

Southern Baptists today are engaged in a battle for self-definition. The chief front of this battle is the debate over fundamentalism and inerrancy. But at least as significant historically is the battle which both sides of the inerrancy debate are waging, sometimes subtly, sometimes overtly, with the charismatic movement. A clear sign of this conflict can be seen in recent policy decisions by both mission boards to exclude persons who "speak in tongues" from mission service positions.

It is probably not unreasonable to view this struggle with the charismatic movement as a form of neo-Landmarkism. The rise of Landmarkism in the nineteenth century not accidentally coincided with the success of the Disciples of Christ, a movement which claimed (some would say stole) many Southern Baptists in its ranks. It is likewise no accident today, when charismatic churches and denominations outstrip Southern Baptist growth and claim many Southern Baptists in their own ranks, that Southern Baptists begin to react and define themselves against them. If Southern Baptist neo-Landmarkism has any of the power of its nineteenth century predecessor, we will likely see further attempts to root out those who practice or believe some of the teachings of the charismatics.

In an atmosphere charged with this kind of political dynamo, it is not easy to write a paper about healing and the early liturgies. One is tempted very quickly to take sides, either with or against the charismatics, in reading and interpreting the information the early liturgies give us about the practice of healing in the first four centuries.

But Southern Baptists are apparently not the only ones who have difficulty discussing this subject in a balanced, historical way. A review of *Religion Index One: Periodicals* shows that only two articles have been written about Christian healing from an historical perspective,

considering the documents of the early church itself, during the past forty years (1948-1988). Most of the articles are either phenomenological (discussing or describing current instances of healing, mostly on the mission fields) or purely polemic (making arguments from Scripture and/or personal experience for or against the practice of healing). One of the historical articles was itself polemical; the other was more balanced historically, but didn't deal with liturgies.¹

It is also important to note that much the same thing can be said about the books which have been written about healing. The most historically oriented of these, Evelyn Frost's *Christian Healing* and Morton Kelsey's *Psychology, Medicine, and Christian Healing* are often no more than citations from church fathers which support their stated view that healing was universally practiced and nearly universally effective in the early church. No attempt is made to suggest there may have been a diversity of traditions or practices from (nearly) the beginning and to explore something of the significance of this diversity. These books, then, represent not historical analysis, but an apologetic for a particular doctrine of Christian healing. Secondary sources, then, either because of their dearth or because of their non-historical character, do not prove very helpful for the kind of historical analysis this paper attempts. Instead, it will be important to analyze primary source documents, the liturgies of the first four centuries themselves, or indications about those liturgies from Scripture and/or patristic writings, to see how healing was understood within the life of the church throughout those centuries. Without the help of good secondary sources, my analysis is necessarily open to all kinds of errors which better sources

¹ The articles, in order, are: Henry C. Robins, "Spiritual Healing in the History of the Church," London Quarterly and Holborn Review, 181(July 1956), 171-174. John Foster, "Healing the Sick in the Early Church," London Quarterly and Holborn Review, 182(July-October, 1957) 217-222,299-304. The latter appears to have been in response to the former.

might have helped me avoid. For the most part, I am also relying on translations and compilations of the liturgies, either because the liturgies are not available in the original languages, or I cannot read those languages, or, as in most cases, none of the liturgies exists in a reliable, complete text.

Given these problems, why bother looking at liturgies at all, much less as the primary source of information? In part, this is because I have a prior interest in liturgy and liturgical development. But more importantly in this case, liturgies, by their very nature, preserve a record of beliefs and practices which were likely more durable and more widely held by the whole church (or the church in the region and time of the liturgy in question) than the relatively infrequent statements of a few persons we call church fathers. Admittedly, this approach leaves out the numerous instances of healing reported by the fathers and others, and particularly the probably non-liturgical ministrations of those reputed to have the "gift of healing." For a paper of this length, however, I think this limitation is justifiable. A further limitation should be discussed at this point, that of the sources analyzed here. I begin with James 5:13-16, the *locus classicus* for any discussion of Christian healing. While it is not itself a liturgy, it does point to or describe liturgical actions which would take place to bring about the healing of sick persons. The next reliable liturgy with any references to healing is in Hippolytus's *The Apostolic Tradition* from the early third century; some comments from Irenaeus will also be helpful at this point. *The Prayer Book of Bishop Sarapion*, dated in the mid-fourth century, provides some prayers for the liturgy which illumine certain Egyptian views about healing. I conclude the analysis of the liturgies with a look at the "Clementine Liturgy" of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, as well as a few other notes from that late-fourth century document. Though the editors of *Ante-Nicene Fathers*

include the liturgies of St. James, St. Mark, and Sts. Addis and Mari, they also note that none of them can make any claim to being "ante-Nicene," much less authentically of the fourth century.² I leave analysis of those liturgies for another student. Also, I have intentionally not covered the liturgies of St. Chrysostom and St. Basil since these are "living" liturgies, still in use by the Orthodox Church and so full of changes and accretions that their fourth-century originals can scarcely be recovered for analysis today. The paper concludes with some remarks on how Southern Baptists might think about ministries of healing among our churches.

James 5:13-16

¹³Is anyone among you suffering? Let that one pray. Is any cheerful? Let that one sing praise. ¹⁴Is any among you sick? Let such a one call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him or her, anointing that one with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise that person up; and if that one has committed sins, he or she will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power in its effects (RSV, inclusive language changes mine).

