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Candy Gunther Brown. *Testing Prayer: Science and Healing.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

As a health economist who both teaches a graduate-level course on research methods and has a professional interest in the study of prayer (Brown, "A Monetary Valuation" 2031-2037; Brown, "Rational Praying" 37-44), I looked forward to the publication of Candy Gunther Brown's *Testing Prayer: Science and Healing*. Placing her analysis within the context of the history of evaluating prayer claims and the modern Pentecostal-Charismatic global healing movement, Brown takes a mixed methods approach incorporating survey methods, direct empirical measurement, medical record review, ethnography, and textual methods. These are woven together using a social constructionist understanding of the observed phenomena informed by theological analysis.

Brown is careful not to overreach in her conclusions. Her basic answer to the question of whether science can prove or disprove the healing power of prayer, is "no, but" (20), with the "but" referring to what can be fairly confidently known about healing prayer. Although this may disturb some readers, her conclusion is reasonable, considering the diversity of opinion across academic disciplines regarding what constitutes evidence of causality (e.g., Worral 235-238; Heckman 1-27; Winship and Morgan 659-706; Woodward). Evidence for causation occurs on a continuum ranging from no evidence to perfect evidence. By clearly stating that she has insufficient evidence to "prove" a causal claim, Brown is able to focus on the categories of evidence available and the quality of evi-

dence in each category. Brown's research is organized around five questions: (1) why are biomedical tests of prayer controversial; (2) are healing claims documented; (3) how do sufferers perceive healing prayer; (4) can health outcomes of prayer be measured; and (5) do healing experiences produce lasting effects?

After a tour of the Pentecostal-Charismatic global healing movement in chapter one, chapter two introduces the history of testing prayer including a discussion of recent major studies of distant intercessory prayer. Brown discusses the fact that a major difference between studies yielding positive versus negative outcomes was the difference in the characteristics of the intercessors. Of the studies she discusses, studies with positive outcomes used intercessors who were "born again" (88) or who were believers "in a personal God who hears and answers prayer" (88), while studies with negative outcomes used many intercessors who would not meet either criterion. Very helpful discussions are included of the controversial randomized controlled trial of prayer and fertility outcomes and the original and revised/updated reviews of the effectiveness of prayer by the Cochrane Collaboration. Brown also includes a short discussion of the interplay between theological assumptions and scientific research and how theological assumptions can legitimately function as an analytic tool in the design and interpretation of studies as well as illegitimately be used to imply supernatural causal mechanisms (in the case of supporters of prayer studies) or to delegitimize prayer research (in the case of opponents of prayer studies).

Chapter three discusses the use of medical records in documenting healing claims, their strengths and weaknesses as evidence, and the attitudes of Pentecostals-Charismatics towards collecting and disseminating documentation. Brown concludes that while medical records cannot give evidence as to the cause of a given medical recovery, they do provide a "scientifically informed perspective" (154) regarding whether an individual actually exhibited improved health. She also makes the important point that the lack of leaders demanding such evidence has contributed to the spread of a number of falsified healing claims.

The fourth chapter largely presents the results of a survey on healing given to attendees of various conferences. Brown is careful to note the weakness of her sampling strategy and limits her interpretation and application of the survey results to insights into how participants socially construct their experiences of healing prayer.

The fifth chapter is the highlight of the book and discusses in detail Brown's study of healing at Iris Ministries. Her team empirically measured and documented what many would interpret as the healing of the blind and the deaf, although Brown is careful not to interpret the documented changes in sight and hearing as necessarily implying divine intervention. The sixth chapter explores whether prayer produces lasting effects through a series of narratives constructed using ethnographic and textual analysis. Brown concludes the book with a helpful integrative discussion.

Overall, Brown has written a book of great importance that will serve both investigators who use

empirical methods to study prayer as well as theologians seeking to understand the strengths and weaknesses of various types of evidence given in support of theological claims. This work should contribute to the use of greater rigor and thoughtfulness in both of these endeavors.

Reviewed by Timothy T. Brown
University of California, Berkeley

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