

Reflecting the Great Physician: The Life and Ministry of Dr. Lilian B. Yeomans



Marissa Tailleir, Vanguard College Alumnus¹

ABSTRACT: *Several prominent figures, including John Alexander Dowie and Aimee Semple McPherson, are well known to have influenced the early Pentecostal movement. Dr. Lilian B. Yeomans (1861-1942) is not well known today, yet her life, writings, and ministry were significant contributions to early Pentecostalism. The fruit of her deliverance from morphine addiction was a life and ministry that exhibited her firm faith in God's Word. As a physician, she gave important insight into the doctrine of divine healing. Her compassionate practice of preaching the Gospel paired with praying for healing had a clear impact wherever she ministered. Believers today who desire to learn about the key figures of early Pentecostalism can be encouraged in their faith by reading her writings.*

KEYWORDS: *Pentecostal History, Lilian B. Yeomans, Yeomans, Divine healing, Holistic ministry, Christian Theology, 20th century church history*

Introduction

Ontario-born Dr. Lilian Barbara Yeomans (1861-1942), although not widely known today, was best known during her time as a physician healed of morphine addiction, a prolific writer on divine healing, and an active preacher and healing evangelist. Her life intersected with several prominent figures in the early Pentecostal movement, including Andrew H. Argue, Carrie Judd Montgomery, John Alexander Dowie, and Aimee Semple McPherson.² Therefore, through seeing her life, writings, and ministry, one gets a snapshot of the people, events, cultural context, and Pentecostal doctrines and practices of the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century that shaped her life. This paper argues that Dr. Lilian Yeomans made significant contributions to the early Pentecostal movement due to her faith, Pentecostal doctrines, and practices. First, her testimony shows Jesus' healing and redemption through faith in God's Word. Then, Lilian's Pentecostal doctrines focused on God's character and promises of healing throughout His Word, which served as the foundation for her ministry. Third, Dr. Yeomans' practices had a significant impact and included holistic missions, praying and laying hands on the sick, and preaching and teaching Scripture. Her reasonable faith in God's Word coupled with her Spirit-empowered healing and teaching ministry provides a powerful example for believers today

¹ Marissa is a 2025 graduate from Vanguard College with an After-Degree in Theology and Minor in Intercultural Ministry. She currently practices as a Registered Dental Hygienist and does outreach to Middle Eastern refugees to Canada. She may be contacted at marissa.tailleur@vanguardmail.ca.

² Desiree D. Rodgers, "Encountering the Great Physician: The Life and Ministry of Dr. Lilian B. Yeomans," *Assemblies of God Heritage*, 2016, 5.



who seek to serve the LORD. Diving into her story, it is clear that she glorified God through her life and ministry, and that God used her to heal many bodies and souls throughout North America.

Faith

Dr. Yeomans's faith was sparked and endured throughout her life and ministry through the Lord's healing and transformation of her life at a critical moment. Although she was raised in a Puritan family, learned the Ten Commandments, and went to Sunday school, she reported living as a sinner throughout her childhood and young adulthood.³ As she followed her father into the medical profession, she said, "By the time I graduated in medicine I was practically an agnostic. I became so hardened that I absolutely hated the missionaries who were at college with me."⁴ She was following God at a distance during this time of her life, which led to a downward spiral.

After graduation, she started practicing medicine in Winnipeg alongside her mother and sister. However, the physician soon started to self-medicate with morphine due to her insomnia and the stress of her work, which she gradually increased to doses "fifty times the normal dose of an adult man."⁵ She recognized that she was a "veritable victim of morphinomania"—an addiction that would soon lead to death—and sought several ways to overcome it.⁶ Lilian tried praying, quitting cold turkey, the famous consulting with other physicians, and even Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science content.⁷ Nothing healed her of her addiction, and her condition only worsened. Her salvation came not "by means," but by a "personal encounter with the healing power of his gracious hand."⁸

