

WHEN GOD SPOKE AMERICAN:

Norwegian Pentecostalism and the North American Healing Revival, 1947–57

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Abstract: This article tells the story of the Norwegian reception of the North-American postwar pentecostal healing revival. The 1950 visit by two American faith healers was a major media event. Although the healing revival was perceived as “too American” by many, including many pentecostal believers in Norway, the article shows that Nordic-American pentecostal groups played a role in launching the movement in the first place. Moreover, it argues that the American faith healers visiting Norway in 1950 shaped Norwegian public debate and understanding of religious freedom.

Keywords: pentecostalism, faith healing, culture wars, transatlantic exchange, migrant churches, Americanization, post-war period

Henry Lilleborg, a Minnesota-born factory worker in a small town outside Oslo, played a small but significant role in facilitating the growth of a new kind of religious culture.¹ Between the summer of 1948 and April 1949, Lilleborg reportedly translated four thousand letters from Norwegian into English before forwarding the letters and a cash donation to the US. The letter writers hoped to reach American faith healer William Branham, who would in return pray for them and send over prayer cloths for them to put on their aching bodies.² For these petitioners, it was clear that God was busily working through this American and his peers. By October 1949, Lilleborg claimed to have translated more than 10,000 letters. His volunteer work had exhausted him so much that he was looking for another line of work. Were he not to, he feared it would shorten his own life. Startled by this confession, the editors of *Friend of the Home*, the pentecostal magazine that facilitated the letter exchange, urged believers to pray for Lilleborg in return for his great service to the faithful.³ His workload, however, seems only to have increased after Branham and another star of the healing revival, William Freeman, visited Oslo in 1950. To lighten Lilleborg's workload, *Friend of the Home* encouraged people to "[b]e short and clear."⁴

The letters and the prayer cloths were what Oral Roberts, the pentecostal faith healer who would later outrank his peers, called "points of contact" between the believer and God.⁵ But as Andrew Atherstone, Mark Hutchinson, and John G. Maiden have pointed out, they were also important in uniting believers across geographic divides. They were the "'stuff' of charismatic renewal," and connected believers across the Atlantic, along with testimonies and books published by pentecostal institutions.⁶ Such transatlantic exchanges of religious ideas and practices were not new.⁷ But the end of the Second World War launched a new wave of religious and cultural exchange as American political and cultural

dominance increased and Europeans embraced, adapted, or rejected American cultural exports. The healing revival was a part of these dynamics. Pentecostalism in Norway had, despite its roots in the US, developed relatively independently from American churches, and the postwar era reignited the relationship across the Atlantic. The healing revival was perhaps the most hotly debated topic at its time, not only among pentecostals, but also in secular settings including newspapers and Parliamentary debates. Whether reading the Oslo-based newspaper of record *Aftenposten* or regional and small-town newspapers on the political left and right, Norwegians—secular or not—could not avoid the phenomenon. And yet the healing revival remains an understudied moment in transatlantic history that deserves more attention.⁸ The healing revival raised questions about what constituted true religion and what was just crass American sensationalism, questions that have remained at the heart of the discussion of pentecostal faith practices into the present.

This article is also informed by scholarship on postwar American evangelical missionary efforts. American pentecostal groups had for decades, like the broader evangelical movement, invested in foreign missions. The Second World War only intensified their drive to spread their faith. Along with fundamentalists and the nascent neo-evangelical movement, postwar faith healers were eager to make sure that as many lost souls as possible would be saved until what they believed was Jesus's imminent return. Nonetheless, this was not just a matter of American cultural and religious imperialism. Rather, as recent scholarship on American missionary efforts has shown, religious actors in different countries have been active participants in this exchange.⁹ This article adds to this discussion with a case study on how North American faith healers and Norwegian pentecostal believers dealt with the healing revival. It argues that religious culture was not one-directional. Rather,

people on both sides of the Atlantic contributed to the distribution of new faith practices.

There is no shortage of primary sources for this project. Pentecostal and other free church groups have produced an impressive amount of print material. In the 1940s, there were about a dozen pentecostal and holiness magazines, encompassing a broad range of groups of various statuses.¹⁰ This article examines the flagship *Korsets seier* (*Victory of the Cross*, first named *By-posten*, which has run from 1904 to the present), which was established by the founder of the Norwegian Pentecostal Movement, the English-born preacher Thomas Ball Barratt, and remains a highly influential periodical. This is paired with *Hjemmets venn* (*Friend of the Home*), published by small-scale preacher Michael Wåde, and *Profetrøsten* (*Prophetic Voice*), published by the independent but highly influential preacher Carl Rein Seehuus. In addition, I have used the National Library of Norway's extensive collection of digitized newspapers, which has provided ample examples of secular coverage of the healing revival.

Transatlantic Responses to the Healing Revival

Freeman and Branham were part of a group of young, charismatic American preachers who attracted thousands of people to their meetings. Branham and fellow revivalists such as Oral Roberts, A. A. Allen, and Gordon Lindsay grew out of the fringes of North American pentecostalism. These independent preachers joined a network centering on the magazine *Voice of Healing* (established in 1948). This network overlapped with the restorationist and apostolic Latter Rain movement that emerged in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada. Both groups challenged the more established networks such as the Assemblies of God, which had co-founded the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1942

and joined forces with groups that had openly disdained the ecstatic worship services in pentecostal churches. The faith healers rejected the NAE and its kind. Instead, they wanted to restore the early days of pentecostalism. As they saw it, signs and wonders—not staid bureaucracy—would save the church.¹¹

