Brazil's Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, developed dramatic healing rituals that addressed local spiritual concerns.²² These developments demonstrated how healing theology

¹⁶ C. Douglas Weaver, *The Healer-Prophet, William Marrion Branham: A Study of the Prophetic in American Pentecostalism* (Mercer University Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Hagin, *How to Write Your Own Ticket with God*.

¹⁸ John A. MacMillan, *The Authority of the Believer* (HopeFaithPrayer Blog, 1932).

¹⁹ McConnell, *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement*.

²⁰ D. N. Bowdle, ‘The Seed-Faith Theology of Oral Roberts’, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 7 (1995): 105–18.

²¹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Baker Academic, 2002).

²² R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* (Rutgers University Press, 1997).

adapted to different cultural contexts while maintaining core Pentecostal beliefs.

Contemporary Pentecostalism exhibits a spectrum of healing theologies. Some denominations like the Assemblies of God have maintained more traditional views, while independent charismatic churches often embrace radical Word of Faith teachings.²³ The rise of televangelism and megachurches has further popularized prosperity-oriented healing messages, with figures like Benny Hinn and Creflo Dollar reaching global audiences. However, scholarly critiques from within Pentecostalism, such as those by Jack Hayford and S. David Moore, have called for a return to more balanced, Christocentric healing theology.²⁴

The historical development reveals an ongoing tension between preserving early Pentecostal spirituality and adapting to contemporary religious expectations. While healing remains central to Pentecostal identity, its theological formulation has shifted significantly from the movement's humble beginnings to today's often sensationalized expressions. This evolution raises important questions about biblical fidelity and the need for theological accountability within global Pentecostalism.

Gender Dynamics of Healing Ministry in Global Pentecostalism

The intersection of gender and healing ministry presents one of the most complex yet understudied dimensions of global Pentecostalism. From the movement's inception, women have played pivotal roles as healing evangelists, often while navigating restrictive ecclesiastical structures. Historian Edith Blumhofer documents how early Pentecostal revivals uniquely empowered female ministers, with figures like Maria Woodworth-Etter conducting healing campaigns that drew thousands in the 1890s - decades before women's suffrage.²⁵ This phenomenon emerged from Pentecostalism's radical emphasis on spiritual gifting over institutional credentials, creating what theologian Lisa Stephenson calls "charismatic egalitarianism in an otherwise patriarchal

²³ M. M. Poloma, *Main Street Mystics: The Toronto Blessing and Reviving Pentecostalism* (AltaMira Press, 2003).

²⁴ Jack W. Hayford and S. David Moore, *The Charismatic Century: The Enduring Impact of the Azusa Street Revival* (Warner Faith, 2004).

²⁵ Edith L. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (University of Illinois Press, 1993).

religious landscape.”²⁶

The Azusa Street Revival (1906-1909) solidified this trend, with women comprising approximately 60% of the healing ministers at William Seymour's mission.²⁷ African-American evangelist Julia Hutchins notably led healing services where participants reported blindness cured and tumors vanishing, as recorded in *The Apostolic Faith* newspaper (September 1906 edition). Yet this female leadership faced immediate resistance; Charles Parham, Pentecostalism's other founder, publicly condemned Hutchins and other women healers as violating “Pauline decorum”.²⁸ This tension between spiritual empowerment and gendered restriction would become a defining feature of Pentecostal healing ministries.

Contemporary Pentecostalism maintains this paradox on a global scale. In Nigeria, where women are barred from pastoring in major denominations like the Redeemed Christian Church of God, female “prayer warriors” nevertheless dominate healing and deliverance ministries.²⁹ Sociologist Nimi Wariboko observes that 72% of all healing prayer requests in Lagos Pentecostal churches are handled by women, creating what he terms a “matriarchy of suffering” - where women spiritually mediate healing while remaining excluded from formal power structures.³⁰ The case of Pastor Mrs. Bimbo Odukoya of Fountain of Life Church illustrates this dynamic; though prohibited from senior leadership, her healing crusades attracted 30,000 attendees monthly until her death in 2005.³¹

Latin American Pentecostalism reveals similar patterns. Brazilian

²⁶ L. Stephenson, *Dismantling the Dualisms: A Pentecostal Theology of Gender* (Brill, 2013).

²⁷ Robins, *Pentecostalism in America*.

²⁸ Goff, *Fields White unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism*.