In researching this passage I have chosen two commentators with rather divergent views: Ralph P. Martin and Martin Dibelius. Both agree that verses 14 and 15 refer

² Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, repr. 1985), pp. 533-534. Josef Jungmann, in The Early Liturgy (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959, pp. 224-225) states that the Anaphora of St. James does date to the fourth century, since Jerome and St. Cyril quote from it. Unfortunately, it is not possible based on the translations available to me to assess what is or is not part of the fourth century liturgy. The same may be said for the liturgy of St. Mark, of which only a fragment exists from the fourth century. As for Addis and Mari, Jungmann agrees this is much later. I should also note that this paper would be excessively long if I included analysis of these liturgies.

specifically to the healing of a sick person (translating \3swzein\1 as "to heal" rather than "to save"), but Martin is hesitant about this interpretation. Hence, he renders " $\text{\3en tw onomati tou kuriou\1}$ " (vs. 14) not as a power statement, as in exorcism (as does Dibelius), but as a statement by the elders to assure the sick person that "whatever the outcome" God can be trusted.³ Martin concludes his comment on this passage by stating that the real point of the passage is not that the elders have any special powers of healing, but that the whole congregation can and should experience healing in its relationship with one another.⁴

Despite Martin's overall doubt about whether James 5 speaks of Christian healing or what such healing might entail, he does propose that at least two liturgical settings are involved here. In the first, verses 14-15, a sick person unable to attend public worship summons the elders of the church who, in turn, lay hands on the sick person, pray for that person to be healed, anoint that person with oil, and, apparently, pronounce some kind of absolution for the sins of the sick person.⁵ In the second, verse 16, the sick who are able to attend the services of the church are seen confessing their sins publicly as a prelude to some unspecified public ceremony for healing. Martin takes the "prayer of the righteous person" to refer not to the elders of verses 14-15, but to the person who has confessed his or her sin

³Ralph P. Martin, James, Word Bible Commentary, Vol. 48 (Waco, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), p. 208. Martin Dibelius, James (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 252.

⁴ Martin, op. cit., p. 211.

⁵ Martin, pp. 202-209.

publicly and received forgiveness for it.⁶

Dibelius, too, notes a distinction between verses 14-15 and verse 16. For him, though, verse 16 is almost a contradiction of the power assigned to the elders in verses 14-15 rather than a reference to a different setting.⁷ Verses 14-15 have a more definite meaning in Dibelius than Martin ascribes to them. Dibelius argues that the elders comprise an official position in the church, one which by this time (80-130 A.D. Palestine, p. 45) is associated with the ministry of healing. He further speaks of two layers in the healing tradition of James 5, the "charismatic" and the "institutional." Persons with the gift of healing, or "charismatic" healers, were expected always to be able to heal everyone, while that expectation may not have been true of the institutional setting in which elders, by virtue of their office, were believed to have this gift. The certainty of the effectiveness of the rites for healing (prayer, laying on of hands, anointing in the name of Jesus) thus point to the expectations of a charismatic rather than an institutional setting.⁸

Clearly, more work needs to be done on this passage in James to achieve some degree of clarity about its meaning and use in its original context. Perhaps the most helpful commentary for our purposes comes from Dibelius who notes that whatever James 5 means, the highly traditional content of James shows that it is clearly pointing to practices already in

⁶ Ibid., p. 212.

⁷ Dibelius, op. cit., p. 255.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 253-255.

use rather than inventing or introducing new ones.⁹ One of those practices from at least the end of the first century seems to have been the invoking of the elders (presbyters) to pray for, lay hands on, and anoint the sick with some expectation that the sick person would become well and his or her sins would be forgiven through the power of the Lord invoked by church officials. The nature of the connection between sin and sickness in this passage remains rather unclear, or at least open to various interpretations. It would not seem, though, that sickness is understood as the cause of illness in this instance, as the conditional statement in verse 15 leaves open the possibility that sin may be an independent variable which is also "treated" by the methods suggested here.

The Apostolic Tradition

The most authoritative edition of *The Apostolic Tradition* to date which is available in our library is that by Gregory Dix, completed in 1937 and revised by Henry Chadwick in 1968. In his introduction, Dix dates the composition of the text to 215, two years before Hippolytus's schism from Rome and during a time in which he was very concerned about the changes taking place in the Roman rite. Dix thus asserts that *The Apostolic Tradition* is not the record of the whims of an extremist, but a fairly reliable account of the liturgy as it would have been celebrated at the end of the second century and the beginning of the third. Further, since Hippolytus was a student of Irenaeus, some of Irenaeus's writings about the liturgy and healing may prove helpful in interpreting Hippolytus's views or the view of the tradition he

⁹ Ibid., p. 254.

records.¹⁰

The first mention of healing in *The Apostolic Tradition* comes immediately after the description of the Anaphora and the epiclesis in the form of a blessing of oil. Whether this blessing of oil was intended to follow the anaphora and (apparently) precede the communion in the liturgy itself is difficult to say. The blessing of oil itself is followed by a blessing of cheese and olives which in turn is followed by a set of communion prayers and descriptions of the communion itself which Dix has labeled spurious, appearing only in the late Ethiopic version.¹¹ Since what follows the spurious communion prayers is a set of instructions for ordaining presbyters and deacons (chapters 8-9), it is possible that the prayers for blessing on oil and cheese and olives comprise a separate section, unrelated to the actual order or performance of the liturgy, or may refer to prayers which may occasionally be said at an unspecified place in the liturgy.

However, the liturgical action involved before these prayers, that of an offering by the people of oil, in this case, would make logical sense in the context of the main offering of the bread and wine of the eucharist. Moreover, the instruction to the bishop in section one of this chapter ("he shall make eucharist as at the oblation of bread and wine," p. 10) would tend to make this connection stronger. In that case, what we have here is a triple anaphora, one for the remission of sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit (see the eucharistic prayer, pp. 7-9), a

¹⁰ Gregory Dix, *The Treatise on The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome* (London: SPCK, 1968), pp. d-i, xi-xii, l.

¹¹ Dix, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11. Subsequent references to this work will be found in parentheses in the text.

second for healing (the blessing of oil), and the third for "charity" and "sweetness" (cheese and olives, pp. 10-11). The conditional language prefacing both of the latter blessings ("if anyone offers X") may further indicate that these offerings were occasional rather than normative. Of the two, however, it seems likely that the offering of oil may have been more widely practiced, given the linguistic connection between its opening instructions, referred to above, and the eucharistic prayer.

