

Faith Healing

In the 19th century, scientifically based medicine transformed health and the expectation of life in the Western world. But especially during the last sixty years, medical science has made its most profound and amazing progress in history. New findings, modern technology and up-to-date facilities have given a new lease on life to many who were formerly thought beyond hope.

Health is precious! Thank God for modern medicine and doctors. Though we must be careful not to put all our trust in modern technology, vastly expanded scientific knowledge and its beneficial effects on health and medicine should be appreciated. Man is mortal. God is still the source of wisdom and life!

During the months of recuperation after open heart surgery, I often "meditated on the meaning of health, sickness, and death. I also have received some more correspondence and inquiries about faith healers in the Philippines. All these factors led to further exploration of Scriptures, the background of modern faith healers, " and some trends in Asian and African methods of healing.

Healing has become one of the most conspicuous features of 20th century religion. More and more books and articles on this subject continue to be published. The names of faith healers are legion. Some use sensational methods. Others carry on healing practices with approval of the authorities of their traditional denominations.

Is all healing of God? No! Dr. John Gerstner included a chapter on faith healing in his book *The Theology of the Major Sects*. His case for faith healing as a cultic practice is well documented and carefully presented. Dr. Merrill F. Unger in *Demons In The World Today* devotes a whole chapter on physical healing manifested in spiritism, magic and demon possession.

Seekers after miraculous cures must bear in mind the possibility of counterfeit or demonic healing. The danger of delusion about miracles, faith healing, and the health and prosperity teaching, is real. Some faith healers' performances are so hard to evaluate that Christians are often in doubt as to the forces behind these people.

I have received mail from eyewitnesses to psychic surgery. Each account was different. The Bible warns us that Satanic powers will abound the closer we come to the end times. Our Lord Himself predicted that false teachers and false Christs would come to deceive many with demonic signs and wonders (Mark 13:22).

Our times are so bewildering! Prayer, for discernment is a daily necessity. Confusion abounds everywhere! Christian schools in Ontario do not receive tax support. But since 1960 you can claim - as a medical deduction - fees paid to certified Christian Science practitioners, supported by proper receipts.

Christian Science believes in healing of physical and psychological illness, not through the regular medical means, but in prayer. Christian Science does not believe in medical healing. And what must we think about this statement that appeared In the Psychic News: "Just as there are many roads to God, so also are there many channels through whom spiritual healing is directed to mankind."?

In 1972 Bill Morrison, a tall, broad-shouldered Scotsman, was ill with suspected stomach cancer. Surgery was suggested, but he was unwilling. He was sent home. When Bill came back to the hospital in early January 1973, the radiologist could not find the tumor by x-ray. Bill claims that he was healed when evangelist Jerry Walker gave the Invitation to come forward for prayer and healing at a downtown Toronto church.

This is how Bill describes his healing experience: "When I was prayed for, It was like an electric shock running right through me, as if I were standing on a red-hot wire." Bill told his physician about his miraculous healing. The latter said: "We didn't do a biopsy so our evidence for cancer was indirect.. However, there was obviously something seriously wrong and we would have proceeded to operate had he consented to It. Bill believes that God healed him. Whom am I to dispute It?"

Opinions about faith healing range from wholehearted acceptance to outright rejection. Proponents of faith healing stress that the references to cures in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles are also for today. Others believe that miracles of all sorts largely ceased after the apostolic age. J. Dwight Pentecost in *The Divine Comforter: The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit* writes that power to heal was not. a permanent gift to the disciples. It was a temporary sign to authenticate the message and the messengers.

General William Booth of the Salvation Army, in a statement on faith healing in 1902, asserted that there was an historical tendency for faith healing to be associated with "one form or other of fanaticism." He argued that sickness is not necessarily against the will of God or an indication of the presence of sin. He also denied the healing in the atonement teaching.

In a message preached at the Full Gospel Church In Calgary, Alberta, the faith healer Rev. Don E. Gosset claims that healing Is the master key to evangelism. He considered the ministry of healing as "Heaven's advertisement to draw people to hear the Gospel."

Rev. Antonio Agpaoa of the Philippine Spiritual Church of Science and Revelation, Inc., Baguio City, also teaches that evangelism and healing cannot be separated. He relates the story of a "sign-gifted" minister who tried to reach Muslims with the Gospel: "The evangelist put a proposition to the people. If Christ were to heal people before their eyes, giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, making the lame walk, would you believe? They readily signified that they would. So, it came about that when these miracles actually began to take place, and the people saw them with their own eyes, the vast multitude of Moslems began to shout: 'Jesus is' alive, He is alive! Jesus is the Son of God! He heals people!'"

