This paper explores empirical data to test for the main approaches to healing being pursued by British Pentecostal ministers. It sets these approaches within a theological and historical context. On the basis of its findings, it sketches two scenarios about the future place healing might play in the church of the twenty-first century.

Theological and Historical Context

The four main Pentecostal denominations within the UK have all historically either explicitly or by implication addressed the issue of healing within the statements of faith to which their ministers are expected to subscribe. For example, Assemblies of God in Great Britain and Ireland say, ‘we believe that deliverance from sickness by Divine Healing is provided for in the Atonement’. Similarly the Church of God states, ‘Divine healing is provided for all in the atonement’. The Apostolic church certainly accepted the strong Pentecostal position on healing, though in its tenets there is nothing more specific than reference to the ‘nine gifts of the Holy Spirit for the edification, exhortation and comfort of the Church’. However Turnbull, in an authoritative

* William K. Kay (PhD [Theology], Nottingham; PhD [Education], Reading) is Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Theology and Education, Trinity College, Carmarthen, Wales, and Secretary and Treasurer of the Donald Gee Centre, Mattersey, UK.

historical account, conjoins healing through the activity of the Holy Spirit with the atonement of Christ: ‘the operation of the finished work of Christ on our behalf in regard to divine healing is made effectual by these gifts of healing’ in a way that does not rule out extreme interpretations of the doctrine. The Elim church, having revised its fundamental truths in 1994, continues to emphasize healing, but makes its basis less specific: ‘we believe that the Gospel embraces the needs of the whole man and the Church is therefore commissioned to preach the Gospel to the world and to fulfil a ministry of healing and deliverance to the spiritual and physical needs of mankind’.

Before the Pentecostal denominations were formed, the most influential figure within the antecedent events was A.A. Boddy, the Anglican vicar of Sunderland. His own views of healing were influenced by the experience of his wife, who was healed from asthma in answer to prayer in about 1900, and he regularly prayed with laying on of hands for his daughter when she needed help during adolescence. Smith Wigglesworth, who appeared to be an archetypal British Pentecostal—blunt, formally uneducated and unconventional—was influential in the spread of Pentecostalism within the UK and overseas. His doctrine of healing centred round faith. His main explanation to account for lack of healing, for instance in the case of his daughter Alice who was deaf, lay in the sick person’s lack of faith. This is not to say that he condemned people who remained ill and, so far as Alice was concerned, his relationship with her was good and she taught him patience.

Wigglesworth, who was never closely identified with any single denomination, lived on until 1947 and his example and his books continue to exert an influence across a broad spectrum of Pentecostal opinion. By contrast, Nelson Parr who was intimately associated with

2. It should be pointed out, however, that the Apostolic church’s Manual of Belief, Practice and History (Penygroes: The Apostolic Church, 1988) does not link healing and atonement.
4. J. Vazeille Boddy, Memoir (c. 1970; held in the archives of the Donald Gee Centre at Mattersey Hall, Mattersey, England).