In what sense was the offering of oil at the eucharist seen to be efficacious for healing? The prayer Hippolytus includes at this point, while he is careful to state that it is not to be used verbatim, may give us some clues:

O God who sanctifiest this oil, as Thou dost grant unto all who are anointed and receive of it the hallowing wherewith Thou didst anoint kings <and> priests and prophets, so <grant that> it may give strength to all that taste of it and health to all that use it (p. 10).

It would appear from this prayer that perhaps two uses were suggested for the holy oil. If we may take the parallel structure of this prayer seriously, the phrase "anoint and receive" appears to be in chiasmic parallelism with "taste... and... use." Hence, "receive" here means "taste" and "use" means "be anointed." Indeed, Charles Harris has proposed that "use" (xrwmenois) represents a misspelling in the Greek for "be anointed" (xriomenois).¹² If we are dealing with a dual tradition, then we might suggest that the holy oil might be eaten to maintain health (for strengthening) and that anointing might be done (by the bishop?) to obtain health. Of course,

¹² Charles Harris, "Visitation of the Sick," Liturgy and Worship (London: SPCK, 1932), p. 501.

it is possible, perhaps even likely, that "taste" is itself a parallel form of "be anointed," in which case both refer to an act of anointing with oil for healing, perhaps at or just after communion.

The next place we might expect to see some reference to healing, especially since it follows so closely on the blessing of oil, would be in the ordination prayers or charge for the presbyters (chapter viii, pp. 13-14). In fact, no reference is made to the presbyters having any healing office at all. Instead, one is to be given "the spirit of grace and counsel, `that he may share' in the presbyterate `and govern' Thy people in a pure heart" (viii, 2; p. 13).

Where we do find healing next mentioned is in chapter xv. "If any one among the laity appear to have received a gift of healing by a revelation, hands shall not be laid upon him, for the matter is manifest" (p. 22). Traditionally, this has been explained as an injunction to test a person who claims to have the gift of healing before believing this is the case. This may well be true, but the literary structure of this section of *The Apostolic Tradition* (chapters x-xv) admits of another possibility. Chapter x contains a similar injunction not to lay hands on a "confessor" (one who had suffered torture for confessing the name of Jesus) because "he has the office of the presbyterate by his confession" (chapter x,1; p. 18). Chapters xi-xiv deal with the role and ministry of women, the reader, and the subdeacon, all of whom are appointed, not ordained. It may be possible to suggest that the placement of a person with the gift of healing at the end of this passage is meant to round out this section and be interpreted in the light of the chapter (on confessors) which began it. In that case, the reason for not laying hands on a person with the gift of healing is not to test that person's claim, but rather as an affirmation of the presence of the Spirit already with that person. While the healer would not be an automatic

presbyter thereby, as the confessor is, the healer's office is established as valid. In other words, the healer doesn't need the gift of the Spirit to be added to him or her by the laying on of hands; like the confessor, the healer already manifestly possesses it.

It would have been helpful to know more about the office of the healer and how the healer fit into the overall life of the church in Hippolytus's day, but that information is not supplied here. The closest we may come is a line from Irenaeus in *Against Heresies*:

"[O]thers, still, heal the sick by laying their hands on them, and they are made whole."¹³ This only tells us the method of healing, not the time or its liturgical relationship.

Two other modalities of ministry to the sick, though not clearly of healing, appear in a disputed section of chapter xxvi dealing with the love feast. In paragraph 14 in the Ethiopic version, "The deacon in time of need shall be diligent in giving the sealing to the sick" (p. 49). The Syriac version has this refer to baptism, rather than ministry to the sick. It is unclear exactly what "the sealing to the sick" might be, but this may refer to anointing with oil for healing. Given the likelihood that the bishop is primarily entrusted with this ministry in chapter v, however (see discussion above), the Syriac version may be more reliable here. In paragraphs 15 and 16, though, ministry to the sick (though also to the widows) is clearly in mind. Here, if a presbyter is otherwise unavailable, instruction is given that the deacon take some of the bread blessed at the love feast to the sick and the widows (p. 49). What isn't clear is what effect this bread is supposed to have on the sick. Healing is not stated as the goal, and

¹³ From II.xxxii.4 as translated and found in Evelyn Frost, *Christian Healing* (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co., Limited, 1940), p. 105.

the inclusion of widows may indicate that building the bonds of fellowship may be the more significant reason for these actions.

Finally, chapter xxx contains a note about the visitation of the sick by the bishop. Here, the deacons and subdeacons are instructed to report the names of sick persons to the bishop "that if it seem good to the bishop, he may visit them; for the sick man is much comforted that the high priest remembered him" (p. 57). Here, as in the last section, there is no clear indication of healing involved, but rather of the sick lay person feeling emotionally better because his or her bishop has come by to see him or her. The Latin text Dix cites has "*oblectatur*" for "is much comforted," a word which in its classical use implies not physical but emotional response.¹⁴

Overall, then, two forms of rites for healing are most prominent in *The Apostolic Tradition*: prayer and anointing at eucharist and laying on of hands by persons with the gift of healing. In the case of the former, at least, healing probably did not always occur. If it had, there would have been little reason to include separate episcopal visitation to the sick for their comfort unless we assume (and it seems rather strained to do so) that persons who were subject to episcopal visitation were only those who were unable to participate in the rites of healing at the eucharist. Whether the sick were healed instantly or not healed in these rites, though, *The Apostolic Tradition* bears witness that the church as a whole tried to maintain community and communion with the sick whatever their condition as much as possible.

¹⁴ D. P. Simpson, Cassell's Latin Dictionary (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1968), p. 402.

