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## Energy Healing: A Christian Theological Appraisal

### ENERGY HEALING: A CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

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One feature of our postmodern world is the attention given to health and lifestyle issues, such as diet, fitness, mental health, stress reduction, and the treatment of illnesses. Across the twentieth century many major breakthroughs have occurred in medical diagnosis, surgical procedures, and the treatment of previously incurable diseases. However there has been a groundswell of concern over the depersonalization of patients and the seemingly endless proliferation of drugs. Add to this the escalating costs of surgery and health care in most Western nations, and it is hardly surprising that many people now opt for consultations with holistic or alternative healers.

#### **Paradigm Shift:**

This swing towards holistic or complementary medicine in the closing decades of the twentieth century has coincided with the shift into postmodernity. Postmodernity represents a major shift in ideas in Western thinking. Major shifts in the way people understand themselves and civilizations develop have occurred down the centuries. Medieval Europe, for example, was a feudal society. It capsized with the advent of both the Renaissance and Reformation. These twin movements departed from the structures and basic assumptions of medieval society, and gave rise to new political, philosophical and theological frameworks.

In the eighteenth century another innovation in thought occurred which was known as the Enlightenment. Our modern era emerged from the Enlightenment, which had undergirding it an anti-supernatural bias. The emphasis was placed on finding absolute certainty in knowledge through human reason and science. The assumptions of the Enlightenment world have now collapsed as being unworkable, and it is being replaced by a new mindset, which at present is called postmodern.

In the postmodern framework we can discern two principal features. First, postmodernity represents a critique of the inadequacies of the Enlightenment agenda to find absolute certainty in reason and science. Second, it stands for a fresh way of understanding life in the context of an emerging global civilization. The bias against the spiritual, which characterized the modern world, is winnowing away. One of the major spiritual expressions of postmodern thought in the West is new age.

#### **Holistic Healing:**

Accompanying this broad shift in ideas is the movement of holistic health. In holistic health the entire person in

body, mind and spirit is treated. This deep attention to the whole person is immensely appealing, particularly when contrasted with the perceived depersonalization of patients in mainstream medical practice. Holistic healers bring to their work considerable personal interaction with their clients. These healers quite rightly emphasize the need to not merely tackle the symptoms of illness, but to address wider lifestyle issues that are conducive to fostering health and well being.

The signposts of this popular swing towards alternative or complementary health care are easy to measure. We need only peruse the magazine stands in most newsagents to find titles such as WellBeing International, Nature & Health, Good Medicine and so on. There are numerous Alternative Therapy Colleges where one can study acupuncture, aromatherapy, homeopathy, massage and reiki. The University of Southern Cross (Lismore, NSW) now incorporates aspects of complementary medicine in formal medical and nursing degree studies. The journal LAMP, which is the official periodical of the NSW Nurses Association, devoted an entire issue to the positive use of complementary therapies. Some health insurance funds now recognize certain alternative treatments for purposes of coverage and reimbursement. Our bookstores are also brimming with a multitude of texts and testimonials to holistic healing.

### **Energy Healing:**

Some alternative therapies are built upon the concept of healing through energy. Some of these include acupuncture, kinesiology and reiki. The idea that there are various energies we can tap into to heal is not new. We find this notion in ancient Chinese healing, Hindu folk religion, in the hermetic traditions and in primal societies. Spiritual healers such as Emmanuel Swedenborg, Anton Mesmer and Mary Baker Eddy likewise spoke of drawing on various magnetic or energetic forces. The relationship between healing and religious belief is itself a very ancient one found across many cultures.

The renewed emphasis on energy healing has some continuity with these ancient traditions. However some healers have taken the concept a step further and amalgamated it with insights from quantum physics and the hologram. Since Einstein's day we have become aware that at a sub-atomic level energy never "dies" but changes form. The "stuff" of the universe, namely matter, consists of energy in different forms. The new physics, which is bewildering to most lay people, has provided a new framework, indeed even a new mythological stance, for understanding reality. It is in this context some healers are persuaded that quantum physics confirms the validity of their approach to energy healing.

Energy healing is gaining widespread acceptance in society and even with some mainstream medical practitioners. Christians can ill afford to ignore neither this trend nor the challenges thrown up by this phenomenon. A colleague of mine at the Presbyterian Theological Centre, Sydney, had this brought home to him when he entered the local hospital for treatment to a back injury. A nurse told him that he needed to have his energy centres reharmonized if he was going to recover. I believe it is imperative that we grapple with complementary medicine and develop a theology that properly addresses it.