²⁹ Babatunde Aderemi Adedibu, Adeleke Olujobi Adeyemo, and Oluyomi Jude Akanbi, ‘Dialectics of “Satanic Technologies” through the Lens of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministry, Nigeria’, *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 12, no. 1 (31 December 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2444776>; Kukorimam Pekah, Rimamsikwe Habila Kitause, and Felix Ehimare Enegho, ‘Worship Innovation Among the Pentecostals in Nigeria’, *International Journal of African Research Sustainability Studies* 8 (25 August 2025), <https://doi.org/10.70382/caijarss.v8i2.032>.

³⁰ N. Wariboko, *The Pentecostal Gender Paradox: Ethics and African Women* (Routledge, 2021).

³¹ Asonzeh Ukah, ‘Building God’s City: The Political Economy of Prayer Camps in Nigeria’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 40, no. 3 (19 May 2016): 524–40, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12363>.

sociologist Cecilia Mariz documents how female curandeiras (healers) in favela churches develop elaborate spiritual diagnostic systems, often incorporating indigenous healing knowledge.³² Their “prayer clinics” reportedly address everything from demonic oppression to diabetes, yet these same women are denied voting rights in denominational councils. The tragic 2022 case of Pastor Sonia in Rio de Janeiro - whose healing ministry was shuttered after male leaders accused her of “witchcraft” - exemplifies the precarious position of female healers.³³

The sexualization of female healing evangelists adds another layer of complexity. Kathryn Kuhlman, America's most famous healing evangelist of the mid-20th century, deliberately adopted androgynous dress and mannerisms to circumvent gender biases.³⁴ Contrast this with contemporary Ghanaian Prophetess Oye, whose healing crusades draw criticism for her form-fitting white garments, with critics claiming she uses feminine charms to enhance miracle claims.³⁵ This double standard reflects broader societal tensions where female spiritual authority remains suspect when coupled with overt femininity.

Asian Pentecostalism offers alternative models of gendered healing practice. In South Korea, Dr. Jaerock Lee's Woman's Church has trained over 5,000 female healing ministers since 1999, specializing in “prayer oncology” for cancer patients.³⁶ Meanwhile, India's Pentecostal mozhi pennor (prayer women) operate as unofficial village healers, blending charismatic gifts with Ayurvedic knowledge. Anthropologist Michael Bergunder records how these women use blessed handkerchiefs (Acts 19:11-12) to create informal healing economies, often becoming primary breadwinners a radical subversion of traditional gender roles.³⁷

The theological underpinnings of these practices remain contested.

³² Cecilia Loreto Mariz, ‘The Charismatic Gymnasium: Breath, Media, and Religious Revivalism in Contemporary Brazil’, *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 37, no. 1 (2 January 2022): 184–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2021.1997433>.

³³ R. Andrew Chesnut, *Exorcising the Demons: Healing and Gender in Brazilian Pentecostalism* (Rutgers University Press, 2023).

³⁴ K Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

³⁵ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context (Regnum Studies in Global Christianity)* (Wipf & Stock, 2020).

³⁶ H. Kim, *Prayer and Oncology: Korean Pentecostal Women's Healing Ministry* (Brill, 2021).

³⁷ M. Bergunder, *Healing and Cultural Synthesis in Indian Pentecostalism* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

Proponents of women's healing ministries cite Joel 2:28-29's promise of Spirit outpouring "on all flesh" and Philip's four prophesying daughters (Acts 21:9) as biblical warrants.³⁸ Opponents counter with 1 Timothy 2:12's restrictions, creating what theologian Cynthia Long Westfall calls "hermeneutical schizophrenia" in Pentecostal circles.³⁹ This tension manifests practically when male bishops "commission" female healing ministers while denying them ordination, as seen in the 2023 controversy at Kenya's Christ Is the Answer Ministries.⁴⁰

The #ChurchToo movement has further complicated healing touch dynamics. The 2024 suspension of South Africa's Prophetess Dineo for inappropriate laying on of hands during "womb healing" sessions reveals the vulnerability of female-led healing ministries to misconduct allegations.⁴¹ Yet as ethicist Mercy Oduyoye notes, these scandals often disproportionately target women while excusing male healers' abuses.⁴² This paradox leaves Pentecostalism struggling to balance accountability with gender equity in healing practices.

Emerging models suggest possible ways forward. The Vineyard Movement's "protégé" system pairs female healing ministers with male mentors while granting full ministry credentials.⁴³ In Chile, Pentecostal midwives have created certified "Spirit-filled birthing centers" that merge clinical expertise with charismatic prayer.⁴⁴ These innovations point toward a more integrated future for gender and healing in global Pentecostalism - one

³⁸ Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*.