Bishop Sarapion's Prayer Book

Sarapion was Bishop of Thmuis, a region in Northern Egypt in a delta of the Nile not far from Lake Menzaleh, during the middle of the fourth century. His *Prayer Book*, probably written sometime between 350 and 356, provides an important witness for the liturgy of mid-fourth century Egypt.¹⁵ Unfortunately for us, however, the prayers listed here are not in much apparent order, so, as with the *Apostolic Tradition*, it is sometimes difficult to be certain exactly where in the liturgy certain prayers would have been used. John Sarum's attempts to reconstruct the liturgy from other sources appears to be fairly sound, but he admits that the sources he uses never exactly match the material in the *Prayer Book* and I would add that some of the sources he consults (especially the *Canons of Hippolytus* and the *Anaphora of the Ethiopic Church Ordinances*) are commonly dated today later than the fourth century.¹⁶ Since the later traditions would have been drawing on earlier ones for the most part, his reconstruction cannot be said to be entirely invalid; however, any conclusions we may make about these prayers and their place in the liturgy must be seen as provisional in character.

Sarapion's *Prayer Book* describes four distinct channels or means of healing. In the

¹⁵Saint Sarapion, *Bishop Sarapion's Prayer-book*, trans. by John Wordsworth, ed. by John Sarum (London: SPCK, 1923), pp. 10-13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-36. The bulk of more recent literature, including Dix's critical introduction to the *Apostolic Tradition* (q.v., p. liii) places the *Canons of Hippolytus* in sixth century Egypt. Brightman, in his introductory materials in *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, vol. 1 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1896) makes no firm conclusion about the date of the *Ethiopic Church Ordinances* whatsoever, but does indicate its relationship to the *Canons of Hippolytus* (p. lxxv). It would seem likely, then, that a later date may well be involved here. Hereafter, I will refer to *Sarapion's Prayer-book* by chapter and page number in parentheses in the text.

order of the proposed reconstruction, these are the prayers and benedictions of the faithful before the anaphora, baptism, holy communion, and two apparently post-communion services of anointing with oil. It is interesting and perhaps significant to note that the prayers for the mass of the catechumens included here omit all reference to any ministry of healing. This could be an oversight or an intentional omission since catechumens presumably wouldn't be reading a book like this anyway. On the other hand, it could also provide an explanation for having the service of anointing follow the post-communion prayer. Perhaps the ill among the catechumens would be allowed to enter the church to receive anointing after the rites of the eucharist were ended. The anointing prayer (#6, pp. 67-68) doesn't seem to support this idea directly, but neither does it rule this out entirely. I will discuss another possibility for the omission of the catechumens later.

Among the pre-anaphoral prayers and benedictions, three are of particular interest: "Prayer for those who are sick" (#22, p. 83), "Laying on of hands (Benediction) of sick persons" (#30, p. 93), and "Prayer on behalf of the people" (#27 B, p. 91). Presumably the benediction of the sick would have immediately followed the prayer for the sick, and the prayers for the people would have immediately preceded the anaphora (pp. 32-36).

The "Prayer for those who are sick," after acknowledging God as "overlooker and Lord and fashioner of the body," asks God to "assist and heal all that are sick. Rebuke the sicknesses: raise up those that are lying down" (p. 83). The benediction of the sick expands on this theme:

O Lord God of compassions, stretch out thine hand and grant that all the sick may be healed. Grant them to be counted worthy of health. Free them from the sickness which lies upon them. Let them be healed in the name of thy only-begotten. May his holy name be to them a medicine for health and soundness, because through him to thee (is) the glory and the strength in holy Spirit both now and to all the ages of ages. Amen (p. 93)

Here the name of Jesus, or the invocation of that name, is seen as efficacious for healing.

What is not clear is the significance of the laying on of hands (if that actually happened) by the bishop. Were the sick gathered at the front near the bishop to receive this prayer and blessing? Did the bishop say this prayer over each of the sick, or, as it appears from the plural references, over the sick in general? In short, was the invocation of the name by the bishop sufficient, or was the touch of the bishop also needed? Whatever the answers to these question, though, unmistakably this rite of prayer was seen as one means of grace for healing.

Apparently, though, if Sarum's reconstruction is correct, it may not have been seen as necessarily efficacious. The last petition of the "Prayer on behalf of (the) people" reads, "We pray for the sick, grant (them) health and raise them up from their sickness, and make them to have perfect health of body and soul" (p. 91). To be sure, another prayer for the sick is not necessarily in conflict with the idea that the sick have already been healed; indeed, it may function as a sort of confession that that has or does regularly happen, or simply as a summary and conclusion of the previous prayers. It is also possible, perhaps even likely, that this prayer belongs to another tradition than that of the preceding prayers for the sick, especially since it is part of a larger litany of prayer for the church and the world. In that case, too, there is no real conflict, but also no attempt to harmonize potentially conflicting messages. It is enough to note, though, that the presence of this prayer after the preceding prayers for healing does call

into question their efficacy.

But the Church does not live by words alone. In Sarapion's *Prayer Book* the sacraments are also seen as efficacious for healing. The prayer for the oil of anointing before baptism is specifically linked to healing.

"[W]e anoint with anointing oil those who in purpose approach this divine regeneration, beseeching (thee) that our Lord Jesus Christ may work in them healing and strength-making power, and by this anointing oil may reveal (himself) and heal away from their soul, body, spirit, every mark of sin and lawlessness or Satanic fault (#15, p. 75).