### **Two Opposing Camps:**

At the present time I see two mutually exclusive stances taken by Christians on the subject. The first group comprises Christians who endorse the use of alternative healing techniques, including those based on energy. In general when challenged about using them these Christians reply, "I use them because I know they work and I pray that God uses me to help others." This is a very pragmatic stance, but its advocates rarely offer any substantial biblical or theological reasons to justify their approach to healing. One exception to this is the former Campus Crusade worker Monte Kline who has apparently written in defence of their use. Kline is now a practitioner of alternative therapies and has been criticized by the evangelical apologist Elliot Miller.

The second group is very suspicious of alternative medicine, especially remedies based on energy. These Christians

offer two principal objections. One is that there is no scientific evidence to support the claims about a mystical energy force, and so energy healing is debunked as unscientific. The other objection is that these references to a mystical energy force have occultic or demonic overtones. Since many, though not all, alternative healers tend to profess some form of new age spirituality, the model of energy healing is understood to be spiritual in nature. Since it is a spiritual source, and the originators of the techniques were not Christian, it is argued that Satan must be deceiving people.

I find both stances to be somewhat deficient in their theological understanding of this subject. I believe that a solid Biblical and theological framework must first be developed before attempting to embrace or reject energy healing.

### **Theological Mapwork:**

The proper starting point is grounded in God's character and nature. The Bible declares that by the very act of creation, God gave life to human beings, animals and plants (Gen. 1). The portrait of creation in the Bible is not that of a static work, like a wound-up clock left to run on its own. Rather, the Bible affirms that the entire creation depends on God to keep it in existence. Thus in Hebrews 1:3 it is disclosed that Jesus Christ is the creator and he upholds all things by the power of his word. Paul taught that the whole creation was made by, for and through Jesus Christ (Col. 1:16-17). Paul also preached that it is in God we all live and move and have our very being (Acts 17:24-28).

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word *ruah* appears more than three hundred times. It is translated, according to context, as spirit, breath and wind. It is God's *ruah* that hovers over the creation (Gen. 1:2), renews the ground (Ps. 104:30), and maintains and sustains all things (Gen. 6:3; Num. 16:22 & 27: 16; Job 10:12, 27:3 & 34:14). The *ruah* is the fountain of all life (Ps. 36:9), is present everywhere in the creation (Ps. 139:7). The breath of life is given to humans (Gen. 2:7) and all creatures (Gen. 1:30). In the New Testament it is reaffirmed that the breath of life comes from God (Rev. 11: 11).

B. B. Warfield, in *Biblical and Theological Studies* wrote that, "The Spirit of God in the Old Testament is the executive name of God - the divine principle of activity everywhere at work in the world." (p. 131). Warfield affirmed that the Spirit of God is the "principle of the very existence and persistence of all things, and as the source and originating cause of all movement and order and life." (p. 134) R. C. Sproul in *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit* likewise avers that "there is another sense in which all mankind, believers and unbelievers alike, 'have' the Holy Spirit. In the sense of creation (as distinguished from redemption) everybody participates in the Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit is the source and power supply of life itself, no one can live completely apart from the Holy Spirit." (p. 88)

So another key element is a theology of the creation in which we discover the Spirit of God at work. This work of the Spirit did not end with the act of creation, but continues on in all ages. At times Christians seem to develop so much of their theological understandings based on the fall of humanity (Gen. 3), at the expense of any developed theology of the creation. The redemption of humanity is not divorced from the sphere of creation, because the incarnation of God in Christ takes place in time and space. Although the redemption focuses on individual humans, the creation is swept up in the work of Christ. Indeed the eschatological picture is of the whole creation renewed and restored (Is. 65:17-25; Rom. 8:22; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21). In other words, a holistic theology will not set the creation and the fall off against one another, but rather will keep both teachings in balance.

### **God as the Healer:**

Another clear-cut teaching of the Bible is that it is inherent in God's nature to heal (Ex. 15:26). Throughout the Old Testament God heals various individuals (Gen. 20:17; 2 Chron. 30:20), and in the New Testament Jesus exercised a ministry of healing (Matt. 4:24, 8:8-16, 12:15; Lk. 6:17, 9:11, 13:14, 22:51). The apostles likewise were agents of healing (Acts 3:11, 4:14, 5:16, 8:7, 14: 9, 28: 8-9). Healing was seen as one of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12: 9,28, 30), and James exhorted Christians to anoint the sick with oil and pray for healing (Jam. 5: 16).