The woman physician met the Great Physician as she turned to desperate study of God's Word. Through her study, she sensed that God would not deliver her from her narcotics addiction through her own efforts or willpower. This sense influenced her decision to move to John Alexander Dowie's Zion Divine Healing Home in Chicago, Illinois in 1898.⁹ At the healing home, the institution confiscated her medications as it strictly relied on divine healing. Therefore, she had to rely on the grace of God to endure her withdrawal symptoms. When her condition seemed hopeless, a friend visited telling her to go to church. Although she initially refused, the Holy Spirit spoke to her heart that, "I sent him here to tell you to go to the church. Arise."¹⁰ With great exertion and accompanied by her sister, Lilian walked to the church. Shortly after the service, her condition began to improve, as if the Lord used her step of faith to kickstart her healing in Jesus' name. On January 12, 1898, the power of God delivered her from her morphine addiction. From then on, Dr. Yeomans' reasonable faith in the Lord became grounded on God's Word and His promises of "divine healing on every page."¹¹ Her perspective on a person guided by this reasonable faith was that she "refuses to take one step unless she has the Word of God under her feet, whereas fanaticism is ready to be guided by feelings and impressions alone."¹² In the early Pentecostal movement—characterized by many as sensationalist and unbiblical—her faith in the authority of God's Word resulted in a Christ-like life and fruitful ministry. While she respected the medical profession and continued to practice for a time after her healing, she made praying for the sick and sharing the Gospel her life's work.¹³ She stewarded her reasonable faith well, which led to positive action. In contrast, John Alexander Dowie marred his reputation as he

³ Lilian B. Yeomans, *Balm of Gilead* (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1936) 13.

⁴ Yeomans, *Balm of Gilead*, 13.

⁵ Lilian B. Yeomans, *Healing from Heaven* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1935) 9.

⁶ Yeomans, *Healing from Heaven*, 9.

⁷ Rodgers, "Encountering the Great Physician: The Life and Ministry of Dr. Lilian B. Yeomans," 7.

⁸ Rodgers, "Encountering the Great Physician: The Life and Ministry of Dr. Lilian B. Yeomans," 9.

⁹ Rodgers, "Encountering the Great Physician: The Life and Ministry of Dr. Lilian B. Yeomans," 9.

¹⁰ Rodgers, "Encountering the Great Physician: The Life and Ministry of Dr. Lilian B. Yeomans," 9.

¹¹ Yeomans, *Balm of Gilead*, 21.

¹² Yeomans, *Balm of Gilead*, 21.

¹³ Rodgers, "Encountering the Great Physician: The Life and Ministry of Dr. Lilian B. Yeomans," 9.

claimed to be Elijah the Restorer, rejected all doctors and drugs as “man’s way,” and incited his followers to vandalize pharmacies and intimidate pharmacists.¹⁴ He extrapolated his faith beyond reason or Scripture. In summary, Dr. Yeomans distinguished herself as a minister who stepped out in faith and was healed, began serving the Lord, and then exhorted others to do the same.¹⁵

After her divine healing, she became an ordained missionary and ministered among the Cree Nation of Northern Manitoba as a physician and evangelist.¹⁶ Then, after moving to Calgary, she received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues in 1907 and held evangelism and healing meetings in rural Alberta.¹⁷ In the late 1920s, she moved her family to California and taught on church history and divine healing for more than fifteen years at Aimee Semple McPherson’s Angelus Temple and L.I.F.E. Bible School. Although Yeomans gained a great platform for teaching, her ministry connection with McPherson caused some tension with the Assemblies of God for which Yeomans was an ordained evangelist. Lilian Yeomans was also a prolific writer sharing her healing theology and testimonies from her ministry in several tracts, magazine articles, and books.¹⁸ That Yeomans’ faith was living and active is evident through her good works and positive impact, which will be further explored in the discussion of her doctrines and practices.

Pentecostal Doctrines

Just as she would prescribe medication, Dr. Yeomans’ doctrine on healing was that one must take the remedy for one’s sickness, God’s Word, and mix it with faith.¹⁹ In other words, one must prayerfully apply the promises of healing in Scripture to one’s present situation to receive healing through faith in Jesus, the Great Physician. To her, it was the unconditional will of God to heal all spiritual and physical affliction. Influenced by the holiness and early Pentecostal movements, Dr. Yeomans seemed to be a proponent of the ‘Healing in the Atonement’ doctrine alongside John Alexander Dowie, T.L. Osborn, Aimee Semple McPherson, and Oral Roberts.²⁰ This doctrine taught that the Fall of Man brought about sin and sickness, but Jesus secured both salvation and healing on the Cross for all who put their faith in Him. However, early Pentecostal teachers of the doctrine showed flawed theology due to their tendency to blame a believer’s lack of healing on lack of faith, and to reject all doctors and medicine. In the early 1900s, the medical system *was* underdeveloped, and many people suffered from it. During this time, the sick and dying turned to many sources including God for healing. Given Yeomans’ medical profession and personal testimony, she could offer a more discerning medical and biblical perspective on healing doctrine. Her ministry helped people discern between truth and heresy. In one instance, having been on the receiving end of the lies of Christian Science, she wrote about its blasphemies as if to prevent any more desperate souls from becoming involved with the cult.²¹ In addition, while Yeomans did not agree with John Alexander Dowie’s ostracism of doctors and pharmacists, he confirmed his God-given gift of faith and healing, saying, “If there is anything in his life or teaching that you do not see to be in accordance with God’s Word, you are not called upon to follow it; but his faith in God’s Word you are exhorted to imitate.”²²