Two things should be noted about this prayer. First, there is a strong connection made here between sin or Satan and sickness, whether of body or of soul, with the soul seeming to have some priority over the body. This connection is, of course, quite appropriate for the context of baptism, which, after all, is no mere "washing of the body" but a "divine regeneration" of the whole person in which, if *The Apostolic Tradition* is at all representative for fourth century Egyptian usage, sin and Satan are specifically renounced.¹⁷

Second, "healing" is the primary metaphor used to describe the activity of this anointing. On the one hand, given the strong connection between sin and sickness this prayer implies, "healing" could itself be a metaphor for "spiritual cleansing" and, it might be argued, should not be understood literally. However, given the apparent exclusion of catechumens from the church's prayers and perhaps other rites for healing, the pre-baptismal anointing could very well be the first opportunity for healing for the newly-converted. This makes more sense given the use of oil in this anointing and in the post-communion rites for healing alike, as we shall later see. Moreover, it is the prayer for the oil of chrismation, applied after

¹⁷ See Dix, *The Apostolic Tradition*, p. 34.

baptism, which more specifically refers to spiritual cleansing and hardly at all to the body (#16, pp. 76-77).¹⁸

The eucharist, too, was seen as an occasion for healing. Two prayers in the anaphora point specifically to this (#1.C, F; pp. 63, 64). The first, labeled by Sarum as "Invocation of the Logos," asks, after calling for the Word of God to transform the elements into the body and blood of Christ, for "all who communicate to receive a medicine of life for the healing of every sickness and for the strengthening of all advancement and virtue" (p. 63). The second, "Prayer for those who have offered" (again Sarum's title, not Sarapion's), asks a blessing for all who have offered "the offerings and the thanksgivings"¹⁹ and asks God to "grant health and soundness and cheerfulness and all advancement of soul and body to this whole people" (p. 64).

While there thus appears to be a strong sense in which partaking of holy communion was viewed as a means of healing, the prayer of the fraction asks not for healing, but for "our bodies to contain purity" (#2, p. 65), and the post-communion prayer makes clear reference to forgiveness of sins, but no very clear reference to healing (#4, p. 66).²⁰ This might be

¹⁸ Indeed, the only references here to the body are that the chrismated person may remain "unhurt and inviolate, free from harsh treatment and intrigue." These epithets sound very little like prayers for healing from a current bodily affliction or disease, but prayers for protection from affliction or torture by other people, and steadfastness in faith if such trials should come.

¹⁹ These may refer to the eucharistic elements and prayers, or, perhaps, to additional offerings, such as oil, olives, and cheese as found in *The Apostolic Tradition*, or even bread or other items, as in #17, p. 77, discussed below.

²⁰ The closest we might come to a reference to healing is the line "thou . . . hast set aside the threat that was against us" (p. 66), but in context the "threat" seems to be sin or its penalty, not

interpreted in a number of ways. The most obvious is that physical healing is not the main function of the eucharist but may be a subsidiary one. The fact that healing is mentioned in the anaphoral prayers may indicate that healing was an important subsidiary function, perhaps the most important,²¹ but still subsidiary to the main function of receiving forgiveness and cleansing from sin and the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is also possible that Sarapion's prayers are here representative of several different eucharistic traditions, some which see healing as central, and others which do not.

The most unequivocal means of healing in Sarapion's *Prayer Book* are the post-communion services of anointing with oil. Two prayers (#5, pp. 66-67; #17, pp. 77-78) are significant here. The first, "Prayer concerning the oils and waters that are offered," may, as we have suggested in a footnote, refer to oil or water offered at the anaphora (1.F, p. 64), but would not have been said until after the communion was ended.²² It is possible that this prayer would have been used in a post-communion service involving only the sick and the bishop.

The prayer reads:

We bless through the name of thy only-begotten Jesus Christ these creatures, we name the name of him who suffered . . . upon this water and upon this [oil]. Grant healing power upon these creatures that every fever and every evil spirit and every sickness may depart through the drinking and the anointing, and that the partaking of

disease or sickness.

²¹ Healing is mentioned in two separate prayers, while "the living" and "the departed" receive only one prayer apiece; see #1. D, E, pp. 63-64).

²² The benediction which follows this prayer asks, "Grant this blessing to be a keeping of their communion, and a security to the Eucharist that has been celebrated" (#6, p. 67).

these creatures may be a healing medicine, and a medicine of soundness, in the name . . . (pp. 66-67)

What is unclear about this service is exactly how and where the oil and water were used. It would make sense that the anointing would be done at the service by the bishop. It is possible that the holy water would be consumed at the same time, but it is also possible that the water (and perhaps even the oil) would have been carried away by the sick for their use at home. The opening line of the benediction after this prayer may suggest this interpretation: "[L]et the communion of thy body and blood go along with (\3sumparabainetw\1) this people" (p. 67). This also opens another possibility of interpretation, that perhaps this post-communion service of water and oil was used as a substitute communion for those who were too ill to stomach the bread and wine of the communion. For such people, healing would indeed be sought as a primary benefit to be obtained in holy communion.

The other prayer, "Prayer in regard to oil of the sick or for bread or for water," may be an expansion of the previous prayer, or may have been used in non-eucharistic healing services conducted at other times. The latter seems more likely. It is also possible that this prayer was used for exorcism and thus might apply to the ill among the catechumens (against my theory about pre-baptismal anointing as the first rite of healing for the newly-converted).²³

The prayer reads:

We invoke thee who hast all authority and power. . . and pray thee to send healing power of the only-begotten from heaven upon this

²³ See above, p. 18. My theory may still apply in a modified form. This service does not appear to be connected with the celebration of the divine liturgy proper. There are no references in it of any kind to the eucharist. There are still no prayers for healing of catechumens in the mass of the catechumens according to Sarum's reconstruction. Pre-baptismal anointing may still have been the first "official" or "public" or "eucharistic" rite of healing for the newly-converted.

oil, that it may become to those who are being anointed (with it), or are partaking of these thy creatures, for a throwing off of every sickness and every infirmity, for a charm against every demon, for a separation of every unclean spirit, for an expulsion of every evil spirit, for a driving out of all fever and ague and every infirmity, for good grace and remission of sins, for a medicine of life and salvation, for health and soundness of soul, body, spirit, for perfect strengthening. O Master, let every Satanic energy, every demon, every device of the adversary, every plague, every scourge, every pain, every labour or stroke or shaking or evil shadowing, fear thy holy name which we have now invoked and the name of the only begotten; and let them depart from the inward [and] the outward parts of these thy servants, that his name may be glorified who for us was crucified and rose again, who took up our sicknesses and our infirmities, (even) Jesus Christ . . . (pp. 77-78).