The Bible indicates that God in his general kindness to all humanity makes provision for our basic needs (Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:17). We see that God bestows healing on both believers and unbelievers (2 Ki. 5; Lk. 17:12-17). God's Spirit sustains all life, and death comes when the ruah is withdrawn by God (Ps. 146:4; Eccl. 12:7). S. I. McMillen was a Christian medical practitioner who wrote the little classic *None of These Diseases*. McMillen found that God's Word also set forth principles for diet, fitness, hygiene, emotional health and spiritual well being. He concluded that the Biblical guidelines of morality, lifestyle and well being comprise God's prescription for a healthy and happy life. So we find that all healing, be it miraculous or not, occurs under God's sovereignty.

From Biblical times until the present, Christians have happily affirmed that the work of physicians is an extension of God's general blessings to a fallen human race. With the modern day advent of the mainstream medical profession, Christians do not seem to raise any alarm bells about doctors and nurses who happen to be atheistic, agnostic or the devotee of a non-Christian faith. Perhaps one reason why this is so stems from an implicit trust in science as something that is provable and works. It is interesting to note that some medical treatments were discovered or developed by non-Christian physicians. For example, Jonas Salk is renowned for developing the polio vaccine. Since the late 1970s, Salk has been involved in new age and alternative health care circles, whilst remaining committed to mainstream practices. If Christians are willing to endorse mainstream medicine as one of God's blessings, even though many practitioners do not believe in God, then why is alternative healing set aside as a special case?

### **Science versus Energy Healing:**

As noted earlier, one major reason why many Christians dismiss energy healing is because it does not fit in with their understanding of science. Thus far, it is argued, no scientific proof exists to show there is a mystical energy force we can tap into. The conclusion drawn is that in the absence of scientific verification, energy healing is pseudo-science and is therefore wrong.

Now we are by creation creatures of reason and God assuredly wants us to use our minds to his glory. Through the use of rational analysis and rigorous scientific testing we can establish whether someone is trying to con us. Even professional stage illusionists, such as Andre Kole and Danny Korem, have demonstrated how certain psychic healers employ sleight-of-hand tricks when purporting to make incisions by their fingers, withdrawing tumours and closing up the patient's body. Snake-oil merchants and charlatans have abounded in every civilization, and we ought to be discerning lest unscrupulous people exploit our naivete. So there is some wise counsel and caution here to be on the alert for fakes and frauds.

Another moot point is whether energy healers can justifiably leap from quantum physics to the universal life force they claim exists. It is one thing to talk about energy and matter at a sub-atomic level, and entirely another thing to talk about the whole cosmos in the spiritual terms that some healers do.

It is also undeniable that through scientific research and experimentation, a variety of cures have been discovered. There is, however, a potential blindspot for those who feel that science is somehow the "be all and end all". We must be mindful of the fact that the stance of the modern era was based on an anti-supernatural bias and a commitment to the idea that objective knowledge could be uncovered through reason and science. Postmodern thinkers have underscored the difficulty with this outlook. Knowledge arises and is interpreted in the matrix of many factors including one's gender, ethnicity and culture.

My colleague Ross Clifford has a marvellous illustration of this bias in his book *Leading Lawyers Case for the Resurrection*. His illustration concerns the Australian mammal the platypus. In the nineteenth century European zoologists refused to believe the claims emanating from Australia concerning the existence of the platypus. The creature was unknown in European scientific taxonomy. A duck-billed, spiny, webbed mammal that lays eggs like a reptile was deemed to be a hoax. This perspective was maintained even when a carcass of the platypus was sent to England. The prevailing scientific mindset could not accept the evidence for the platypus because it contradicted

accepted norms of zoological understanding. Despite their scepticism, the platypus was indeed a real Australian mammal, and these days live specimens can be seen in most zoos.

John Warwick Montgomery offers another illustration with respect to the classic "Table of Elements" devised at the end of the nineteenth century. Within the classic table there are the inert gases: neon, radon, xenon, krypton, argon and helium. It became orthodox scientific opinion that these gases, because of their zero valences, could not be combined with other chemicals to produce any compounds. Yet in the 1960s, and in the absence of atomic physics, new chemical compounds were produced. These compounds could have been produced when the gases were discovered, but the prevailing mindset had already deemed it impossible. Thus it took over seventy years to show up the inadequacy of the orthodox opinion, which had been a genuine barrier to making these discoveries. That presuppositional barrier occurred inside the context of a paradigm governed by the absolute confidence in the objective, bias free nature of scientific research.