Is this a Biblical approach? When King Herod asked for a miracle, the Lord didn't satisfy his desire. (Luke 23:8 cf. Math. 27:42)

Faith healing in non-Christian religions

Pentecostalism and Sal Baba are two of the biggest magnets for those dissatisfied with mainstream religions In Malaysia. Pentecostals with their emphasis on speaking in tongues and healing are attracting many followers. In Malaysia, where belief In the supernatural has always been strong, the demonstration of such gifts is a strong Incentive to join.

Sri Satya Sal Baba, a self appointed Saviour of the world, has a large following In Malaysia. He lives In Bombay, India, and claims to have tens of thousands of followers worldwide. His fame is based on his purported ability to perform various "miracles"; among them making objects to disappear. Not only Christians claim to have the ability to perform miracles, non-Christian religions also have their miracle-workers and faith healers.

The world In which the early Christians lived was full of demons and demon-energized healers and magic workers (cf. .Acts 8:9-11; 13:7-10). In the temple of Serapis at Alexandria, Egypt, multitudes of pagans were miraculously healed. Jannes and Jambres, the magicians of Egypt (Gen. 41:8; Ex. 7:11; 8:7,19; 2 Tim. 3:8) are examples of men who were adept in the black arts and workers of miracles. Physical healings and other supernatural feats performed through demonic powers are well known facts in the history of the occult.

Buddhist Tibet has always known feats of healings. A prominent Tibetan Lama restored health to a girl who had been ailing for years, and who, on his command "took her bed and walked away," to the open-mouthed surprise of those who had carried her on a stretcher and the whole village present.

Tibetan hermits heal the sick mainly through the power of the spirits, either by performing special rites and the laying on of hands, or by the preparation of healing potions or consecrated pills. This Buddhist practice of laying on of hands proves that this ceremony is not the sole prerogative of God's people.

Not only Tibetan Buddhists, but also magicians and mediums impart gifts of healing or mediumistic abilities by placing their hands upon a person and uttering magic charms and incantations. In Tibet, healing powers are ascribed to all religious functions, and, therefore, the more religious the man, the greater is his capacity to heal or to endow consecrated objects with beneficent forces.

In Sri Lanka faith-healing is a well-known phenomenon. Scores of advertisements appear in local papers offering occult assistance for the solution of any problem, be It finding lost property or treating the physically ill or the insane. These occultists practice a wide variety of methods. The most spectacular is devil dancing, designed to appease

the spirits believed to bring various forms of sickness. Colombo's well-known practitioner Arnolis uses such devices as an elaborate miniature castle in which a sick man will sit for a cure.

Some years ago, one of the very few women gurus in the world made her appearance in Toronto. Swami Sivananda Radha, born in Berlin, founded her Ashram in the Kootenay district of British Columbia in 1982. She calls God "the cosmic energy." Christ is no more than the perfect guru, the greatest who ever lived. She said: "Often while I am chanting mantras people in the audience are healed; there is an energy of vibrations which builds up and flows out to those in need. This does not say that I heal - I'm simply a channel for the divine light."

Willy Marquez, regular contributor to Philippines' Evangelical Thrust, tells of an instance of healing in Cebu City. His neighbour was a faith-healer whose fame was spread throughout the Philippines so that his clients came from all over.

Marquez was surprised to notice that some of those who would come to see the healer were priests, nuns, teachers, and students of religious schools. Even his own relative, a member of a respectable Protestant church, was one of his clients.

Marquez comments: "These seemingly respectable people allowed this son of Satan to spit on their faces while muttering weird incantations and to mangle their lives spiritually." Marquez believes that the devil is more active now than he was five or ten years ago as he knows his days are numbered.

Woman's Home Companion, a Filipino weekly, published in 1978, a series of articles entitled "Amang Frank-Jesureno." The claims in these articles are fantastic. The first installment began: "The great healing hand of Jesus is again made manifest today through a group of divine healers headed by Amang Frank, otherwise known as the Jesureno, a contraction of Jesus Nazareno, or Jesus the Nazarene."

The series tells about the many miraculous healings performed by Amang Frank and how he got his healing powers.

Some of his incredible claims are:

1. God the Father spoke directly to Amang Frank through a woman medium.
2. He is able to locate and restore missing persons. He liberates spirits of people which have been "captured" by gnomes.
3. St. Jude and St. Peter also talk to him through mediums
4. He has even "raised the dead"
5. He has been given prophecies by Jesus Christ (speaking directly to or through him.)