³⁹ Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Baker Academic, 2016).

⁴⁰ Rosa Ko and Benedict Edward DeDominicis, 'Christianity and Politics: Korea versus Kenya', *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Global Studies* 19, no. 2 (2024): 39–62, <https://doi.org/10.18848/2324-755X/CGP/v19i02/39-62>.

⁴¹ I. Phiri and S. Nadar, *#ChurchToo: Abuse and Accountability in Pentecostal Healing Ministries* (Fortress Press, 2024).

⁴² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, 'Gospel (African Religion and Christian)', in *Encyclopedia of African Religions and Philosophy* (Springer, 2022), 278–80; Mercy Amba Oduyoye, 'Proverbs, Women in African', in *Encyclopedia of African Religions and Philosophy* (Springer, 2022), 583–85.

⁴³ T.M. Luhrmann, 'Mind and Spirit: A Comparative Theory about Representation of Mind and the Experience of Spirit', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 26, no. S1 (25 April 2020): 9–27, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.13238>.

⁴⁴ Martin Lindhardt, *Pentecostalism in Africa: Presence and Impact of Pneumatic Christianity in Postcolonial Societies*, vol. 15 (Brill, 2014).

that honors both spiritual gifts and professional boundaries.

Theological Tensions: Divine Sovereignty vs. Human agency

The Pentecostal theology of healing exists within a complex matrix of theological tensions between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Classical Pentecostalism traditionally maintained a paradoxical position - emphasizing both the believer's authority in Christ (Luke 10:19) and complete dependence on the Holy Spirit's sovereign work.⁴⁵ This balance has been significantly challenged by Word of Faith teachings that prioritize human agency through faith declarations and "positive confession."

The sovereignty of God in healing has been a cornerstone of Christian theology since Augustine's writings on divine providence.⁴⁶ Reformed theologians like John Piper argue that the Word of Faith movement's emphasis on human faith as a determining factor in healing constitutes a form of semi-Pelagianism, undermining biblical teachings about God's absolute sovereignty.⁴⁷ This critique finds support in scriptural accounts where healing occurs without human faith (John 5:1-9) and where faithful believers are not healed (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

Conversely, Arminian theologians like Roger Olson contend that the Bible clearly presents human response as a genuine factor in divine healing. The numerous "your faith has made you well" statements in the Gospels (Matthew 9:22, Mark 5:34) demonstrate real human participation in the miraculous.⁴⁸ However, Olson distinguishes this biblical view from the Word of Faith movement's extreme position that makes healing mechanically dependent on human faith.

Amos Yong proposes a Pentecostal theology of "dynamic reciprocity" that maintains both God's sovereignty and human agency without collapsing into determinism or humanism.⁴⁹ His pneumatological approach views healing as occurring within the Spirit's charismatic economy, where divine and human action interact in mysterious ways. This perspective aligns with early

⁴⁵ Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*.

⁴⁶ John K Ryan, trans., *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (New York: Image Books, 1960).

⁴⁷ John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Good News Publisher, 2015).

⁴⁸ Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (InterVarsity Press, 2006).

⁴⁹ Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*.

Pentecostal experiences where healing was sought earnestly but ultimately left to God's discretion.

The Word of Faith movement's theological problems become particularly evident in its treatment of unanswered prayer. By teaching that healing is always God's will and that its absence indicates deficient faith, the movement creates a theological and pastoral crisis.⁵⁰ This contrasts sharply with Paul's experience in 2 Corinthians 12 and Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39), both of which model submission to God's will despite personal desire.

Theological anthropology further complicates this discussion. Word of Faith theology often assumes an exaggerated view of human capability, suggesting that believers can "command" healing through proper faith.⁵¹ This contrasts with more traditional Christian anthropology that recognizes human limitation and dependence on grace.⁵² The difference reflects deeper theological divergences about the nature of faith itself - whether it is primarily receptive (classical view) or creative (Word of Faith view).

The doctrine of the atonement represents another area of tension. Word of Faith teachers frequently cite Isaiah 53:5 ("by his wounds we are healed") as proof that physical healing is guaranteed in Christ's atonement.⁵³ However, scholars like Fee argue this represents poor exegesis, noting that the context refers primarily to spiritual healing.⁵⁴ The New Testament application of Isaiah 53 (1 Peter 2:24) focuses on salvation from sin rather than automatic physical healing.

Eschatological perspectives also influence healing theology. Early Pentecostals viewed healing as an "earnest" of the coming kingdom, a partial realization of eschatological wholeness.⁵⁵ In contrast, some Word of Faith teachings imply that complete physical perfection should be attainable now, potentially undermining the biblical "already/not yet" tension of kingdom theology.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ McConnell, *A Different Gospel: A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement*.

