

Faith Healing: Taming the Therapeutic Miracle

by

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Dr. Jarvis gave a presentation on faith healing as quackery and served as a member of a panel on the topic, "Who are the Real Healers? The Physicians? The Clergy?" sponsored by the CMA Committee on Medicine and Religion at Anaheim, California, March 6, 1977. This paper represents a portion of the research done in preparation for that meeting.

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Summary

Although "faith healing" is the most widely used term, many events purported to represent paranormal healing do not involve faith, at least in the traditional religious sense, in either the healer or the healee. In fact, non-believers have both "healed" and "been healed," and "healing" has taken place in completely secular settings. Explanations for what mechanisms are at work vary considerably. McNutt clarifies faith healing from a religious point of view by categorizing three different basic kinds of sickness: guilt, emotional hurts and that caused by disease or accident.

Faith healing involves either or both power from within the healee, healer, or some "other worldly" power the healer claims. While the religious attribute healing to God, secular healers are more apt to claim some intrinsic power of their own. They attempt to demonstrate such power by such means as Kirlian photography. The real concern to health professionals is the pragmatic question, "Does it have any real therapeutic value?" This question is difficult to answer quantitatively since faith healers are notoriously bad at following up their cases to determine long-range effectiveness. But there is evidence that some people are helped by faith healing. Most likely to benefit are those with deep-seated psychosomatic ailments. Indeed, these people may not be helped by conventional means. What they need is an inner sense of forgiveness or cleansing which only a ritual can produce.

There are several scientific explanations for the possible mechanisms which produce seemingly effective cures, most involving well-established psychodynamic phenomena. According to these theories, a case can be made for faith healing as a useful tool in humanity's arsenal against disease and suffering.

Unfortunately, faith healing also has a negative side. Under pressure to demonstrate the quality of their faith, a number of people have come to tragic ends. Taking into account the powerful mind/body relationships, faith healing wrongly applied is potentially as dangerous as any drug or surgical procedure in the armamentarium against disease and a great deal less dependable.

One of the most disturbing aspects of faith healing is its potential for quackery. Examples of this occur regularly on the world scene. This includes psychic healers promoted by the sensational newspapers to itinerant preachers and the Filipino psychic surgeons.

With today's emphasis on treating the "whole man," there has been increased interest in faith healing by the legitimate medical community. In order to adequately answer the question of its usefulness, medicine must subject faith healing to the same kind of scrutiny it applies to any method of treatment. To do less would be an irresponsible breach of the public's trust.

In order to study faith healing scientifically it is important to begin with certain basic assumptions, the first of which is that it is possible for paranormal healing to occur. Also, that it is inappropriate to use a supernatural explanation when a natural one will suffice. Others include that evidence of effectiveness must constitute more than simply relief of

symptoms in the healee and the recognition of the tremendous limitations of the single case history without hard, objective evidence of benefit. Even in the most convincing case the explanation given for the mechanism remains speculative. For example, powers demonstrated from an "other worldly" force leaves a Christian with the dilemma of whether the force was representative of good or evil because of Christ's warnings that false prophets would cast out devils in his name.

Scientific tests of faith healing would not be difficult to design. It is even possible to use double-blind protocols. The goal is to find a way of identifying individuals who would most likely benefit from the faith healing ritual and screen out those who might be harmed so that a kind of "faith healing prescription" might be written.

Faith healing has existed for as many years as we can trace. It is now being invited into the scientific arena to measure itself against the standards of scientific investigation. Should it succeed, medical science will have a valuable new therapeutic tool at its disposal. Should it fail it will no doubt continue to flourish as it has in the past. Hopefully, however, such a failure would cause responsible churchmen and physicians to curtail the use of an activity which has such great potential for harm.

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The setting is a large, metropolitan hospital. It is staffed by top professionals who have at their disposal the latest methods of scientific medicine. In a treatment room a young woman sits quietly, though expectantly in her wheel chair. Her eyes are fixed on a man in front of her who is trying to help heal her of her disease. He is a gray-haired, grandfatherly-looking gentleman, apparently a man of great compassion. It is obvious to anyone that the sounds and motions the old man is making are not those of the ordinary physician. He is a curandero, a native Mexican-Indian faith healer employed by this modern medical institution to perform his rituals on behalf of people who believe as he does.

"Faith healing" appears to have become the most commonly used term for a wide variety of purported therapeutic events of a paranormal nature. The ambiguity which pervades the topic is reflected by the numerous designations given these events, each having a slightly different connotation attempting to describe what is believed to have occurred. Some express a religious interpretation, while others are more secular. "Divine healing," "laying on of hands," "temple cure," and "healing through prayer" all imply a supernatural involvement. "Psychic healing," "magnetic healing," and "spirit or spiritual healing" may or may not have such implications.