Christian science

North American cults that profess to heal are bountiful. Christian Science, probably one of the best known, founded by Mary Baker Eddy teaches a kind of mental therapy in which the supernatural is supposed to work. All movements related to Christian Science, such as New Thought, Unity Movement, The Institute of Religious Science, The Church of Advanced Thought, and others, agree in regarding "the human body as shaped, ruled, repaired, and controlled solely by mental influences, God is regarded as Universal Love, Life, Truth, and Joy, and through oneness with God these virtues have healing power." Matter, sin and sickness do not exist. Healing is, therefore, only a liberation from a mortal belief in the reality of matter. These healing cults distort the Gospel and are anti-Christian.

Beware of claims of faith healers! Non-Christian religions have their healers and healing. Witch doctors are not without their successes and their explanations. Occult powers are at work as never before. Satan is willing and able to perform diabolic miracles to deceive men. Miracles are possible with the devil. The Bible calls him a deceiver and the father of lies. He even appears as an angel of light.

More than ever before, Christians ought to discern the works of our Lord's enemy. The demonic is intruding and deceiving where only God should operate. Therefore, faith-healing can never be a key to evangelism since faith healers are not only within the Christian religion. Faith healers are also very active within paganism.

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Folk medicine, ancient medical and occult practices are not only kept alive in Third World countries, they are now even finding a welcome reception in the Western world. For centuries witch doctors have been looked down upon as primitive and uncivilized. But now they are being courted by the World Health Organization and drug companies. Their methodology is being studied by scientists and even taught at universities. In late 1979, a World Congress on Folk Medicine was held in Peru, which gave new prestige to folk healers and their ways.

All folk healers are not necessarily witch doctors. And concoctions prescribed by herbalists are often beneficent remedies. In many Third World countries traditional remedies are the only help available to the poor. How can the destitute afford Western prescription drugs?

China has been using herbal medicine for thousands of years, for everything from headaches to infertility. In Toronto the Nam Pek Hong Chinese Herbs Centre, an oriental pharmacy, will dispense all kinds of drugs; dried Australian deer tails at \$120 each, herbs, roots, sea oddities. Customers are told that dried green leaves of seaweed are good for high blood pressure.

For centuries, the horns and antlers of certain species of wild game have been thought to contain cures for a wide variety of human ailments. Potions brewed from horns and

antlers are sold in herbalist shops in many nations. And nowhere are they as popular as In Southeast Asia. The antlers of the North American elk, or Wapiti, can bring up to \$330 U.S. per kilogram. A Boy Scout troop in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where the U.S. government maintains a sprawling 9,700 ha, National Elk Refuge, raises nearly \$20,000 annually from the sale of antlers to Korean and other Asian dealers who come to Jackson Hole each April to bid in the antler auction. These antlers are made into soup and this is supposed to be a "sure-fire" cure for vitamin deficiency.

Thailand, Bangkok now has 15 schools of traditional medicine. One such school is the College of Traditional Medicine at Wat Po, a royal temple where herbal medicine, diagnosis, treatment and Chinese acupuncture are taught from a Buddhist understanding of man and world. The entire school is approved by the government, and the 15 or so students who graduate each year receive a certificate from the Ministry of Public Health.

The school's specialty is Thai massage. The course in this ancient art lasts only a month. This is thought sufficient to master the complicated procedures, develop the muscles in your hands, and begin to get a feel for the therapeutic possibilities of the newly required skills. The massage is supposed to relieve muscle discomfort such as cramping spasms and nervous tensions.

In my reading about Thai massage, folk medicine, and herbalism I have become Impressed about the religious nature of the ancient medical arts. You just don't dispense herbs like a North American druggist: Massage is not just a muscle relaxing treatment. The successful criterion for massage itself is dependent on forces other than simply the skill of the practitioner.

The Asian and African holistic view of man and his world doesn't distinguish between sacred and secular medicine. A folk healer in Zaire testified: "To treat a sickness only with drugs can sometimes work, but I believe that is only half the cure. So I must collect my plants with proper ceremonies, and my remedy sometimes must be given with chants or dancing. To treat a fever I go to a sacred part of the woods where my father lies buried, and there I pluck some herbs at the moment the sun's last rays die away. Then I say a prayer to ask my ancestor's spirits to make the fever's heat fade away In the same way the sun's light disappears. Often it is Important that the. patient's family be assembled, to show that the village cares and to make the patient again feel accepted among his relatives and friends."

Not all healing is of Gad; but no healing, whether ancient or modern, is religiously neutral. The Westerners who go for a massage at Wat Po get more than a physical work-out. Their treatment is accompanied by a Buddhist prayer for a successful outcome. And you just don't pick some leaves for the preparation of a concoction of herbs. The appropriate rituals must be observed.

We may smile about ancient and folk medical practices. We may dismiss them for scientific and religious reasons. But we must respect the Asian and African holistic view

of man. Man and his spirit, the physical and spiritual world and community in which he lives,.. all interact. How sad If Western Christians are no longer able to recognize the religious nature of ancient and modern medicine!

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