There is clearly a strong connection made in this prayer between Satan and/or demonic powers and the presence of illness, indeed almost a causative connection. The intended audience for this prayer, aside, of course, from God, may be established by two references in the prayer itself. At least some of the audience must have been "energumens," demon-possessed persons, as the line "for an expulsion of every evil spirit" might indicate. On the other hand, the prayer refers to the people before the bishop as "these thy servants" would tend to rule out at least non-believers, and may, though not clearly, exclude even catechumens. To determine that, however, it would be necessary to know whether Sarapion or the Egyptian tradition he represents believed persons who had been baptized and chrismated could become demon-possessed. If that were not possible, the prayer could only refer to catechumens; if it were, catechumens may or may not have been included.

On the other hand it is also important to note how strong the non-exorcistic language of healing is in this prayer. Jesus is invoked not as exorcist, but as the healer "who took up our sicknesses and infirmities." Given this, perhaps the intended audience for this prayer were the

mentally ill, persons who might have been thought to be influenced or possessed at times by demons but who may also have been recognized as having organic disease. The mention of "every labour or stroke or shaking or evil shadowing" would fit this context very well, especially since the first three are physical symptoms and only the last is specifically given the epithet "evil."²⁴ The "borderline" language of exorcism and healing might thus be representative of the "borderline" condition of the mentally ill between spiritual and physical disorder.

Like the post-communion service of healing, this service, too, involves at least two means of administration: anointing the sick with oil, either by the bishop or, possibly, by other church officials or even laypersons, and/or the consumption of blessed or holy food by the sick. The means of administration seems indifferent here; either way (or both!) it would be seen as "a medicine of life and salvation." There seems no reason to suppose that the bread mentioned here is eucharistic bread; indeed, if we are speaking about catechumens or energumens chances are such would be denied to them. However, perhaps in place of the eucharist in which these people cannot participate, this rite of healing is seen as sacramental, "for good grace and remission of sins." While the mention of "remission of sins" in connection with anointing the sick is in good accord with James 5, the specifically sacramental character of the holy oil or food may have been an innovation, an adaptation to

²⁴ I recognize, of course, that this entire list is prefaced by a reference to "every Satanic energy;" I don't think that weakens my case, however.

deal with a pastoral situation the Bible didn't describe,²⁵ a way of including persons who would otherwise be excluded in the sacramental life of the Church.

Overall, the witness of Sarapion's *Prayer Book* to healing in a fourth-century Egyptian liturgy is quite comprehensive. It would appear from this collection of prayers that healing was a central aspect of this church's mission, one which tried to reach as many baptized and chrismated Christians, and perhaps some catechumens and energumens, by as many means possible. In this regard, it is very much in line with the Liturgy of Saint Mark, used in Alexandria, Egypt, which also contains frequent references to healing.²⁶ It is possible that the eucharist itself was adapted to meet the needs of the sick who could not physically receive it, and that a new sacrament for the remission of sins was included here for those who were not spiritually qualified to attend the eucharist. The one group apparently omitted from the healing ministrations of the church was non-believers, but it is likely that a bishop would not have included prayers for them in such a work as this in the first place.

²⁵ The idea of innovation or adaptation is central to E. Glenn Hinson's *The Evangelization of the Roman Empire* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1981). While he does not discuss healing as a Christian institution or list Sarapion's *Prayer Book* among the sources he consults, his idea that Christians would adapt their worship and discipline to meet the mission needs of the Church and the culture before them underlies my thinking about this rite, if my interpretation of it is correct.

²⁶ As I noted in my introduction, I am not covering this liturgy in any great detail in this paper, in part because I think it may be of a later date than the fourth century. But in this liturgy, healing is mentioned both in the opening prayers and in the prayer at the Little Entrance (See ANF, vol. vii, p. 553) as part of the mission of the church ("sent them forth to proclaim . . . and to heal"), is specifically included three times in the eucharistic prayer (p. 555), once at the prayer of incense (p. 557), and directly after the epiclesis (p. 558), though not at all in the prayer of thanksgiving following communion.

Constitutions of the Holy Apostles

The *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, or *Apostolic Constitutions*, as they are more frequently called, is a collection of church rules and ordinances by an unorthodox compiler in Syria sometime during the late fourth century, perhaps around 380.²⁷

While the compiler cannot be called an Arian, one of the prayers in one of the major manuscripts takes much pains to make God superior over all, including the Son.²⁸ While the possible heterodoxy of the compiler may call into question the value of his work for a study in early liturgy, for our purposes such tendencies are likely to have little effect.²⁹

Of interest for our study are materials in Book II dealing with the duties of bishops and presbyters, a section on "the assembling of the church" and some prayers in book VII, and large sections of Book VIII, especially the so-called "Clementine" liturgy for the ordination of a bishop and other prayers and canons concerning church officers and the liturgy.³⁰

²⁷ F. E. Brightman, ed. *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, vol. 1 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1896), pp. xxv-xxix.

²⁸ See the V manuscript version of "The Form of Prayer for the Ordination of a Bishop," ANF viii., p. 482.

²⁹ Of more concern, perhaps, is the value of the so-called "Clementine" liturgy of Book VIII as an example of early Syrian liturgy. Scholarly opinion, from what I can gather, is unanimous that this liturgy would never have been used in its current form. Brightman (*Liturgies Eastern and Western*, p. xxxi) is confident, though, that this liturgy, at least in the anaphora and in broad outlines elsewhere, is representative of Syrian usage.