Norwegian pentecostalism was similarly at a crossroads after its leader Thomas Ball Barratt passed away in 1940. After the war, questions of what it meant to be pentecostal and how such a community should be organized—if at all—rose to the forefront. Like fellow believers in the US, they were split between those who wanted to “evangelicalize” their tradition by developing a formalized structure and by attaching themselves to other churches and those who wanted to restore the spirit of the early revivals.¹² But the healing revival was not necessarily a good fit for a Norwegian context. As the historian Nils Bloch-Hoell notes in one of the first substantial scholarly treatments of pentecostal theology, Freeman and Branham represented a practice that had been an anomaly in pentecostal churches in Norway. Such public healing events were an American import, Bloch-Hoell concludes, and they were seen as something alien.¹³

The history of Norwegian and North American pentecostalism, however, gets more complicated when we consider pentecostal churches in Norwegian immigrant communities in North America. Such churches existed in the tension between Norwegian traditions and the entrepreneurial culture of the postwar era. Norwegian-American immigrant pentecostal churches in the US were in many cases more or less transplants of churches at home. The Salem Gospel Tabernacle in Brooklyn, New York, for instance, had close ties with the Filadelfia Church in Oslo and “owed virtually nothing to the already flourishing American Pentecostal movements of that period.”¹⁴ These churches were scattered

around ethnic enclaves across the country. Letters printed by *Victory of the Cross* testify to an intricate network of largely ethnic churches from Brooklyn on the East Coast, via smaller and larger communities in the Midwest and Mountain West, to Seattle on the West Coast. Many writers noted that arriving in Brooklyn, Chicago, or Tacoma often felt like coming home. But many observed that the churches seemed less Norwegian as second- and third-generation immigrants were assimilated into American culture. Although some still understood Norwegian and other Nordic languages, it was clear that Norwegian-American pentecostal believers had looser ties to their ethnic churches. Many of them would seek out inspiration from anglophone churches. News traveled fast, and believers in Norway soon read reports of what they believed could be a new outpouring of the Spirit. In January 1948, for instance, a little over a year after the outbreak of the healing revival and Latter Rain movement, *Victory of the Cross* printed reports about a revival “as in the days of the apostles” taking place in Calgary, Alberta, following Branham’s preaching. A member of Oslo’s Filadelfia Church, the most influential church in Norwegian pentecostalism, testified in a short piece to having seen healing of the sick during meetings that attracted thousands.¹⁵

Scandinavian pentecostal networks were central to the rise of the healing revival.¹⁶ Many Norwegian and other Scandinavian believers had found a spiritual home in the Independent Assemblies of God (IAG), a denomination founded by Swedish immigrants. Reflecting the congregationalist structure of the Swedish Pentecostal Alliance of Independent Churches, the IAG was loosely organized, which allowed for religious experimentation. It was also this group that became central in spreading the healing revival across the US and Canada, and from there to Europe and beyond. The Chicago-based IAG preacher Joseph Mattson-Boze played a key role in promoting independent preachers in the US

and abroad. Born in Sweden, Mattson-Boze had migrated to the US in the 1930s to pastor an IAG church in Chicago. He remained in touch with the old country; he was a close friend of Lewi Pethrus, the leader of the Pentecostal Alliance, who had visited and pastored in Chicago’s Swedish community. When Mattson-Boze encountered the new revival, he had been quick to offer his network to preachers promising healing and salvation after he had returned to Chicago. His church hosted meetings for faith healers like William Freeman and Latter Rain preachers like James and Phyllis Spiers on several occasions. As editor of the *Herald of Faith*, Mattson-Boze spread the message about the new revival to believers across the continent. As he saw it, he could facilitate cooperation between established churches and what many of them saw as a gang of rowdy and sensationalist preachers.¹⁷

After the war, Mattson-Boze returned to Scandinavia for a visit. While he was in Oslo in 1947, he shared that he was acutely aware of the competition from other preachers. In particular, he warned against the fundamentalist group Youth for Christ that had visited Oslo one year earlier with a young and yet largely unknown Billy Graham on the team. Such groups could lead to superficial religiosity, Mattson-Boze warned, and not enough of the religious awakening needed in the country.¹⁸ Back in the US, Mattson-Boze introduced Pethrus to Freeman, who again invited the faith healer to Europe.¹⁹

Swedish and Swedish-American preachers were instrumental in spreading the revival. But what did influential Norwegian pentecostal leaders think? A preacher, pastor, and editor, Rein Seehuus was the son of a second-generation Norwegian-American woman who had returned to her family’s home country, married, and eventually joined the ranks of pentecostal believers. The revivalist spent lengthy periods in the US and authored long reports back to readers in

Norway about religious and political developments in the *Prophetic Voice*. In 1949, Seehuus wrote a series of letters from America, in which readers could follow him on his travels from one Norwegian-American enclave to another, from Brooklyn, NY, through the Upper Midwest to Tacoma, Washington. One thing that stood out to him was how he was met with respect as a preacher. Even his relatives would call him Reverend or Pastor, he noted. Americans held religious leaders in high regard, he explained, because of the separation of church and state and the lack of a priestly class in the country.²⁰ But he was not always happy with what he saw. Seehuus admired the higher material standard of living in the US. He warned, however, that these material goods created complacency and hindered the work of the Holy Spirit in the country. American churches were spiritually dead, he complained. As he saw it, there were no real differences between the church and the unchurched.²¹

The reports changed in the fall of 1949 after Seehuus reached Chicago, where he attended Wilbur Oglivie's and William Freeman's faith healing meetings. He was awed by what he saw. Freeman's preaching was nothing special per se, Seehuus had first concluded. Freeman was not a particularly charismatic person who came with new theological insights. But then he saw what happened when Freeman started praying for the sick. Freeman commanded evil spirits to leave the sick body, Seehuus reported, in a way he had never seen before. Describing the event, the preacher alluded to the words of Jesus in Matthew 11. The blind could see. The deaf could hear. The lame could walk. Not only that, he wrote, people who looked like they were nearing death rose to walk out of the meeting completely healed. Disease was Satan's work, he now had come to realize, and God wanted all those who were suffering to be healed. Seehuus concluded that there was a new outpouring of the Spirit.²²