### **Lessons from Science:**

The first lesson for us is that even using the scientific method, zoologists were not bias free and academically neutral. They rejected the evidence because their presuppositions acted as filters. The data did not fit in with their assumptions. The same was the case for the inert gases in the table of elements. The second lesson is what postmodernists have underscored, namely that knowledge and the interpretation of data can be powerfully shaped by a variety of social factors. The scientific method is not necessarily a neutral or bias free tool. The scientist comes to research and experimentation with some useful skills and critical tools, but also operates with certain beliefs that act as filters.

There is a specific applied lesson for Christians who cannot fit energy healing into a scientific framework. To be sure, energy healing at the present time does not fit into current scientific understanding. That very fact ought to make us cautious because it may turn out in years to come that a plausible scientific explanation is forthcoming. Thus to simply reject the reality of energy healing because it does not fit in with our cherished assumptions, would be as Kline says akin to a contemporary defence of a flat earth.

It was an established scientific stance that the earth was the centre of the solar system around which the sun and planets revolved. This geocentric stance has given way since the discoveries of Copernicus and Kepler. So we are reminded by this illustration that science involves an exploration of uncharted spheres of knowledge where theories are subject to constant revision. So whilst we should applaud the efforts of scientists and sceptics who have exposed cases of fraud, science itself is a discipline where conjectures and theories are made and always subject to modification or rejection as further insights are gained.

Modern astronomy has its roots in ancient astrology, just as chemistry and metallurgy began with spiritual alchemists searching for the elixir of life. Both astrology and alchemy are hermetic or occult traditions. Modern medicine is itself just a recent phenomenon. In pre-Industrial societies folk remedies, herbal healing, and various other techniques prevailed. It is also important to note that in mainstream medicine there are many things that work, but doctors do not necessarily know exactly why they work. Christians need to be more self-aware of their own commitments to a modernity mindset, which can actually run counter to Biblical beliefs. A modernity mindset can put cataracts over our eyes, simply because what is unfamiliar or unknown does not fit in with what we are prepared to accept as true or real. Christians need to recall that in the modernity mindset, Jesus could not have risen from the dead, because the presupposition from the outset is that resurrections are impossible. Despite such a bias the historical and juridical evidence makes such an assumption untenable.

### **Mystical Energy & The Devil:**

The other major reason why many Christians reject energy healing is that it is considered to be spiritually dangerous and possibly satanic in origin. This style of critique, which has been advanced by evangelical apologists such as John Ankerberg, John Weldon, Paul Reisser and Elliot Miller, reminds the Christian of the need for

spiritual discernment. The Bible itself makes repeated warnings about being deceived by false teachings, false prophets and so on (Deut. 13:1-5, 18:18-22; Matt. 7:15ff; Acts 20:26-32; Eph. 4:11-16; 2 Cor. 11:3-4,13-15; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1-3).

The stance taken by these apologists is firmly grounded in the theology of the fall, and takes very seriously the Biblical teachings about the Devil and demons. These apologists are usually quite adept at describing other systems of belief and identifying flaws in those beliefs. They see a crucial link formed between a non-Christian's beliefs and spiritual deception. As some discoverers of alternative therapies have had commitments to non-Christian beliefs - such as D. D. Palmer the discoverer of chiropractic, and Samuel Hahnemann the discoverer of homeopathy - the apologists hone their criticisms on the therapist's worldview. The conclusion that is generally drawn is that new age healers who advocate energy healing are promoting a false worldview and the reality of the energy source is identified as being satanic in nature.

### **Potential Drawbacks:**

The great strength of the apologists who argue against energy healing is their unswerving fidelity to Biblical teaching. However I believe there are some weaknesses with their approach to energy-based alternative healing. Firstly, their explanation is what I dub a "devil-of-the-gaps" theory. In the history of science whatever was inexplicable was once attributed to the hand of God. This became known as the "God-of-the-gaps" theory. Unfortunately as more gaps were filled in less and less was there a need to appeal to God as a factor in the equation. It seems to me that the same drawback applies here in attributing the unexplained energy source as being devilish. If it is demonstrated sometime in the future that the energy source has a scientific explanation, then the devil as the answer will disappear. If energy healing remains beyond science, it does not necessarily follow that the spiritual source must be the devil.