While it is quite certain that the religious forms are most prevalent, the secular seem to be clearly on the increase. This is not surprising in light of the general trend of secular-

ization which characterizes modern technological society.¹

The secular form of paranormal healing is, however, no recent phenomenon. It seems to be as old as any other type of healing on record. While it is certainly true that the farther back into the history of healing one goes, the more difficult it becomes to separate the secular from the religious because of the dual role played by the priest-physicians, still Galen's second century statement, "We have proof at the temple of Aesculapius that many serious illnesses can be cured solely by the shock administered to the mind"² reveals that natural or secular explanations for special healing are not new.

Even though paranormal healing phenomena generally have a religious connotation, the connection between the "healer" and/or the "healee" and God, or belief or faith on the part of either, often has been missing. Kings, charlatans, skeptics, and persons claiming to have been imbued with special power due to such things as lightning strikes have been successful healers according to the rather loose standards generally applied to this field of endeavor. Most curious was the success of Colinon, who posed as a faith healer and had considerable success with methods in which he himself had no credence.³ In his case the success must be attributed to factors within the "healee."

In addition, the fact that people are healed at a distance, out of contact with the healer, either by placing their hands on a radio or T.V. set, or by having a proxy represent them, as is commonly done in connection with temple cures, also makes a strong case for the "healee" as the significant factor. ↙

Charcot reports that old women in Poitou, France, make a profession of serving as intercessors at the tomb of Saint Radegonde on behalf of those who either cannot or will not come to the shrine in person.⁴ On the other hand, it is widely known that skeptics are sometimes healed, even though they openly expressed non-belief. Bertrin spoke of this, stating, "Patients are cured who had no hope of cure, blind unbelievers who spoke evil of religion and were more or less cured; and there have been others who have been cured after returning home, when they had ceased to expect a cure."⁵ Kathryn Kuhlman also stated explicitly in her sermons that she did not know why some are not healed who have complete faith, while others who are quite skeptical are healed.⁶ This argues for power on the part of the "healer," but does not establish it because of other possible explanations.

Whether or not opinions expressed by the healee are accurate reflections of what he feels inside is open to question. If there was truly non-belief, why did they bother to undergo the ritual in the first place? His very presence or participation in the process is an indication of a certain amount of openness to the possibility of help with his problem. Rawcliffe says that the conditions necessary for mental healing require belief in the powers of the healer on the part of the healee, but where conscious belief is lacking, the subconscious mind may be able to supply the lack. In this way, he says, many a self-proclaimed skeptic has been converted.⁷

Another possible explanation for the healed skeptic is what we have learned about the dynamics of belief-changing

strategies from Pavlov's work. ⁷ The healee certainly is apt to have had his belief structure and value system disrupted by the illness, especially if it is life-threatening or chronically painful (these are usually the kinds treated by faith healers), and is therefore vulnerable to mental manipulation. Or, by another process, the healer can bring about a disruption of the belief structure and the potential for change by causing great excitement and hysteria.

Another important point which adds to the problem of defining faith healing is that mainstream religion believes and teaches that all healing is of God. This is very easily harmonized with the fundamental which is the very basis of scientific medicine. Since Hippocrates it has been taught that nature is the healer and that the physician merely assists in the process. Religion sees God as the author and sustainer of nature and, therefore, the active agent is all healing.^{8,9}

McNutt clarifies the picture from religion's point of view by pointing out three basic kinds of sickness: first, that of the spirit caused by sin (which in a secular sense could be described as an anxiety reaction of guilt resulting from the violation of one's deeply-held value system); second, that caused by emotional hurts of our past (which is completely compatible with secular explanations); and third, that caused by disease or accidents.¹⁰ For these he offers four different prayer methods to aid in or effectuate healing: (1) for personal sin: prayer for repentance; (2) for emotional hurts: prayer for inner healing; (3) for disease and trauma: prayer for physical healing;

and (4) for demonic possession: prayer for deliverance (exorcism).¹¹

McNutt's categorizations offer some help in understanding the differing Biblical references to special healing. For instance, when the woman reportedly was healed by touching Christ's garment, he told her that her faith had "made her whole," implying that the power had come from within herself.¹² On other occasions he himself is said to have "cured" people of such things as blindness and mutism from birth,¹³ implying a special power in him as the healer. And indeed, he spoke of such an external power when he passed it along to his disciples.¹⁴ He also "cast out devils,"¹⁵ which has been described by some as an obvious application of the so-called "demonic theory" as the cause of man's woes, yet he refuted that all-inclusive supposition when asked about a wall which had fallen on some people in a nearby town.¹⁶ Thus, the religious view of faith healing offers a variety of causes and interventions for diseases, including the "other worldly" notion of demonic possession.