Leaders of the Pentecostal Movement also sent their reports back home. The head of its publishing house J. G. Bratlie wrote a series of letters from his trip across the US. In September 1949, a Norwegian audience could read his thoughts on Oral Roberts's ministry. Bratlie had traveled to Tacoma, Washington, to experience the healing revival for himself. He was impressed—everything was bigger in America, it seemed. The tent used for the meetings, Bratlie wrote, could seat 4,500 people. It was packed every night, he wrote, and more than two hundred people had been saved at the meetings after listening to Roberts's powerful sermons and watching him pray for people to be healed. The Americans were also *professional*, he noted. The healing services were meticulously organized, he explained. Each night, the revival team would hand out cards so that those seeking healing could fill them out to provide information about their health issues. He could not say all of them were miraculously healed, but he concluded that some had been. Bratlie had sat on the stage close to the preacher and could observe the events close-up. He had no reason to doubt them.²³ The magazine followed up on Bratlie's account with a lengthy report from Roberts's revival in Minneapolis. This had been even larger, readers would learn. As many as 60,000 people attended the meetings, with about 5,000 attending each night. The reporter noted Roberts's ability to discern the Spirit. Never had he seen anyone gifted in the same way.²⁴ God was on the move, it seemed, and God moved through these Americans.

Others were not equally convinced. Pastor and *Victory of the Cross* journalist Erling Strøm had attended a meeting with Roberts and had been impressed by his preaching, but he was not so sure about Roberts's claims. Perhaps his journalistic instincts made him hesitant to conclude. Since he had not observed the reported healing himself, Strøm declined to say much about the preacher's powers. "There were instances that

seemed somewhat curious," he noted, but he could not confirm what had happened.²⁵ His skepticism toward new forms of religious practice was evident in his next letter, where he brought up the healing revival's sister movement, Latter Rain. He had left the West Coast for Chicago, where he attended the largely Scandinavian Independent Assemblies of God's annual meeting, that year hosted by Mattson-Boze. Strøm had met Norwegian and Norwegian-American friends there, and he noted that understanding the Latter Rain movement had been at the center of their conversations. Quite a few had rejected the movement, Strøm reported, and he admitted to being among those critical of it.²⁶ Earlier that fall, he had attended and preached at the General Council of the more evangelical-oriented and organized Assemblies of God in Seattle.²⁷ During this meeting, the denomination discussed the Latter Rain phenomenon. Eventually, they concluded that Latter Rain teachings on spiritual gifts and specially anointed prophets and apostles were unsound.²⁸ Strøm seemed to agree. He was more interested in the ways the nascent postwar evangelical movement operated. Earlier the same year, he had visited Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, a historically fundamentalist school a few miles south of the Swedish neighborhood of Andersonville, a center for Scandinavian pentecostalism in the area. Strøm had met Einar Christiansen, from Drammen, Norway, who headed a department at Moody, and who had given Strøm an overview of their work. Strøm was impressed. Moody students were given a thorough biblical education, he wrote, combined with practical evangelizing tasks to prepare them to win souls for Christ.²⁹

Such admiration of the Moody Bible Institute reflected an identity crisis of sorts among at least some Norwegian pentecostal believers. The editor of *Victory of the Cross* Martin Ski shared his thoughts on how to fit his faith tradition into the broader stream of Christianity. It had not been

possible for Thomas Ball Barratt to fit the early Pentecostal Movement into a broader evangelical community, Ski suggested. Rather, Barratt had had to find his own way. Yet Ski seems to have found hope in that even though the Pentecostal Movement represented a separate stream of faith, all water led to the same ocean. Ski, it seems, wanted reform and reconnection with evangelicalism writ large, and not a restoration of the movement that set them apart.³⁰

Stateside pastors were also worried that Freeman would bring an unhealthy theology to Oslo. Pastor Arne Dahl of the Salem Brooklyn Tabernacle shared his thoughts in *Victory of the Cross*. There was a new wind blowing in the US and in Canada, Dahl wrote. But he was not convinced that the "American methods" used during those meetings—which he did not fully describe because he had not observed them closely himself—would harmonize with the more conformist and conservative tone common in Norwegian and Norwegian-American pentecostalism. Just because something was new and exciting, he noted, it need not be good or godly. "It's not all gold that glimmers," Dahl warned.³¹

With Freeman's meeting approaching, leaders were more willing to take one step at a time. Pastor Osvald Orlie, who would later go to medical school and become a medical missionary in Congo, was hesitant about concluding too soon.³² In a piece originally written for *Victory of the Cross*, readers of *Friend of the Home* could learn about Orlie's thoughts on the upcoming visit. Orlie was a little disappointed that Freeman could only stay for two days. It would have been better, he wrote, if the faith healer had spent some time in the country ahead of the meetings to preach the Gospel and lay a foundation for his healing meetings. But he understood that Freeman's schedule was hectic. Orlie, however, expressed concern that people would pay too much attention to the faith healer himself. Freeman, he reminded readers, was merely a

vessel for God's power in the world. Only Jesus could perform miracles, he wrote, and if believers kept their eyes on Jesus, they would not believe in vain. Orlien noted that some observers, Americans and Norwegians alike, had questioned the results of the healing revivals reported in the US. Still, he trusted God to heal the sick and was willing to give the American healing preachers a chance.³³

The secular press was less willing to do so. Newspapers on the left and the right, across the country, reported from Freeman's campaigns in Sweden as they prepared for his coming visit to Oslo. At a time when many Europeans resisted American power, several observers noted that the faith healers represented a crass, American religious culture unfit for a Norwegian context. Most reports were indirect. But the conservative newspaper, and Norway's paper of record, *Aftenposten* published accounts from a journalist who had traveled to Gothenburg, Sweden, to attend Freeman's meetings in person. Freeman was a sly salesman who could trick anyone into buying just about anything, journalist Henning Sinding-Larsen thought. "If he had stretched [his arms] over a fridge," he wrote, "it would be hard not to buy it." Freeman's gestures made the journalist think of American catalogs where both consumer goods and personal development were being advertised. Sinding-Larsen was worried about the goods being sold in the meetings. Faith, he noted, should ideally be a private matter. Freeman's healing ministry, however, could threaten public health, and Sinding-Larsen suggested that future meetings should be stopped.³⁴