A second point is that their theological base rests on the fall and does not consider a creation theology. Earlier I discussed some elements in a creation theology, particularly with respect to the Spirit of God working in the creation. We discovered that it is inherent in God's nature to heal and the Spirit is maintaining the very existence of the cosmos. I referred to the works of two prominent Reformed evangelical theologians of the twentieth century, B. B. Warfield and R. C. Sproul. Both were addressing the issue of the work of God's Spirit in the creation. Both underscored the Biblical fact that it is the Spirit of God who keeps all life going. God in his general grace to humanity makes blessings and provisions equally on the just and unjust. We noted that even the Bible records cases where unbelievers were directly healed by God and remained in their unbelief.

### **Devilish Healing:**

One major question to be addressed concerns the claim that energy healing derives from the devil. Most evangelical apologists tackling this subject tend to follow the approach of Walter Martin (1928-1989). Martin was an evangelical pioneer in counter-cult apologetics. From the 1950s until his death, Martin inspired many evangelicals to take the cults and occult seriously. In his assessment of the teachings of movements like Christian Science, Martin raised theological doubts about cultic and occultic healing. He acknowledged that genuine healings could be documented in these movements. However, he argued, since the teachings of these groups contradicted Biblical revelation, the source of such healing must be devilish.

The basic Biblical justification of Martin's stance is grounded in passages concerning counterfeit miracles (Ex. 7:8-12; Matt. 24: 24; Acts 8:9-24; 2 Cor. 11:3-4, 13-15; 2 Thess. 2:9). Although none of these passages expressly mentions healing, it is inferred because miracles and signs and wonders are mentioned. A subsidiary point is an analogy taken from Jesus' discourse about knowing false prophets by their fruits (Matt. 7:15-23). It is argued that since the theology or metaphysics of a group is anti-Biblical, the fruits borne by that movement are also evil. Thus energy healing is interwoven with the new age and occult, and any healing here comes from the devil so as to reinforce spiritual deception on both the healer and the recipient of the healing.

This stance deserves serious consideration. The Biblical material certainly indicates that some amazing signs can occur in conjunction with false teaching. The Bible also teaches the reality of the devil and the demonic, and speaks of Christians contending against principalities and powers.

However I believe this argument is somewhat curtailed by the Bible. The first point to note is the context of the warning about spiritual deception is invariably directed at the believing community. Consider Jesus' remarks (Matt. 24) about the false prophets displaying signs and wonders. Jesus addresses the question of the signs of the times and warns that some prophets will arise showing signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, the elect of God. During the period between Pentecost and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, various sign prophets emerged. Gamaliel referred retrospectively to the two aborted movements started by Theudas and Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:34-37). Paul Barnett has discussed in some detail the sign prophets of this period and shown how the signs promised were meant to be imitations of great Old Testament events. So the immediate context of Jesus' remarks related to the Jewish community and the emergence of false messiahs from inside the faith. There is no reference to people beyond the Jewish covenant performing counterfeit miracles.

A similar thread runs through the passages in 2nd Corinthians and 2nd Thessalonians. In 2nd Corinthians 11 Paul deals with those who have tried to undermine his apostolic credentials. In the previous chapter he defends his apostolic credentials, and then in chapter 11 debunks his critics. He brands them as false apostles. He uses strong language to speak of a counterfeit gospel and counterfeit spirit, and alludes to Satan as one who deceives by appearing as an angel of light. Paul does not address the question of healing, nor does he say that his opponents had the gift of healing. Paul's criticism is of false messengers with a false message that detracts from the gospel. The passage in 2nd Thessalonians is concerned with the "Man of Lawlessness" who exalts himself over God. The signs associated with his advent will be displayed with counterfeit signs and wonders. The text does not expressly refer to healing.

Both these passages, in context, are addressed to Christians about spiritual deception occurring inside the Church. The 2nd Corinthians passage in its historical context refers to certain unnamed opponents of Paul who had visited the Corinthian Christians and cast aspersions on Paul's credentials. The 2nd Thessalonians passage alerts the believer not to be deceived by the Antichrist who sets himself up to be worshipped in God's Temple. The false messengers, in both cases, relate to either the Jewish cultus or the Church. So it is difficult to apply these passages directly to new age healing, since new age is a non-Christian movement, with its roots outside the Church.

In the case of both Pharaoh's magicians (Ex. 7) and Simon (Acts 8), the Biblical texts clearly indicate that these marvels were done through sorcery. Sorcery is condemned in the Bible. Yet in neither case is healing mentioned. The story of Simon does not expressly indicate he was healing anyone, merely performing great marvels. Apologists therefore can only conjecture that healing is implied in this incident.