¹⁴ William Sloos, “John Alexander Dowie,” *History of Pentecostalism* (lecture, Vanguard College, August 26, 2024).

¹⁵ Yeomans, *Healing from Heaven*, 15.

¹⁶ Rodgers, “Encountering the Great Physician: The Life and Ministry of Dr. Lilian B. Yeomans,” 9.

¹⁷ Rodgers, “Encountering the Great Physician: The Life and Ministry of Dr. Lilian B. Yeomans,” 10.

¹⁸ Rodgers, “Encountering the Great Physician: The Life and Ministry of Dr. Lilian B. Yeomans,” 11.

¹⁹ Rodgers, “Encountering the Great Physician: The Life and Ministry of Dr. Lilian B. Yeomans,” 12.

²⁰ William Sloos, “Healing in the Atonement,” *History of Pentecostalism* (lecture, Vanguard College, August 27, 2024).

²¹ Lilian B. Yeomans, *Healing from Heaven*, 92.

²² Lilian B. Yeomans, *Healing from Heaven*, 108.

As for Yeomans' perspective towards medical professionals, it is clear from her writings that she valued the work of physicians and advances in medicine. After all, her own mother practiced as a physician. However, she put her firm faith in Jesus as her Great family physician and encouraged others to do so as well. She interpreted Isaiah 53:4 and Matthew 8:17 to mean that Jesus forever consummated and finished our healing on the Cross at Calvary. Therefore, no human effort or advancement (medications, treatment, surgery) can add to or compare to His supreme sacrifice.²³ In her mind, all can and should come to Him for healing because Jesus never changes. The sick should internalize and recite the powerful promises of healing in Scripture daily as they would a healing tonic. Citing James 5:14 in an article for the *Pentecostal Evangel*, she writes, "[The prayer of faith] is God's way, and it is as far above the human way with all its medical science, Pharmacopoeias, X-rays, and all the rest, as far as the heavens are above the earth."²⁴ Several curious physicians she spoke to about promises of healing in Scripture gave up their medical practice and devoted themselves to the Lord's work.²⁵

Indeed, Yeomans' theology stands out from other healing evangelists of the time as she taught on divine healing from both the Old and New Testaments. As she said of her healing testimony, "I feel as though I could almost say I was healed by the whole Book."²⁶ Through Dr. Yeomans' many experiences in the field, she could not "separate healing from salvation."²⁷ In other words, she witnessed many receive complete deliverance and healing by putting their faith in Jesus for forgiveness of their sins. She even resolved the problem of the sickness and suffering of saints through God's Word, where Deuteronomy 29:29 says: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."²⁸ Therefore, she felt it was the believer's responsibility to take the promises of God for healing for oneself and others in Jesus' Name and leave the unknowns to the Lord.²⁹ It does no good for a believer to try to rationalize why God would not heal them after praying. They must simply be obedient by praying in faith for healing. Just like the medicines she used to prescribe, she believed that to "take" God's unfailing Word for one's healing, the seeker "must mix it with faith," otherwise one can prevent God from healing them.³⁰ These were important doctrinal issues to explore, and the physician hungrily searched Scripture for answers that still prioritized God's sovereignty and role in the Healing in the Atonement. The popular early Pentecostal expression "double cure for the double curse" is never mentioned in her books, but it is strongly suggested throughout her writings.³¹ Dr. Yeomans strongly believed that the blood of Christ forever redeemed those who believe in Him from the 'curses' of sin and sickness and secured the 'cures' of forgiveness and healing.