Public health was a concern for many. Already before Freeman made it to Oslo, there were potential problems ahead. Swedish parliamentarians tried unsuccessfully to deny him entry to the country.³⁵ During his stay in Sweden, Norwegian newspapers reported that the faith healer claimed to heal people from tuberculosis and

cancer.³⁶ Some reported that Freeman and Mattson-Boze had been interrogated by the police and that they had been denied entry to Finland.³⁷ Such news caught the attention of the then-head of Norway's public health services Karl Evang. He questioned whether faith healers should be allowed to practice in Norway and argued that Freeman's healing sessions might go against the 1935 quackery law about who could treat patients. The law required that anyone intending to cure someone of bodily ailments have an appropriate medical degree. The question that the border authorities would have to ask was whether a faith healer was a quack or whether this person, first and foremost, acted out their religious faith. Faced with this dilemma, the border authorities noted that there was little they could do to stop "a religious sectarian" with an American passport from entering the country, even if the religious practices he represented were alien to Norwegians.³⁸

The Faith Healers Arrive

Into this fray, William Freeman arrived in Oslo in late February 1950 with his Swedish-American mentor and translator Mattson-Boze. Martin Ski calculated that about 15,000 people attended the meetings, which lasted three days and were so crowded that the police had to be called upon to help manage the masses. It was clear that the organizers had gone to great lengths to avoid any accusations of scandalous behavior. They allowed journalists to cover the events—as long as they did not bring their cameras—and emphasized how calm, civil, and organized everyone's behavior had been. Freeman was not a loud and chaotic preacher, Ski wrote, but spoke of healing and salvation in the name of Jesus to existing and new believers peacefully and gracefully. Yet Ski admitted that he had mixed feelings about it all. Freeman's methods were so new, he said, that he had yet to conclude what he thought

about them. He described a preacher who had urged people to come up to him and shake his hand as they walked past him. He wanted evidence that it was of God, and asked for people who had experienced healing to send letters to the magazine with testimonies of their healing.³⁹

Many spirit-filled Norwegians seem to have believed that these Americans were gifted with special powers from God that demanded their interceding between the person seeking healing and God himself. In the aftermath of Freeman's meetings in Oslo, one woman testified in *Victory of the Cross* to having been fully healed after writing to Freeman two years prior, and in return she received a prayer cloth to lay upon her body.⁴⁰ A young girl claimed later to have been partially healed from polio during Freeman's meetings. She and her family believed she could have been fully healed had Freeman had more time in Oslo. They now hoped the forthcoming meetings with William Branham would complete the process.⁴¹ To this family, the physical presence of a faith healer seemed to be what mattered. Others believed that the power to heal could be transferred to a material vessel. After Freeman had left the country, a woman brought her son to the Filadelfia Church to ask them to pray for her son, who had a serious sinus infection. As soon as she entered the church, she wrote, she had been handed an envelope with one of Freeman's prayer cloths. It had originally been intended for someone else, but she felt lucky to be handed what was now a leftover cloth. She took it home to her son, she wrote, and immediately the boy had been healed.⁴² Regardless of what they believed about whether a faith healer had to be present or whether their powers could be transferred, these believers saw God as working in majestic ways through American faith healers.

The secular press thought otherwise. Newspapers across the country published commentaries and reports on the events.⁴³ One of the

most colorful commentaries came from *Dagbladet*, an Oslo-based culturally radical newspaper with a history of combatting Christian conservatism. "Freeman was nothing but a mediocre magician," Norway's foremost magician and circus director Arne Arnardo declared on the cover. Arnardo had been present at one of Freeman's meetings and concluded that the techniques the faith healer had used were the same as those used at his circus. People would believe just about anything while under his spell, the magician explained, and Freeman had done the same when people were convinced about being healed. The only difference between the two, he noted, was that while a hypnotist working for a circus had to pay taxes on their income, a faith healer could raise money and claim religious exemption from the tax authorities. The circus director jokingly suggested that he and some fellow hypnotists and magicians should create their own religion and reap the benefits of laxer tax regulations.⁴⁴

Although the secular press had been critical, some believers concluded that the overall coverage had been better than expected. A *Prophetic Voice* writer noted that the secular newspapers seemed disappointed in how "little American" Freeman had been. Instead of the circus that they might have expected, he noted, the meetings had been calm and well organized. The only extraordinary thing about the meetings, he wrote, was that actual healing had taken place. He had seen it with his own eyes.⁴⁵ Others complained about an anti-American tone in some of the coverage. In *Friend of the Home*, Florentinus Hällzon lamented the unfair treatment of the faith healers. In particular, he was bothered by the radical press' dismissive tone regarding the fact that Freeman was an *American*. When did being American become a negative thing? he asked. He complained that the press had little but praise for Black American athletes succeeding in international sports and for authors, actors, and musicians visiting Europe as cultural

ambassadors. Eventually he concluded that the faith healers' Americanness was not the problem. The Norwegian media was particularly hostile towards American *religion* and to anyone professing faith in a God who meets people in their everyday lives and cares about their conditions.⁴⁶

Things were about to get worse for those concerned with ridicule in the press. Shortly after Freeman and Mattson-Boze had left for Copenhagen, newspapers reported that hotel staff in Gothenburg had found dozens of unopened letters from believers in Freeman's room. Daily, the staff noted, letters from hopeful believers had arrived at the hotel, but the letters often ended up discarded. The preachers' host church in Gothenburg suggested that outsiders had gotten hold of the letters to take out any money in the envelopes, and they had requested that the police investigate the issue, but the police deemed that an unlikely explanation.⁴⁷ Readers could easily draw the conclusion that the preachers had defrauded innocent believers. The question of whether the American faith healers were fraudsters trying to make money on naïve Norwegians lingered. Many must have wondered, were the American preachers simply entertainers out to make easy money from desperate believers?