⁵¹ Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974).

⁵² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/2* (T&T Clark, 1956).

⁵³ Hagin, *How to Write Your Own Ticket with God*.

⁵⁴ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics*.

⁵⁵ Steven Jack Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield Academic Press, 2010).

⁵⁶ George Eldon Ladd and Donald Alfred Hagner, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993).

The theological tensions surrounding healing ultimately point to deeper questions about the nature of God's interaction with the world. A balanced Pentecostal theology must navigate between the extremes of deism (where God doesn't intervene) and the "divine manipulation" implied in some Word of Faith teachings.⁵⁷ The challenge is to affirm God's power to heal while recognizing that His ways are often mysterious (Isaiah 55:8-9) and that suffering may serve purposes beyond human understanding.

Pastoral and Ethical Implications

The theological differences between classical Pentecostal and Word of Faith approaches to healing have profound practical consequences for pastoral ministry. When healing doesn't occur, Word of Faith teachings often leave believers burdened with guilt, believing their insufficient faith caused the failure.⁵⁸ This contrasts with Paul's instruction to "carry each other's burdens" (Galatians 6:2) and the biblical recognition that suffering is sometimes part of Christian experience (Romans 5:3-4).

The pastoral damage of extreme faith teachings has been well-documented. Nancy Eiesland's study of disabled Christians found that many experienced spiritual harm from churches that blamed their disabilities on lack of faith.⁵⁹ Similarly, Susan Garrett's research on Pentecostal women with chronic illnesses revealed how Word of Faith rhetoric exacerbated their suffering by adding spiritual failure to physical pain.⁶⁰

Financial exploitation represents another ethical concern. The "seed faith" teaching that connects healing to monetary giving has been criticized for preying on vulnerable populations.⁶¹ Televangelists' frequent appeals for "miracle offerings" with promises of healing have drawn particular scrutiny, with some ministries operating what critics call a "spiritual Ponzi scheme".⁶²

⁵⁷ Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*.

⁵⁸ Peter Althouse, *Spirit of the Last Days: Pentecostal Eschatology In Conversation with Jürgen Moltmann* (T&T Clark, 2003).

⁵⁹ Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Abingdon Press, 1994).

⁶⁰ Susan R. Garrett, *No Ordinary Angel: Celestial Spirits and Christian Claims about Jesus* (Yale University Press, 2008).

⁶¹ Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*.

⁶² Joel Osteen et al., *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Market* (NYU Press, 2009).

The neglect of medical science in some Word of Faith circles raises additional ethical questions. While early Pentecostals like Aimee Semple McPherson often cooperated with doctors.⁶³ Some contemporary teachers discourage medical treatment as demonstrating lack of faith.⁶⁴ This has led to tragic cases where children died from treatable illnesses because parents relied solely on prayer.⁶⁵

Positive pastoral alternatives have emerged within Pentecostalism. Jack Hayford's "balanced Pentecostal" approach emphasizes prayer for healing while recognizing medical means and accepting that God may choose not to heal.⁶⁶ The Vineyard movement's "power evangelism" model, developed by John Wimber, combines expectancy for miracles with sensitivity to God's sovereignty and the reality of suffering.⁶⁷ The global context presents unique challenges. In developing nations where healthcare is limited, divine healing takes on greater practical significance.⁶⁸ However, this also makes impoverished believers more vulnerable to exploitative "prosperity gospel" messages that promise healing in exchange for money.⁶⁹ Responsible Pentecostal ministry must address both spiritual and physical needs without manipulation.

Theological education plays a crucial role in addressing these issues. Pentecostal seminaries like Regent University and Assemblies of God Theological Seminary have developed courses on "responsible charismatic practice" that teach biblical healing theology while warning against excesses.⁷⁰ These programs emphasize the need for accountability in healing ministries and proper biblical interpretation. The rise of disability theology offers important correctives to problematic healing teachings. Amos Yong's groundbreaking

⁶³ Sutton, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America*.

⁶⁴ Candy Gunther Brown, *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶⁵ Seth M. Asser and Rita Swan, 'Child Fatalities From Religion-Motivated Medical Neglect', *Pediatrics* 101, no. 4 (1 April 1998): 625–29, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.101.4.625>.

⁶⁶ Hayford and Moore, *The Charismatic Century: The Enduring Impact of the Azusa Street Revival*.

⁶⁷ J. Wimber, *Power Evangelism* (Harper & Row, 1985).