The same elements found in the religious explanations can be seen in the secular side of the picture. Edwards describes the healing power from within the "healee" by calling it an activity of the "spirit mind."¹⁷ He says although psychiatrists may have a different name for it, it is the same thing. He takes a cause/effect approach to spiritual healing and appears to be simply trying to explain psychological mechanisms in a quasi-religious manner.

More commonly, it appears, secular healers claim they themselves possess some kind of special power which they apply to the healee. One of the currently popular ways of exhibiting

their healing force is through the use of Kirlian photography. This curiously interesting photographic technique was developed in Russia in 1939 by Semyon Davidovich Kirlian, an obscure Soviet electrician, and while it has thus far failed to establish its validity for anything, it has been a boon for those trying to prove things in the world of the paranormal.

UCLA psychologist Thelma Moss is the leading proponent of Kirlian photography in the United States and is said to have taken more photographs and done more experimental work than anyone outside Russia. Moss believes that Kirlian photography clearly demonstrates a human aura. She says, "We have done work with acupuncturists and [psychic] healers, and we find that the corona of the healer becomes intense before healing, and then afterward is more relaxed and less strong. We think we are looking for a transfer of energy from the healer to the injured person."¹⁸

Other researchers are less dramatic in their explanations of Kirlian photography. The research team of Pehek, Kyler, and Faust at Logical Technical Services in New York City conclude that perspiration is the factor which causes the patterns, densities, and colors of Kirlian pictures.¹⁹ Experimental psychologist Ray Hyman of the University of Oregon found that the amount of finger area in contact with the surface greatly affects the resulting aura

Paralleling religion's "other worldly" influences in the paranormal healing process is an element of mysticism often associated with secular healing. An example of it was recently seen in the case of a psychic healer who works privately and

without any religious pretense. His account of his ability as a healer is a curious mixture of all three possibilities. He rejects the title of "healer" in preference to the designation of "helper." "I heal no one," he states, "I merely help them mobilize their own inner healing power." However, he claims to have "acquired" this ability as the result of lightning strike. Among his documents which he presents as validation of his extraordinary power are pictures of him in a special trance state which he claims to be in when healing, Kirlian photographs of his allegedly better-than-normal aura, and other references to unusual inherent powers. One of the most unusual is his claim that the healing process causes his arms to bleed spontaneously. He says they bleed less as the patient improves because it takes less energy "out of him."

The mystical dimension is his report that he became aware of his healing power when the voice of a 2,700-year-old woman spoke through him during a trance and told him he had the power to heal. He also claims that she communicates through him during sleep by automatic writing. "I see a pair of tiny hands on top of mine guiding me," he says, which he believes belong to the "old woman."

Thus, we seem to see more similarities than differences between the paranormal healing methods of the religious and secular practitioners. Both recognize power from within the "healee," power from without via the "healer," and an additional mystical, supernatural, or "other worldly" element. The major difference seems to be that the secular healers are more apt to claim personal powers, while the religious are more apt to give credit

to God.

What really concerns those of us in the health professions who are trying to relieve human suffering by any means is the pragmatic question, "Does it have any real therapeutic value?" Janet argues that something must be happening for the phenomenon of temple cure and faith healing to have survived for so many centuries.²⁰ This author knows personally individuals who believe they have been cured by "divine intervention," and saw in one relatively conservative church auditorium no less than thirty people stand to their feet when asked by a Christian physician, who stated that while he believed in the possibility, he had failed to observe any such thing in thirty years of medical practice, if anyone in the congregation had directly experienced special healing. Also, a serious, properly skeptical student of faith healing reports that he never fails to find several college students in his religion classes who claim to have been the recipients of special healing.²¹

One of the most convincing reports of the reality of faith healing involves Olga Worrall of Baltimore, Maryland. She has been able to perform well enough to convince a number of respectable physicians of her effectiveness. At a Stanford University seminar on unconventional means of healing she was able to improve or cure the conditions of seven out of ten patients brought to her by their physicians who had afflictions that had not responded well to regular medical care.²²

Unfortunately, no faith healers, including Mrs. Worrall, do an adequate job of follow-up to assess their effectiveness. No real data seems to exist to verify statistically that anything

significant is really happening. McNutt states in his book that roughly one-half of the cases involving physical illnesses and three-fourths of those involving mental illness are healed, although he admits that it is difficult to know for sure, because he travels too much to be able to follow up accurately.²³ For proof, he offers only his word based upon his personal experience.²⁴ He, like all of the others in faith healing, offer only testimonials as evidence of their effectiveness. As wonderful as many of these reports sound, they can never prove anything about the validity of faith healing, for if testimonial evidence were sufficient, every healing procedure and device ever advanced in the name of healing would have to be accepted as effective, because all of them have a group of people ready to testify under oath that it worked for them!