The question would become even more acute as a new troupe of healing evangelists arrived. William Branham, accompanied by *Voice of Healing* editor Gordon Lindsay, as well as Jack Moore and Ed Baxter, visited Norway, Finland, and Sweden in the spring of 1950. Branham, a friend of Mattson-Boze, arrived in a country in flux over how to deal with grand claims of healing. Karl Evang of the health authorities asked the police to prevent Branham and his team from holding healing services when they arrived a few weeks after Freeman had left the country. With the police present in the church, Branham followed the orders, or at least the letter of them. Branham

did so, although he had the support of a broad section of the Norwegian church establishment. They feared that the ban could affect more conventional practices. Their concerns were not theoretical. The Norwegian Parliament discussed the case as a test of the limits of religious freedom in the country. Simply put, the visit from Branham urged Norwegian parliamentarians to examine whether praying for the sick was merely a form of quackery or whether it was a legitimate part of religious practice.⁴⁸

Martin Ski may have had mixed feelings about the faith healers, but he was clear in his views on how the government handled the issue. To him, the case had broader implications for religious freedom. Norway was a Christian nation and land of religious freedom, but, he noted, had Jesus himself ministered in the country under the prevailing rules on healing, his ministry would have been illegal. To the health authorities, he wrote, "Jesus must have been a quack."⁴⁹ In the same issue, he republished an editorial from the Christian newspaper *Vårt Land*. The newspaper suggested that Evang, a social democrat and member of the Labor Party, had let his anti-religious ideology cloud his judgment when faced with the American faith healers and described Evang as a serious threat to religious freedom in the country.⁵⁰

Some secular media personalities showed their support, however. In *Aftenposten*, Phillip Rønneberg argued that Branham's experience was relevant for people outside the healing revival as well. He pointed out that praying for the sick was a key part of the Church of Norway's mission to care for the Norwegian people. Other churches routinely prayed for divine intervention without government meddling. The Catholic church, he noted, deemed praying for the sick a sacrament and routinely had foreign clergy perform their religious tasks on Norwegian soil without interference from Evang and his colleagues. It was a matter of hypocrisy, Rønneberg complained,

that the health authorities would stop an American preacher from doing something others had done before. Rønneberg more than hinted that the real reason for Evang's hostility toward American preachers was political. He was critical of how people in Evang's left-wing circles had complained about how Americans tried to keep Communists out of the country. Norwegian authorities had not stopped such agitators from spreading their message, he wrote, even though they had declared communist activities treasonous. To Rønneberg, it was absurd and hypocritical to see American preachers being stopped for doing something that otherwise would be protected by the religious freedom clause in the Constitution.⁵¹ Even the prominent bishop Eivind Berggrav of the Church of Norway, a central figure in the postwar international ecumenical movement, expressed his support for pentecostals against what he perceived as an attack on religious freedom. The police had responded to scandalous reports from Freeman's meetings, he believed. The police simply could not generalize about faith healers on the basis of such reports. Each case had to be treated individually, he argued.⁵² As he saw it, proper procedures were a dire concern to the Christian faith itself.⁵³

Principled support on constitutional grounds, however, did not necessarily translate to acceptance of the healing revival. A low-church Lutheran magazine criticized the Pentecostal Movement for using crass and sensational methods to market Freeman's and Branham's visits. Such methods, the editor wrote, made Christians partially to blame for a wave of mockery from secular outlets. In other words, to them it was not a question of whether God could or would heal the sick, but how, as well as who was involved and in what context the healing would take place. Ski thought the criticism was unwarranted and unfair. It was primarily the *secular* press that had created a circus out of the visit, he argued. Ski sought support in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. Faced with criticism, Ski

pointed to Paul's advice to not be overly critical about messages from prophets, "but test them all; hold on to what is good." The Pentecostal Movement had been on solid biblical grounds, he believed, when allowing Freeman, Branham, and their troupes to preach and pray in their churches.⁵⁴

The Afterlife of the Healing Revival

In the following years, the limits of religious freedom remained a thorny issue in Norwegian politics. Those fearing government intrusion into religious life rejoiced in 1955, when Parliament decided *not* to outlaw faith healing. A writer in *Victory of the Cross* interpreted this as a vote of confidence in religious communities to make sensible choices, but he remained doubtful of the claim that God had anointed the American visitors with special powers to heal. Reports from the *Voice of Healing* were exaggerated, he argued, and he cautioned against healing campaigns in an American fashion.⁵⁵

As in the US, postwar faith healing practices were rejected by the pentecostal establishment.⁵⁶ Some were concerned with the schematic healing practices of Branham, Freeman, and similar figures. Osvald Orlien, by then a medical doctor and missionary, lectured about "Miraculous Healing" at the 1955 World Pentecostal Conference in Stockholm. He voiced a clear disapproval of the faith healing movement. As a believer, he held onto the belief that God could perform miracles, but he warned against teachings that connected sickness to a lack of connection with God. To be sick was not sinful, listeners heard, and humans should refrain from making grand claims about God's will. "God has no fixed way of healing," he concluded, "we cannot harness the Almighty."⁵⁷

Church polity was also a concern. Martin Ski worried about the effect emphasis on individual

prophets and apostolic leaders had on the healing revival and Latter Rain groups. *God's Word* should guide the churches, he argued, not prophecies from anointed leaders. It was time to move away from the spectacular and toward a more sober Christianity and collaboration with others. "Pentecostal believers in Norway," he had written already in 1949, "are not at a crossroads, they are walking the Way together with others who believe in Jesus."⁵⁸ In the mid 1950s, Ski represented Pentecostal believers in negotiations with the government over the legal status of churches outside the Church of Norway. It seems to have been important to him to get his church recognized as a free church in line with other churches. As he saw it, it was important to reform the existing structures and work within the system, rather than revolutionize or challenge existing churches.⁵⁹