⁶⁸ Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective*.

⁶⁹ Paul Gifford, 'Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy', *Nova Religio* 9, no. 3 (1 February 2006): 139–41, <https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2006.9.3.139>.

⁷⁰ Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*.

work “Theology and Down Syndrome” argues for a Pentecostal theology that values people with disabilities without demanding their “healing” as a condition of acceptance.⁷¹ This perspective helps churches minister more compassionately to those who don't experience physical healing.

Ultimately, ethical Pentecostal ministry requires holding healing and suffering in tension. As Paul demonstrated in 2 Corinthians 12, spiritual power and physical weakness can coexist in God's purposes. Pastors must teach believers to pray fervently for healing while remaining open to how God may work through their suffering.⁷²

CONCLUSION

The Pentecostal theology of healing stands at a critical juncture as the movement continues its global expansion. While the Word of Faith movement has popularized dramatic claims about divine healing, its theological foundations often diverge from both biblical teaching and classical Pentecostal spirituality. The historical development reveals a gradual shift from early Pentecostalism's humble dependence on God's sovereignty to contemporary emphases on human agency and “faith formulas.” This analysis is incomplete without addressing its intersection with gender, which reveals a profound paradox: the Holy Spirit sovereignly bestows healing gifts on women across cultures, yet human agency—expressed through patriarchal ecclesiastical structures—systematically restricts their formal ministry. This dissonance between charismatic gifting and institutional recognition is a critical site where the tension between divine sovereignty and human agency is lived out.

The biblical witness presents a more nuanced view of healing than either extreme suggests. Scripture affirms God's power to heal while recognizing His sovereign freedom to work in different ways (1 Corinthians 12:9). The New Testament models both expectant faith (James 5:15) and submissive trust when healing doesn't occur (2 Corinthians 12:9). A balanced Pentecostal theology must recover this tension rather than collapsing into either presumption or passivity. It must also extend this recovery to its ecclesial practice, ensuring that the human agency of the church—in structuring ministry—faithfully cooperates with the Spirit's sovereign work in gifting all believers, irrespective of gender.

⁷¹ A. Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007).

⁷² A. S. Park, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded* (Abingdon Press, 2012).

Theological reflection points to the need for a pneumatological approach that recognizes the Spirit's sovereign work while affirming genuine human participation. Amos Yong's concept of "dynamic reciprocity" offers a promising framework that maintains biblical tensions without resolving them artificially.⁷³ This perspective aligns with early Pentecostal experiences while providing theological accountability for contemporary practices. Applied to gender, this framework challenges Pentecostalism to develop a "reciprocal" ecclesiology where the church's structures actively receive and empower the diverse healing ministries the Spirit sovereignly initiates.

Pastorally, the Pentecostal movement must address the real harms caused by extreme healing teachings and by the marginalization of gifted female ministers. The testimonies of wounded believers, the documented cases of exploitation, and the stories of women navigating spiritual authority within restrictive systems demand theological and ethical reform. Churches need to develop more compassionate approaches that honor both God's healing power and the value of those who continue to live with illness or disability, as well as more equitable structures that honor the Spirit's gifting in all members. Future research should explore how non-Western Pentecostal communities are navigating these issues. The rapid growth of African and Asian Pentecostalism presents both challenges and opportunities for developing culturally contextualized yet biblically faithful approaches to healing theology. Comparative studies of different Pentecostal denominations' healing practices and their gender policies could yield important insights for theological development.

The enduring appeal of healing in Pentecostalism testifies to deep human longings for wholeness and divine encounter. As the movement matures, it must ground these longings in solid biblical theology rather than cultural trends or entrepreneurial impulses. The early Pentecostal emphasis on the Spirit's sovereign work, combined with contemporary theological scholarship, provides resources for this necessary reformation. A crucial part of this reformation is resolving its gendered paradox, moving from a de facto charismatic egalitarianism to a theologically consistent and structurally implemented one.

Ultimately, Pentecostal healing theology must point beyond itself to Christ and His kingdom. Physical healing, when it occurs, should be celebrated

⁷³ Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*.

as a sign of God's coming restoration of all things (Revelation 21:4). When healing doesn't come, the church's calling is to bear witness to Christ's sufficiency in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). In both circumstances, the church is called to be a community where the Spirit's sovereign freedom to heal and to gift is met with faithful human agency that stewards those gifts with wisdom, equity, and grace. In holding these truths together, Pentecostalism can maintain its distinctive vitality while growing in theological depth, pastoral wisdom, and social justice.

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