As for the analogy about false prophets and bad fruit, there is a danger in over stating a case. With respect to the cults, it is unfair to conclude that there is nothing positive to be found in these movements. Take for example the Jehovah's Witnesses. Evangelicals have quite rightly highlighted the doctrinal deviations away from orthodoxy in the Jehovah's Witnesses. I concur with such analysis. However, in all fairness it must be acknowledged that some positive impact on people's lives can be found in this movement. For example, a person who lacks social skills and is very shy will very quickly work through these issues. Jehovah's Witnesses excel in talking to total strangers, and their door-to-door sharing provides the social skills. To overcome deficiencies and weaknesses in one's personality is surely a positive outcome. Thus one can be discerning about the theological errors of Jehovah's Witnesses and the eternal consequences of that and at the same time give credit where credit is due.

A parallel instance is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, better known as the Mormons. Once again the core theology of this group is at odds with Biblical teaching. Yet the Mormons uphold the Old Testament teaching on tithing, and their Church flourishes with financial resources. Here we have a movement that deviates on some

very essential truths and yet also experiences the benefits of acting on the Biblical truth of tithing.

The Bible does affirm that God heals people, but nowhere expressly states that this is something done by the devil and demons. God's Spirit sustains our very breath of life, whether we believe in Christ Jesus or not. The giving of life and health comes exclusively from the hand of God. The devil is said to imitate, but is incapable of creating anything. The power to maintain life is an attribute of God, not of the devil. So it is a very moot point whether we can Biblically maintain the case that the devil can heal people. The primary theological point is that individual humans are held accountable for their moral actions and sin, and blame cannot be shifted over to "the devil made me do it".

### **Miller versus Kline:**

Elliot Miller, in his critique of Monte Kline, argues that if a practice can be shown to be associated with something directly condemned by the Bible, then it is to be avoided. This raises, as Miller states a question of discernment and Christians may have some differences of opinion over whether to abstain or embrace something. There is a truism in what Miller says, but he steers clear of energy healing because it is new age.

Yet Miller does not take into account that in the Bible God used pagan means to reveal his purposes to pagans. The creation narratives of Genesis, in their ancient Near Eastern context, allude to and interact with the imagery and ideas of pagan creation myths in order to reveal the supremacy of God. In the Joseph narrative, the context of the story is ancient Egypt. In Egyptian religion dreams were a primary vehicle for revelation. God takes the initiative to give Pharaoh a dream, so that God's servant is elevated to fulfil God's will. Indeed, Joseph has a "cup of divination" (Gen. 44:5), and although divination is later prohibited in Moses' Law, God revealed things to Laban through divination (Gen. 30:27). The same thing occurs in Babylon between Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel with dreams. Daniel is then made chief of the Magi (2:48), which is like Billy Graham being made managing director of a new age exhibition. Hosea's book is permeated with pagan imagery from nature that is used by God to woo the errant Jewish people back to the covenant (Hos. 14:8).

In the New Testament the pagan Magi astrologers came to worship Jesus (Matt.2), and Paul quoted the pagan philosophers as having had some truths (Acts 17:24-28). In Athens Paul chided them not for their worship of idols, but for their ignorance. Even though the worship of idols is prohibited in Moses' Law and obviously upset the apostle, nonetheless he did not engage in a wholesale rejection of the Greeks' beliefs. The Stoic philosophers Paul quoted were pagans living in a pagan culture. The apostle Paul had no problem in commending the Athenians for their religious search and referring to their philosophers.

### **Food Offered to idols:**

The debate between Miller and Kline is analogous to the problem the early Christians faced over eating food offered to idols. At Corinth the Christians were perplexed as to whether or not they should eat food bought in the marketplace, and which had been prior to sale dedicated to an idol. Here is an item directly associated with pagan or occult beliefs, and the question was should they abstain from buying and eating such produce. The Apostle Paul noted that an idol was nothing (I Cor. 8:4), and went on to encourage them to eat anything sold in the marketplace (1 Cor. 11:25). It is interesting that Paul grounds this liberty in a creation based theology by citing Psalm 24:1 (see 1 Cor. 11:26). The Corinthian Christians had to wrestle with issues of faith and culture where pagan spirituality reigned supreme. The Apostle Paul gave them the theological framework in which they could live without having their faith contaminated. The issue of Christians using energy healing seems to be analogous to the problems the Corinthians faced.