In 1957, the Pentecostal Movement broke with the restorationist faith healer Aage Samuelsen, who had been inspired by Freeman, Branham, and their troupes. A proud working-class preacher, Samuelsen was eager to revolt against the staid religion of "fancy folks." After the much-publicized split, Samuelsen went on a preaching tour in the US. Upon his return, a news reporter noted his American style; Samuelsen's clothes and entire demeanor were those of a slick American preacher. He wore "a nylon shirt and a garish tie" and he had brought back an electric guitar that he used to reignite the energy from the meetings he had experienced stateside.⁶⁰ To Samuelsen, the US was a model society for religious freedom. He praised the US for having no restrictions on freedom of speech and for allowing faith healers to freely reach the masses even via new media outlets.⁶¹ The boisterous preacher stayed in touch with his American peers. In 1961, his magazine *Maran Ata* announced a revival in Oslo with eighteen American preachers including Branham, Gordon Lindsay, and Kenneth Hagin, as well as the South-Af-

rican preacher David Du Plessis.⁶² Samuelsen remained steeped in controversy. In 1966, a film loosely based on Samuelsen, *Broder Gabrielsen*, told a story of a charismatic preacher who lured innocent youths into religious fanaticism by playing American rock music on his electric guitar. Samuelsen eventually mellowed and enjoyed some mainstream approval, and by the time he passed away in 1987, there were plenty of others who provoked believers and non-believers with their theology and practice.

On both sides of the Atlantic, pentecostal entrepreneurs have created a thriving network of churches and institutions that preach health—and increasingly—wealth as evidence of faith. Such preachers have built a church structure based on charismatic preachers anointed to lead. In the US, preachers such as Lance Wallnau and Sean Feucht preach a message rooted in the theology developed in the postwar years. This theology has manifested staunch support of President Donald J. Trump, based on the belief that he is chosen by God to lead the nation. In Norway, the late world evangelist Aril Edvardsen, Christian TV mogul Jan Hanvold, and telephone healer Svein Magne Pedersen have drawn inspiration from the postwar healing revival throughout their careers. Independent pentecostal pastors Åge Åleskjær and Enevald Flåten built on the health and wealth theology of Kenneth Hagin when they established their churches in Oslo and Bergen in the 1980s and 1990s. In recent years, many Norwegian believers have been inspired by the Bethel Church in Redding, California, and the Australian Hillsong movement, both legacies of the postwar healing and Latter Rain movements. In each iteration of pentecostal influence from across the Atlantic, questions of whether believers can harness the Spirit of God to heal and create prosperity, and whether God anoints certain people for leadership and ministry, have challenged pentecostal believers. And more often than not, secular media and non-pentecostal observers have

deemed those beliefs and practices incompatible with Norwegian culture. They are plainly *too American*, many conclude. But a closer look at the history of the healing revival complicates our definitions of North American and Scandinavian cultures. If God spoke American in the postwar healing revival, it might have been with a Scandinavian accent.

Notes

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1. A note on terminology: the Pentecostal Movement (Pinsebevegelsen) refers to the largest Pentecostal network/denomination in Norway and the equivalent of the Assemblies of God in the US. The Pentecostal Movement (upper case), then, is distinct from the broader terms *pentecostalism* and *pentecostal*. These terms include the Pentecostal Movement and, for instance, the Free Evangelical Assemblies (Frie evangeliske forsamlinger), Maranatha, Christian Community (Kristent fellesskap), various Oneness groups, and the charismatic or neo-pentecostal groups that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Lower-case pentecostalism/pentecostal, then, refers to the broader movement on both sides of the Atlantic. This article mainly deals with the tension between those supporting the healing revival and the Pentecostal Movement, as well as its American equivalents.

2. Branham rejected Trinitarianism and held other theological views that broke with Pentecostal theology, but he still found a home in independent pentecostal circles. Kvalvaag, "Endetidens budbærer," 61; Lilleborg, "En hilsen til dem som ønsker pastor Branham's forbønn," *Korsets seier*, July 10-20, 1948, 408.

3. "Mellom venner," *Hjemmets venn*, November 19, 1949, 5; "Takkebrev fra helbredelse," *Hjemmets venn*, Oct. 29, 1949, 4.

4. "Vær kort og klar" and "Brev til pastor Branham," *Hjemmets venn*, May 10, 1951, 4. In 1960, Lilleborg still acted as Branham's contact person in

Norway. "Strøket," *Haugesund Dagblad*, 1960, Jan. 27, 2.

5. Roberts, *If You Need Healing, Do This*, 32.

6. Atherstone, Hutchinson, and Maiden, "The Evidence of Things Unseen," in *Transatlantic Charismatic Renewal, c.1950-2000*, Atherstone, Maiden, and Hutchinson, eds., 11.

7. Alegre, Aronson, and Gustavson, eds., *Revising Pentecostal History*; Stensvold, "Paving the Way for Pentecostalism," in *Charismatic Christianity in Finland, Norway, and Sweden*, Moberg and Skjoldli, eds., 25-48; Bloch-Hoell, "Norwegian Ideas of American Christianity"; Breistein, "De angloamerikanske vekkelsene og deres innflytelse på norsk frikirkelighet," in *Forankring og fornyelse*, Schuff, Salvesen and Hagelia, eds., 209-31; Stensvold, "Amerikansk vekkelseskristendom i Norge," in *Norges religionshistorie*, Amundsen, ed., 349-54; Gollner, "Evangelize-Americanize."