³⁰ My text for the *Apostolic Constitutions* is found in Alexander Robertson and James Donaldson, eds., "Constitutions of the Holy Apostles," *Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. vii (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, repr. 1985). Future references to this work will be noted in the text by book, paragraph, and page number.

According to "How the governed are to obey the bishops who are set over them" in Book II, the office of the bishop includes the duty of "healing that which is sick," but that is quickly qualified by the words, "that is, curing by instruction that which is weak in the faith through doubleness of mind" (II, xx, p. 404). Here, healing is not meant to be understood physically or literally, but spiritually. The same appears to be true of the order later in this section, "Cure them, heal them by all means; restore them sound to the church" (p. 405). But in a section on repentance after intentional sin a few paragraphs later, the words are "let [the bishop] heal and receive those which turn from their sins" (II, xxiii, p. 408). It is possible that physical healing was intended here, but this is difficult to establish with certainty.

In "According to what patterns and dignity every order of the clergy is appointed by God" again no mention is made of healing by the bishop, nor are presbyters singled out as having any ministry of healing. Instead, both are referred to as teachers of "piety" (the bishop) or "divine knowledge" (the presbyters, II, xxvi, p. 410).

In a similar fashion, no mention is made of healing in the section of Book VII dealing with "assembling the church." No mention is made of healing as among the reasons for or benefits of attending the weekly liturgy in "How we ought to assemble together," nor is healing (or any other "spiritual gift" per se) mentioned as a qualification nor benefit of ordination in "What qualifications they are to have who are to be ordained" (VII, xxx, xxxi, p. 471).

Perhaps more importantly, healing is nowhere in view in "A prayer declarative of God's various providence." Instead, God is exalted for having "demonstrated to every [person]

by implanted knowledge . . . how . . . our strength and force are easily dissolved" (VII, xxxiii, p. 472). At the same time, however, "A prayer for the assistance of the righteous" does include the confession "He has delivered us from the sword, . . . has delivered us from sickness, has preserved us from an evil tongue" (VII, xxxviii, p. 475). But nothing in the paragraph on the instruction of catechumens makes any reference to healing, either (VII, xxxix, pp. 475-476).

The most obvious conclusion that may be drawn thus far is that healing as a ministry of the church in late fourth century Syria either did not exist or was extremely unimportant. Far more important to their theology was participating and being victorious in a battle with sin in this life and in the rewards of the life to come.³¹

But these are not the only voices in the *Apostolic Constitutions*. Book VIII points in some other directions. Here, three means of healing are recognized: the ministry of persons with the gift of healing, participation in the liturgy, and the ministry of bishops (by blessing oil) and presbyters (by ordination).

Book VIII begins with a section on spiritual gifts. The first paragraph of this has much to say about the gift of healing, mostly in the form of recounting the ministry of Jesus and the legacy of healing by the apostles. But an editorial "spin" on this document is clear. "Let not, therefore, anyone that works signs and wonders judge any one of the faithful who is not vouchsafed the same" (VIII, i, p.481). Gifts of healing are hereby affirmed, but also almost

³¹ This is made especially clear in "A prayer declarative of God's various providence, where God is chiefly praised for having "appointed this present world as a place of combat to righteousness" (p. 472).

"damned with faint praise." It may be significant that a similar warning is not given to those who do not have such gifts.

Later in Book VIII, however, in at least some of the manuscripts, the office of exorcist as healer is clearly established. In a line very close to Hippolytus's sanction on laying hands on healers, this article declares that "an exorcist is not ordained. . . For he who has the gift of healing is declared by revelation from God" (VIII, xxvi, p. 493). Here exorcism is considered a form of the gift of healing. Also, unlike most interpretations of Hippolytus, ordination is not proscribed. Instead, it reads, "if there is occasion for him, let him be ordained a bishop, or a presbyter, or a deacon" (p. 493)

In the "Clementine" liturgy, the first act of healing, if it may be called so, comes in the form of the prayers for the energumens after the dismissal of the catechumens. The deacon's bidding prayer asks the congregation, "let us all earnestly pray for them, that God. . . will by Christ rebuke the unclean and wicked spirits" (VIII, vi, pp.483-484). The bishop's prayer bids, "Thou only begotten God, the Son of the great Father, rebuke these wicked spirits, and deliver the works of Thy hands from the power of the adverse spirit" (VIII, vii, p. 484). The energumens were then dismissed by the bishop. Whether this would have been a fixed element in the Sunday liturgy, or only applied occasionally or at the ordination of bishops, or is peculiar to this liturgy is difficult to determine. It does seem odd, though, that the energumens are here dismissed after the catechumens. This may reflect a new setting in the church where baptism ordinarily took place in infancy and where some of the baptized later became "demon-possessed."

The petitions of the prayers for the faithful also reveal something of the view of the

church toward sickness and healing. The deacon's bidding prayer reads, "Let us pray for our brethren exercised with sickness, that the Lord may deliver them from every sickness and disease, and restore them sound into His holy Church" (VIII, x, p. 485). "Exercised with sickness" would appear to refer to people who are seriously or chronically ill, perhaps a suggestion that whatever rites the church may possess for healing, they have not yet been effective. The bishop's prayer merely repeats the deacon's ("[D]eliver them from every sickness and every disease") and adds further petition for deliverance "from every offence, every injury and deceit" and for eternal life (VIII, xi, 486).

In the anaphora and eucharist the idea of healing seems to be present, but is ambiguous. In the prayer of anamnesis after the *Sanctus*, remembrance is made of Jesus that "He drove away every sickness and every disease" (VIII, xii, 489). But in the prayer after the words of institution, the words of the bishop concerning the sick are "that Thou, the helper and assister of all [people], wilt be their supporter" (VIII, xii, p. 490); healing is not clearly indicated here. The prayer after communion asks "that it may not be to us for condemnation, but for salvation, to the advantage of soul and body" (VIII, xiv, p. 491). While this may indicate some physical benefit of communion, healing does not seem to be clearly intended.