Another example in church history concerns the hermetic art of alchemy. Although alchemy is something found cross-culturally, as a hermetic art it flourished in Renaissance Europe. During the Reformation several orthodox Lutherans became alchemists. John Warwick Montgomery in *Cross and Crucible*, has discussed the role of Lutherans in alchemy, documenting that on the basis of a creation theology, these Lutherans had no qualms about



studying this hermetic tradition. Indeed rather than choosing to avoid alchemy because of its direct relationship to occult and Rosicrucian metaphysics, the Lutheran alchemists pursued alchemical experiments with great gusto. They understood that God was sovereign in creation and that in the "Book of Nature" God's handiwork was discernible. The Lutherans also used alchemy for apologetic purposes to persuade the hermeticists to come to Christ. The alchemist's quest for the Philosopher's Stone was used by the Lutherans to show Christ as that very Stone.

### **A Holistic Model:**

What if God's Spirit is actually the energy source undergirding energy healing? This is a possibility the apologists have not discussed. To consider this possibility means widening the theological base from that of the fall. By widening the base to incorporate other important Biblical truths, apologists could arrive at a much deeper appreciation of energy healing, which has some missiological implications. Here is a skeletal outline of what that could entail.

First, we begin with God's nature and character, affirming God as the ultimate source of all healing. Second, we build up a strong framework, particularly from the Old Testament, about the universal work of the Spirit in the creation. Here we pay close attention to the omnipresence of God's being in the creation and consider the implications of that in the work of the Spirit to effect healing in both believer and non-believer. Third, we take a cue from the Eastern Orthodox theologians in their theology of the divine energies of God that are resonating throughout the whole creation. Eastern Orthodox theologians, such as Lossky, Ware and Yannaras, explicate what the divine energies comprise. A Biblical basis for this can be formed from the prophet Habakkuk, where God's splendour covers the heavens, the rays that emanate from his hand, the hiding of his power and so forth (Hab. 3:3-4). On a similar tack, consideration could be given to the Lutheran theology of the post-Ascension "Real Presence" of Christ in the world. If Christ is ever present, then his power to heal resonates throughout the world.

Another consideration is to take the Pauline imagery of the "glass darkly", and apply it in this context. All of us, whether Christian or not, suffer from myopic vision because none of us can see the whole picture. If apologists are willing to entertain the possibility that God's Spirit is the energy source then several factors follow on from it. First, Christians can give thanks for God's providential care to us in this stream of healing as with mainstream medicine, prayer and healing miracles. Second, Christian practitioners of energy healing have a firm theological base and not sheer pragmatism as the justification for what they do. Third, non-Christian energy healers have been given a brief glimpse of God's general presence and general revelation. This opens up an entry point for mission.

### **Idolatry:**

Most non-Christian energy healers refer to the source as an impersonal force or use the term the universal life force. Here is the nub of the issue. There is no need to deny that many patients of new age healers do find themselves cured or healed. What is problematic is that the healer does not give the glory to God for the healing. Since the healer does not know God's Spirit through a redemptive faith, the healer develops a "reality construct" or metaphysic to explain the phenomenon. The healer is groping in spiritual darkness and arrives at some version of new age spirituality. The healer does not know the Spirit redemptively, but as Sproul emphasizes no one lives in the creation apart from the work of the Spirit. It is also possible at this juncture for spiritual deception to be reinforced by demonic influence, but the root cause lies with the sinful individual. Whenever God is not acknowledged, the truth is distorted by idolatry. Idolatry is a process that begins in the fallen human mind. Our thought processes suppress, repress and exchange the knowledge of God for idols. Christians know only too well that description of idolatry as it applies to the pagans in Paul's epistle to the Romans. However, Christians must not forget that the warning about idolatry also applies to the believer (1 John 5:21). Christians too can easily slip into a non-acknowledgement of God's work and replace it with some form of idolatry.

So the apologists are quite right to alert us to the faulty metaphysics one finds in new age, and Biblical discernment

of correct teaching is imperative. However we need not stop short by simply identifying false teaching. We need to take the positive initiative to offer Christ as the completion of what is dimly grasped by the non-Christian.

A final objection that some evangelicals might raise is the problem of syncretism. They will say, "alright even if I'm willing to concede that God's Spirit is the real energy source, but if we start taking these techniques on board won't Christians fall into syncretism?" The problem of mixing true teaching with something false is a perennial one. Two points need to be stressed. First, syncretism becomes problematic whenever Christ is not at the centre stage of one's theology. Thus a discerning believer ought to submit things to the filter of God's word.

