The relationships between the Devil and disease, sickness and sin, healing and forgiveness, and exorcism and deliverance is an intriguing and controversial issue. Biblical scholars have long debated the exact understanding of Christians, Jews and pagans about such matters.¹ Pastoral psychologists,² pastoral counsellors³ and social scientists⁴ have made several attempts to integrate the psychic, physiological and spiritual dimensions of mental and physical health.

But such scholarly interests pale in comparison to the attention this topic has received at the popular level within the Pentecostal and


Charismatic traditions. While I do not have at my disposal the data that would enable me to make hard and fast claims concerning the specific ways in which individuals within the tradition line up on this issue, since so much of the data exists in oral instead of published form, it does seem to me that Pentecostals and Charismatics can generally be divided into the following three categories.

First there are those who see lurking behind every illness or misfortune demonic activity. For these believers there is a clear line of demarcation between the Devil (illness) and God (healing). In each circumstance the believer is to rebuke Satan, curse the demonic oppression and utilize the authority God has bestowed upon him or her through Jesus Christ. Generally, those who take this position attribute any failure to receive healing to a deficiency on the part of those who pray. A lack of faith or the presence of sin might prevent healing, but it is never God’s will for a believer to continue in such suffering. God’s will is for all to be healed.

A second group within the tradition would maintain that while ultimately all disease is from the Devil, not every individual sick person is ill as the direct result of Satanic attack. In other words, while there may be instances of believers suffering disease at the hands of Satan, many Christians may become sick from ‘natural causes’. Such a position is advocated for a couple of reasons. First, many of these believers hold that since sin and sickness entered the world through the Fall of Adam, and will not finally be removed until the parousia, individual Christians are just as likely to suffer physically as an unbeliever. Such is the fate of those who live in a fallen world. Secondly, the idea that demons can possess and/or oppress Christians is viewed at best as resting upon very meagre biblical support, and at worst as an unbiblical heresy. The bottom line is that these individuals believe that not every illness can be attributed directly to the Devil. The implication of this assessment is that God might sometimes use suffering for his glory. Prayer for the sick is always legitimate, but it might not always be God’s will to bring physical healing.

A final group is comprised of what might be called ‘functional deists’. These believers genuinely believe in God’s power to heal and the Devil’s ability to inflict suffering, but have become rather disengaged and detached from the whole business. On the one hand, this apathy is in part the result of, or reaction to, outlandish (and sometimes embarrassing) claims made by proponents of divine