8. Bundy, "Visions of Apostolic Mission," 486; Alvarsson, "The Development of Pentecostalism in Scandinavian Countries," in *European Pentecostalism*, Kay and Dyer, eds., 19-40; Aardal, *Pinsevekkelsen i Norge*; Dahl, *Fra seier til nederlag*, 142; Lie, *Fra amerikansk hellighetsbevegelse til moderne norsk karismatikk*, 161-67.

9. Recent examples include Swartz, *Facing West*; Balbier, *Altar Call in Europe*; Maiden, *Age of the Spirit*.

10. Lie, *Norsk pinsekristendom og karismatisk fornyelse*, 144-45.

11. Harrell, *All Things Are Possible*; Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 203-21; Williams, *Spirit Cure*, 55-80; Bowler, *Blessed*, 41-76.

12. Alvarsson, "The Development of Pentecostalism in Scandinavian Countries"; Mikaelsson, "The Norwegian Pentecostal Foreign Mission," in *Charismatic Christianity in Finland, Norway, and Sweden*, Moberg and Skjoldli, eds., 62-64; Moberg and Skjoldli, "Introduction," in *Charismatic Christianity in Finland, Norway, and Sweden*, Moberg and Skjoldli, eds., 9-10.

13. Bloch-Hoell, *Pinsebevegelsen*, 369-73; Halldorf, *Pentecostal Politics in a Secular World*, 172.
14. Johannesen, "The Holy Ghost in Sunset Park," 553.
15. "Som i apostlenes dager," *Korsets seier*, Jan. 17, 1948, 27.
16. Blumhofer's list of supporters of the movement includes Scandinavian names such as A. W. Rasmussen, D. Bruzelius, and Elvar Blomberg. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 210-11.
17. Alvarsson, "Relationer mellan Sverige och USA inom ramen för pentekostalismen" in *Varför reste Lewi Pethrus just till Chicago?*, Alvarsson, ed., 36-42; Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, esp. 203-21; Blumhofer, *Assemblies of God*, n. 51, 403; Malmström, "Han arbetar efter amerikanske metoder," in *Varför reste Lewi Pethrus just till Chicago?*, Alvarsson, ed., 81-137; Halldorf, *Lewis brev*, esp. 244-84; "Philadelphia Church," *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 17, 1949, 14; "Philadelphia Church," *Chicago Tribune*, Mar. 5, 1949, 12; Harrell, *All Things Are Possible*, 109; Colletti, "Lewi Pethrus," 18-29.
18. "'Youth for Christ': Et salt i forråtnelsen," *Vårt Land*, May 10, 1947, 1. The Youth for Christ movement received coverage in secular and religious newspapers. Two examples are "Vekkelsesbevegelsen som samler opptil 60.000 mennesker til sine møter," *Dagsavisen*, Aug. 19, 1946, 3; and "'Youth for Christ' kommet til Skandinavia," *Dagen*, Apr. 10, 1946, 1. This tension between the primitivist pentecostalism and the fundamentalist impulses was also present in the *Friend of the Home*, which reprinted speeches by and reports about fundamentalist preachers such as Billy Sunday and Dwight L. Moody, along with reports of the healing revival. Billy Sunday, "Dersom Kristus kom til Washington?" *Hjemmets venn*, Apr. 24, 1948, 1, 5; Dwight L. Moody, "Valentine Burke: Forbryteren som ble politikasserer," *Hjemmets venn*, Sept. 25, 1948, 1, 5; William Branham, "Hvorledes Branham fikk helbredelsens gave," *Hjemmets venn*, Aug. 28, 1948, 3, 6; William Branham, "Mitt møte med Herrens engel," 1; "700 sjeler ble frelst i ETT møte," *Hjemmets venn*, Sept. 25, 1948, 3.
19. Halldorf, *Pentecostal Politics in a Secular World*, 171.
20. Rein Seehuus, "Vi suser avsted gjennom hele Amerikas Forente Stater," *Profetrøsten*, no. 10, 1949, 308.
21. Rein Seehuus, "Amerikanere har grunn til å være i godt humør," *Profetrøsten*, no. 9, 1949, 272.
22. Rein Seehuus, "Oppsiktsvekkende begivenheter," *Profetrøsten*, no. 11, 1949, 1. Seehuus sometimes translated pieces from the *Voice of Healing*, such as T. L. Osborne, "Min livshistorie og mitt kall til å be for de sykes helbredelse," *Profetrøsten*, no. 1, 1950, 8-15; T. L. Osborne, "Min livshistorie og mitt kall til å be for de sykes helbredelse," *Profetrøsten*, no. 2, 1950, 38-41.
23. J. B. Bratlie, "På reise i Amerika," *Korsets seier*, Sept. 10, 1949, 406.
24. "Fra Oral Roberts helbredelses-møter," *Korsets seier*, Sept. 24, 1949, 440-41.
25. "Det var noen tilfeller som kunne synes som noe spesielt," Erling Strøm, "Fra det store landet i vest," *Korsets seier*, Oct. 22, 1949, 500.
26. Erling Strøm, "Fra det store landet i vest. 3dje reisebrev," *Korsets seier*, Nov. 12, 1949, 548. Pethrus, who had pleaded for welcoming the Latter Rain movement into IAG, was not mentioned. Halldorf, *Pentecostal Politics in a Secular World*, 169-70.
27. "Diary of a Delegate," *Pentecostal Evangel*, Oct. 8, 1949, 2.
28. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 210-11.
29. Erling Strøm, "Det framsto en mann utsendt av Gud," *Korsets seier*, Jan. 21, 1949, 39-41.
30. Martin Ski, "Kunne pinseveennene ha blitt i den kristne hovedstrømmen?" *Korsets seier*, Dec. 10, 1949, 619.
31. "de amerikanske metodene," "ikke gull alt som glimrer." Arne Dahl, "En hilsen fra USA," *Korsets seier*, Feb. 4, 1950, 69-70.