Practices

Another reason Dr. Yeomans was a vital figure in the early Pentecostal movement was that she modelled her ministry and practices after those of Jesus Himself.³² She endeavoured to emulate the method and order of His ministry as written in Matthew 4:23 (ESV): "And he went throughout all

²³ Yeomans, *Balm of Gilead*, 40.

²⁴ Lilian Yeomans, "Divine Healing in the Book of Proverbs," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, May 5, 1923, 5.

²⁵ Yeomans, *Healing from Heaven*, 3, 130.

²⁶ Yeomans, *Healing from Heaven*, 14.

²⁷ Yeomans, *Healing from Heaven*, 119.

²⁸ Yeomans, *Balm of Gilead*, 45.

²⁹ Yeomans, *Balm of Gilead*, 46.

³⁰ Lilian Yeomans, *Health and Healing* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1938) 55.

³¹ William Sloos, "Healing in the Atonement," *History of Pentecostalism* (lecture, Vanguard College, August 27, 2024).

³² Yeomans, *Healing from Heaven*, 125.

Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.” For Yeomans, teaching God’s Word convicted the sinner, preaching the Gospel revealed the way to salvation, and praying for healing removed the consequences of sin. Thus, it was her practice to read Scripture to her patients, sometimes for hours, instead of at once praying for their healing. Yeomans did not just tell the sick to claim their healing by faith. Instead, with a compassion that mirrored the Healer Himself, she preached God’s Word, taught in Bible schools, and prayed for “thousands of unsaved, sick, and burdened ones.”³³ According to Thomas Williams Miller, Lilian preached in the Pentecostal Mission around the Calgary area in 1909.³⁴ After she received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit in 1907, signs followed her bold, Spirit-led evangelical ministry including deliverances from sin and miraculous healings. In the same way, Jesus proved His Messiahship to John the Baptist by healing people of diseases and plagues, delivering the oppressed from evil spirits, and restoring sight to the blind through the power of God’s Spirit (Luke 7:21). There was one account where Yeomans was preaching at a meeting in rural Alberta and a prostitute with a sexually transmitted disease was “saved, healed, and filled with the Spirit.”³⁵ A bachelor farmer claimed her as his wife, trusting that the Blood of Christ had cleansed her from sin and her life had been transformed, just like any other person saved by Jesus. Dr. Yeomans held tarrying meetings, popular in the early Pentecostal movement, where she would preach on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and seekers would linger until they received it.³⁶

After she moved her family to California, she dedicated her full-time ministry to teaching at a few Bible schools. In 1921 she taught at the Glad Tidings Institute in San Francisco, the Berean Bible Institute in San Diego in 1925, and L.I.F.E. Bible School in Los Angeles County in 1927.³⁷ Through Dr. Yeomans’ teaching, she was able to shape many young aspiring ministers as she taught church history and divine healing courses. In this way, she obeyed Jesus’ command to make disciples, teaching them to obey all He had commanded them (Matt. 28:18-20).

The former physician’s prayer and healing ministry particularly was anointed and fruitful. After she was personally delivered from her morphine addiction, she spent time doing missions work as a physician in Northern Manitoba among the Cree people, since there were no other doctors for many miles.³⁸ However, after she moved to Calgary, she practiced medicine no more. Instead, she worked a civil service job to provide for her family meanwhile carrying out her calling to proclaim the Gospel and pray for the sick. During this period of her life, Yeomans often preached at tent meetings, and healings resulted from praying, laying on of hands and anointing with oil. In one instance, at a Western Canada tent meeting, Yeomans prayed for and anointed a five-year-old girl whose ears were damaged by scarlet fever to the point of deafness, and miraculous healing followed.³⁹ She was fully confident that Jesus, who healed the deaf and mute man, was still willing and able to heal the deaf in her day (Mark 7:31-37). Lilian and her sister Charlotte Amelia would also travel to people’s homes and healing homes to pray for the sick.⁴⁰ She showed powerful love and faithfulness in her practice, at one point driving long hours through stormy weather to reach a woman dying of blood poisoning.⁴¹ The Lord moved powerfully through Dr. Yeomans when she spoke a word from the Lord to raise this

³³ Lilian B. Yeomans, *The Great Physician (Formerly Published as Divine Healing Diamonds)* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1933) 8.

³⁴ Thomas William Miller, *Canadian Pentecostals: A History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada* (Mississauga, Ont, Canada: Full Gospel Pub. House, 1994) 90.

³⁵ Miller, *Canadian Pentecostals: A History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada*, 90.