While the "Clementine" liturgy proper does not clearly establish a ministry of healing in the anaphora, "Concerning the blessing of water and oil," later in Book VIII, may. Here, the bishop blesses water and oil that are offered, perhaps in the anaphora (as we saw in Hippolytus, though not in Sarapion), and asks that God might "grant them a power to restore health, to drive away diseases, to banish demons, and to disperse all snares through Christ, our hope" (VIII, xxix, p. 494). What isn't clear here, though, is how the water and oil would be

used. Would the bishop impose or anoint with them, and if so, when? Or were these for private use? That the blessing of the oil is to be "in the name of him or her that has offered them" may suggest either that the bishop would use this oil and water only for the particular person who offered it, or may be establishing a supply of blessed water and oil for private use by the sick person. Either one seems viable.

The ordination of presbyters provides one final insight into the healing tradition of the Syrian church. In the prayer for ordination, the bishop asks, "Do Thou also now, O Lord, grant. . . that this person, being filled with the gifts of healing and of teaching, may in meekness instruct thy people" (VIII, xvi, p. 492). The trouble with this injunction, however, is that nowhere in the *Apostolic Constitutions* is there any description of how the presbyters might use their gifts of healing. Again, one could suppose that "healing" is used metaphorically here as it was of the ministry of the bishop in Book II, but the use of the plural form "gifts," as well as the description of spiritual gifts which begins Book VIII, probably suggests that it is intended literally.

Overall, then, how might we assess the ministry of healing in the *Apostolic Constitutions*? Based on our discussion of Book VIII, it is clear that such ministry was not entirely non-existent. Nor was it without importance, since at least vestiges of rites or healing intent remain in the language of the liturgy and in descriptions of various church offices. The key word, though, seems to be vestiges. By and large, as we noted earlier, the life and mission of the church for which the *Apostolic Constitutions* was written were more focused on fighting sin and enjoying or anticipating eternal life in the hereafter. Perhaps for that very reason the rites and ministries of healing had fallen into disuse, so that what remains in the

record of the *Constitutions* is not a description of current practice, but a sign of an age which had passed.

Conclusion: Southern Baptists and a Ministry of Healing

In at least one major respect, the insights a paper like this can make into the ministries of healing by the early churches won't be well received as any basis for current practice by Southern Baptists. After all, what I have discussed here is precisely Tradition, indeed several traditions, and precious little about Scripture per se. Baptists, who perhaps have taken Luther's dictum *sola scriptura* more seriously than anybody, are likely to reply, "If it isn't in the Bible, we won't do it." Baptists by and large scorn tradition (except their own), and thereby fail to remember that the Bible, too, is Tradition, indeed the hallmark of the tradition of the Church.

If I may be allowed to argue from tradition, though, as well as from scripture, it would appear that the churches of the first four centuries had a continuing interest in and practice of some form of ministry of healing apart from the personal prayers of other Christians. James points to a ministry by elders, or presbyters, and maybe to a public ceremony of healing after a corporate confession of sin. Hippolytus of Rome records rites of anointing at the eucharist and the ministry of charismatic healers. Sarapion of Egypt, and perhaps the entire early Egyptian tradition, saw healing as central to the mission of the church, and included it in baptism, the eucharist, the corporate prayers, and special services after communion and throughout the week. And the *Apostolic Constitutions*, while apparently downplaying the importance of ministries of healing, still records them.

Here's my ax to grind. Given the testimony of the tradition of the first four centuries, I

see good reason for Southern Baptists (indeed all Christian churches!) to develop some form of ministry of healing, if they don't already have one.

The form of such ministries obviously cannot be slavishly copied from the first four centuries. The liturgies and church orders we have analyzed are quite diverse and seemed relatively free in their adaptation of biblical or other traditional materials to fit the needs of the people among whom they were used. Along these lines, a Baptist form of such ministry would probably be less sacramental in character than the early traditions.

Another question must be considered. Can Southern Baptists, given the rise of neo-Landmarkism, overcome their separatist tendencies and engage in fruitful discussions which might lead to balanced, well-grounded ministries of healing? The question we have to ask before this is whether Southern Baptists feel such a ministry is important enough to engage in such dialog.

From my experience as a Southern Baptist, I'd have to say that such ministries are very important. When Southern Baptists pray together, the majority of their prayers and requests for prayer are for the sick and the hospitalized. Often, there is a general feeling of helplessness and grieving that accompanies such prayers, and little sense of hope. Some visible, tangible form of ministry for healing could be a form of bringing more hope both to those who are sick and those who pray for them, and the hope, or even the ministry itself as a form of the mediation of the Church and the Spirit, could bring healing.

In considering particular forms a ministry of healing might take, some form of the ministry described in James 5 might be a good starting place for us. The church would have to decide who its "elders" are-- perhaps deacons, or perhaps unofficial spiritual leaders in the

church. Such a ministry could also be an effective means of outreach and an opportunity for evangelism to non-Christian persons who are ill, a move which, though not clearly in continuity with the first four centuries, fits our evangelistic heritage very well. Occasionally, our celebrations of the Lord's Supper or baptism might include some meditation on the healing presence of Christ.

These are suggestions and starts, no more. Baptists are too diverse and too anti-authoritarian in general, despite the authoritarian tendencies of fundamentalism, to be told what to do, especially in matters of worship. We can also be very creative in adapting old forms to meet new mission needs. My hope is that we will listen to the witness of the first four centuries, in all its variety, and find ways of ministry to the sick which convey a firm and balanced message: Through Christ we stand with you in your pain and your fear, and through Christ we stand with you against those things which cause you pain and your fear.