32. Nilsen, "Osvald Orlien," in Lie, ed., *Norsk pinse-kristendom og karismatisk fornyelse*, 128-29.

33. Osvald Orlien, "Foran pastor Will. W. Freemans besøk i Norge," *Hjemmets venn*, Feb. 10, 1950, 4.

34. "Hvis han strakte dem utover et kjøleskap, ville det vært vanskelig la vær å kjøpe." Henning Sinding-Larsen, "Freeman-feberen kan bli farsott," *Aftenposten*, Feb. 22, 1950, 2.

35. "Freeman gjenstand for interpellasjon i riksdagen i går," *Breviks dagblad*, Feb. 2, 1950, 1.

36. "Freeman kan helbrede kreft og tuberkulose," *Aftenposten*, Jan. 28, 1950, 1, 2-3; "'Mirakelmann' med kone bebuder sin ankomst," *Adresseavisen*, Jan. 26, 1950, 1.

37. "Freeman kom til Norge i går," *Telemark Arbeiderblad*, Feb. 21, 1950, 1; "Pastor Freeman kom uventet til Norge i går," *Aftenposten*, Feb. 21, 1950, 1.

38. "Mirakelmann, religiøst tivoli og reklamema-ker til Norge," *Dagbladet*, Jan. 31, 1950, 2.

39. Martin Ski, "William Freemans besøk i Oslo," *Korsets seier*, March 4, 1950, 130-31, 135.

40. "Helbredet på pastor Freemans møter," *Korsets seier*, May 13, 1950, 297-98.

41. "Helbredet under pastor Freemans møter," *Korsets seier*, March 25, 1950, 181-82.

42. "Helbredet under Freemans møter," *Korsets seier*, April 15, 1950.

43. "Voldsom tilstrømming til Freemans helbredelsesmøte," *Aftenposten: Ukens nytt*, Feb. 23, 1950, 1; Eugen Ludvigsen, "Freeman spekulerer ikke i sugesjon og religiøst svermeri," *Varden*, Feb. 28, 1950, 1; "Svindler eller profet?" *Firda*, March 10, 1950, 1; "Stor skuffelse over bønns-helbrederen," *Lofotposten*, Jan. 28, 1950, 20; "Hundretusener i kollekt-penger?" *Telemark arbeiderblad*, Jan. 28, 1950, 1.

44. "Freeman ikke annet enn en middels dyktig tryllekunstner," *Dagbladet*, Feb. 23, 1950, 1, 6.

45. "...etter avisene å dømme litt for lite amerikansk." Erling Gustavsen, "'Livets gang' om Freeman," *Profetføsten*, no. 4, 1950, 126-29; Erling Gustavsen, "'Livets gang' om Freeman," *Profetføsten*, no. 5, 1950, 133-34.

46. Florentinus Hällzon, "Pressens oppstyr om helbredelsespredikanten William Freeman," *Hjemmets venn*, Feb. 25, 1950, 3.

47. Examples of coverage include "Bønneseidlene ble funnet i hotellets søppelkasse-ulest," *Aftenposten: Ukesnytt*, Feb. 28, 1950, 1; "Bønneseidlene ble funnet i hotellets søppelkasse-ulest," *Ringerikes blad*, Feb. 28, 1950, 1; "Freemans 'bønnekluter' funnet i søppelkassen," *Drammens tidende*, July 4, 1950, 6; "Freemans 'bønnekluter' funnet i søppelkassen," *Sandefjord blad*, July 6, 1950, 4; "Freemans 'bønnekluter' funnet i søppelkassen," *Nordlandsposten*, July 6, 1950, 5; "Freemans 'bønnekluter' funnet i søppelkassen," *Harstad Tidende*, July 6, 1950, 1; "Freemans 'bønnekluter' funnet i søppelkassen," *Teledølen*, July 8, 1950, 1.

48. Kvalvaag, "'Endetidens budbærer"; "Helbredelses nådegave og kvakksalverloven," *Korsets seier*, May 27, 1950, 314. For earlier discussions of freedom and impulses from the US, see Løvlie, "The Concept of Freedom in Theological and Political Debates in the 1870s," in *Freedom and Migration in a Norwegian-American Context*, Joranger and Clevén, eds., 93-105.

49. "må Jesus ha vært en kvakksalver." Martin Ski, "Helbredelses nådegaver og kvakksalverloven," *Korsets seier*, May 27, 1950, 323-24.

50. Reprint of editorial from *Vårt Land*. "Sensur av forkynnelsen," *Korsets seier*, May 27, 1950, 314.

51. Reprint of text first published in *Aftenposten*. Phillip Rønneberg, "Helbredelse ved bønn' og religionsfrihetens prinsipp," *Korsets seier*, May 20, 1950, 313.

52. "Voldsom reaksjon på politiforbudet mot Branham," *Vårt Land*, May 5, 1950, 1, 8.

53. Eivind Berggrav, "Biskop Berggrav holder kraftig oppgjør med helsedirektorat og politi," *Folkets framtid*, June 3, 1.

54. Martin Ski, "Hvem lager mest bråk?" *Korsets seier*, June 17, 1950, 371-72.

55. Henry Robbestad, "Kvakksalverkomiteen og helbredelse ved bønn," *Korsets seier*, Oct. 22, 1955, 677-78.

56. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, 215-16.

57. R. M. Riggs, "Thousands of Delegates Attend the World Pentecostal Conference," *Pentecostal Evangel*, July 17, 1955, 2. A case in point about faith healing's continued importance is that in the mid-1960s, the *Victory of the Cross* ran reports that praised the work of the American faith healer Kathryn Kuhlman. Eyewitness accounts include Ada Vågås Lærum, "En hilsen over havet," *Korsets seier*, Sept. 6, 1967, 4; Agnes Moy, "Stormøte i New York City," *Korsets seier*, Jan. 31, 1970, 7, 11.

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