³⁶ Yeomans, *Healing from Heaven*, 116.

³⁷ Rodgers, “Encountering the Great Physician: The Life and Ministry of Dr. Lilian B. Yeomans,” 10.

³⁸ Rodgers, “Encountering the Great Physician: The Life and Ministry of Dr. Lilian B. Yeomans,” 9.

³⁹ Yeomans, *Healing from Heaven*, 132.

⁴⁰ Rodgers, “Encountering the Great Physician: The Life and Ministry of Dr. Lilian B. Yeomans,” 10.

⁴¹ Yeomans, *Healing from Heaven*, 121.

woman from near death. This woman's spirit seems best exemplified in her exhortation, "If you are afflicted, step out and receive healing and then get to work."⁴²

Synthesis of Material

Although the medical system has advanced since the life of Dr. Yeomans, it is vital to emulate her faith in the Word of God, as well as the use of her fruit and gifts of the Spirit. Healing is a sensitive topic, and there are still Christians today who strongly believe in the Healing in the Atonement doctrine, rejecting all doctors and drugs. On the other side, there is the tendency to worry excessively about one's health, relying too much on doctors and remedies and forgetting to rely on and praise God. Thus, her story presents a challenging message for our time: if one is sick in the mind or body, they should first come to Jesus in prayer and receive prayer. When one reads her writings, one cannot deny how the Lord honoured her boldness and faithfulness in the healings manifested through her ministry. Examining the holiness and early Pentecostal movements, it is easy to overlook her contributions because her life was not as dramatic or publicized as Aimee Semple McPherson's, for example. However, it is important to recognize how significant her testimony was for her time. Dr. Yeomans was a single woman and a doctor with a terrible morphine addiction, but she gave up her prestigious profession and boldly shared her testimony with the world so that God would be glorified. She believed the Word of the Lord, was saved and healed, and then was obedient to the Lord's call on her life to save and heal others.

Those aspiring to ministry or spiritual growth would do well to learn from the fruit of the Spirit Dr. Yeomans exhibited. Her character is conveyed through her written works. Love and joy from the Lord were like medicines that she prescribed for herself and others that often led to health and healing. When the situation was difficult or the Lord did not seem to act immediately, the Holy Spirit gave her peace and patience to wait on the Lord. After recovery from her addiction, there seemed to be no question of her kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control in her life. Dr. Yeomans seemed to apply her compassion for patients from her medical practice to her healing and teaching ministry. Finally, her faithfulness overflowed from her love for Jesus and God's Word. As in today's Christian circles, there was a tendency in early Pentecostalism to prioritize gifts of the Spirit over the fruit. For example, the innovator of the doctrine of tongues-speaking as the initial evidence of the Baptism of the Spirit, Charles Fox Parham, was a white supremacist who supported the KKK.⁴³ However, Dr. Yeomans was able to effectively steward the gifts of tongues, healing, teaching, and preaching due to her Christ-like character. In a Pauline manner, Dr. Yeomans exhorts her readers to "follow [her] example, as [she] follows the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

Conclusion

Truly, the faith, Pentecostal doctrines, and practices of Dr. Lilian Yeomans were significant contributions to the early Pentecostal movement, when the medical system was underdeveloped and revival was breaking out across North America. First, her steadfast and child-like faith in God's healing Word endured throughout her life and fueled her impactful ministry. Second, Yeomans's medical background and biblical studies informed her Pentecostal doctrines of divine healing. Thus, her divine healing theology was grounded on God's Word and more balanced than other divine healing ministers at the time. Third, her practices of preaching, teaching, and healing were directly inspired by those of Jesus. God moved through her obedience, which was seen through the hundreds saved, healed, and baptized in the Holy Spirit throughout her long and fruitful ministry. Although she is not well known

⁴² Yeomans, *Healing from Heaven*, 15.

⁴³ William Sloos, "Charles Fox Parham," *History of Pentecostalism* (lecture, Vanguard College, August 27, 2024).

in Pentecostal circles today, Dr. Yeomans was and is an inspiring figure for believers, whether they aspire to vocational ministry or not. She inspires them to love and to stand on the solid rock of Scripture, placing Christ as one's Saviour, Healer, Baptizer, and All-in-All.⁴⁴ May the Lord continue to honour her memory and bless others through her testimony and teachings.

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⁴⁴ Yeomans, *Healing from Heaven*, 116.