Second, the fear of syncretism is often raised as an excuse for not venturing forth into areas where the supremacy of Christ should be proclaimed. Some spiritual maturity needs to be brought to bear on the sloppy piety of believers. On these grounds the Church would not celebrate Christmas and Easter, because these calendar events overtook older pagan feast days. Since the names of the planets in our solar system, the months of the year and the days of the week, are all named after pagan gods and goddesses, then presumably we should not refer to them at all. In fact as missiologists like Scott Moreau and Paul Hiebert have shown, some evangelicals and charismatics are already guilty of syncretism with respect to their theology of spiritual warfare, which the missiologists show is animistic or pagan and not Biblical.

### **Healers & Mission:**

In view of these considerations, energy healing opens up as a mission field for Christians. Instead of apologists deconstructing or demonizing the field, they can follow Paul's mission paradigm of offering Christ as the fulfilment of the pagan quest (Acts 17:16-34). Like Paul the apologist can see from a creation-based theology that the Spirit is already behind the scenes preparing the spiritual harvest. Thus the apologist, armed with a fully fleshed theology of the Spirit of God in the creation, can say to a new age energy healer, "what you call the universal life force, I now proclaim to you in its fullness is really the person of the Spirit of God who made you and commands us to repent". The Biblical data on God's ruah shows us that there is indeed a universal life force, but unlike the new age version is a personal divine being.

Through their hands energy has indeed burst forth into people for healing, but the healer falls into idolatry by not praising God's Spirit as the source. We know from the Bible that God has worked out his own purposes through the hands of non-believers (The Egyptian Pharaoh of Joseph's day, King Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus the Great). God brings about healing through the work of unbelieving medical practitioners too. If Christians assert that God only heals through Christians and inside the Church, then we descend into obscurantism. The faith descends into henotheism, where God only works inside our tribe and nowhere else.

### **Aromatherapy as a test case:**

A brief application of what is Biblically possible can be sketched in the case of aromatherapy. In classic aromatherapy oils and essences are employed to promote relaxation and healing. New age aromatherapists advocate a theory whereby a given substance, such as lavender, must be diluted. The reason for diluting the substance is to concentrate the universal life force or spirit power in the substance. This dilution concept appears to have its origins in Hahnemann's homeopathy and Rudolf Steiner's biodynamic farming techniques.

A positive Christian approach to aromatherapy would be developed as follows. First, the oils and essences are part of God's good creation and are to be received with thanksgiving. Second, it can be shown that the oils and essences are efficacious in various ways, such as lavender in a bath. The benefits these substances bring are part of God's general kindness and provision to humanity. Third, the Bible sets forth principles regarding our health and well being, and we are to make use of what God has given us. Fourth, God is concerned that we set aside time for rest and relaxation, as evidenced by the seventh day of rest (Gen. 2:2-3; Ex. 20: 8- 11 ). These oils help us relax. Fifth, we find oils and essences used in the Bible. The Kings of Israel were anointed with oil, and that act of

anointing had a spiritual dimension to it. Myrrh and frankincense are mentioned several times in the Song of Songs, which is a Biblical book devoted to the celebration of sexual union in the context of marriage ( 1: 13, 3 :6, 4:6, 14, 5:1, 5, 13). Oils and incense are likewise used in the Old Testament offerings of worship to God (Lev. 2:1-2, 15-16, 24:7). Amongst the gifts the Magi gave to the young Jesus were frankincense and myrrh. Jesus was also anointed with precious oil at Bethany prior to his arrest and crucifixion (Matt. 26:6-13). Thus it is appropriate to speak of the oils and essences as having a definite spiritual purpose. To use them is to bring glory to God. Sixth, as outlined earlier, what the new age person refers to as an impersonal universal life force, can be enhanced to refer to the divine person of the Holy Spirit at work in the creation. The power of the oils and essences ultimately derives from the Spirit at work in the world. Finally, the only point of departure would be over the soundness of the dilution theory.

So aromatherapy can be embraced and built upon solid Biblical foundations, and shorn of those ideas which contradict God's revealed truth. A case by case analysis of each therapy, rather than a blanket rejection, is therefore warranted before accepting or rejecting them.

### **Conclusion:**

Is your devil too big? Is your God too small? Apologists must recall Paul's teaching that Christ disarmed the principalities and powers through the Cross and the Resurrection (Col. 2:15). Both Peter and Jude taught that the fallen angels are already bound in chains waiting the Day of Judgement (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). The apologists are correct to warn of spiritual deception and to describe those philosophical and theological shortcomings in other worldviews. If God's Spirit is the real source behind the energy healing, then to call that devilish is to grieve the Spirit. Instead of falling into an unbiblical dualism, where the cosmos is divided up between the good guys and bad guys let apologists go forth and proclaim the supremacy of Christ as the master healer even to new age energy healers.

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