However, it is probably safe to say that even in the absence of hard statistical evidence, almost no one in the scientific community doubts that something is happening with regard to faith healing. The real question is what?

Some Possible Mechanisms

The first and most obvious mechanism that could be responsible for faith cures involves the entire realm of what is usually called "suggestibility." Hysteria, hypnosis, placebo effect, expectations on the part of either or both the healer and the healee, coupled with the high degree of subjectivity which can accompany any illness, can easily be said to account for most of the reported cures.

In addition to these, there are numerous reported cures

which follow exactly the process of mind-cure, as commonly seen in clinical psychiatry. These can be described as normal. They seem to have an air of mystery around them, mainly because the average person, including the faith healer, has no appreciation for natural healing in the case of functional diseases. We have all cut ourselves and watched the natural process of physical healing take place. To claim that such was paranormal would seem absurd. However, when someone is suffering from the anxiety of grief, guilt, uncertainty (all of which can be "soma-tized" into apparent physical illness), or is depressed and they get over their problem, our description of what has happened is apt to be viewed as something other than an ordinary healing process, especially if the overt symptoms appear to the un-trained observer to have occurred rather quickly, which would not be uncommon in mental healing. That normal psychological mechanisms of healing are at work is exemplified by one of McNutt's explanations of why some people are not healed. "Not praying specifically," he says, "is one of the reasons for failure. Especially in praying for inner healing, it seems important to get to the root cause of emotional suffering, the initial harmful memory . . . It was only when we went back and found the root incident, which had been forgotten, and prayed for Jesus to enter into that moment and heal it, that the healing finally took place." This does not appear to be unlike descriptions of healing through conventional processes of mental healing.

Another intriguing possibility lies in the personality described by Janet--a personality that is suffering from the

depression of boredom. He says,

How many people fall sick because they have nothing of interest to do; because their life is commonplace, dull, and monotonous; because they have no hope, no ambition, no aim; because no one is interested in them, and because they see no prospect of arousing anyone's interest. Take a person of this type and make him understand that the Blessed Virgin is going to work a miracle in his favour, that the all-powerful divine being has chosen him from among thousands to grant him a special favour which no one will be able to overlook, that he will become the living proof of the truth of religion and will promote the eternal salvation of an impious century.

Couple this with the report by Horn entitled, "Bored to Sickness" in Psychology Today,²⁵ in which he points to research in the United States and Sweden which indicates that the routine work of the assembly-line leads to more psychosomatic complaints than the long, personally demanding work week of a physician, and you have some persuasive rationale for what may be happening in some cases of faith cure.

Regardless of the fact that naturalistic explanations could be given to most of the faith healing phenomena, faith healing probably would continue to function. The faith healer does not concern himself with the mechanisms, only with the results. As a matter of fact, the healer capitalizes on his lack of understanding of the mechanisms. Employing a tactic that Young describes as making "a virtue of [their] ignorance,"²⁶ they proclaim that they do not understand how it works, only that it does. In this case the healer pictured the blind man that Christ healed and said, "the only thing he understood was that once he was blind but now can see!" Query any health care practitioner and he will tell you that results in the form of eased pain, returned function,

or "feeling better" is the primary criteria his success is judged by from the patient's point of view.

Most scientists seem willing to concede that faith-healing does indeed offer a genuine form of psychosomatic healing. Few would deny that such healing is of real value due to our increased appreciation of mind/body interactions in the disease process. Both science and the religious community appreciate the power of the psyche on bodily survival. Seligman²⁷ describes this well in his article, "Submissive Death: Giving Up on Life." McNutt²⁸ declares that sometimes Catholics ask that a priest not come to the bedside of the seriously ill because they are so conditioned to the "last rites" ritual that his visit is apt to be interpreted by the sick person as a sign of impending death and result in the kind of response of which Seligman speaks. On this basis a case can be made that faith healing is beneficial and of real practical value in humanity's arsenal against disease and suffering.

Unfortunately, there is also a negative side to faith healing and its effects. The most serious of these is when persons suffering from real physical illness discontinue conventional medical treatments in order to demonstrate the quality of their faith. One of the most tragic involved an eleven-year-old diabetic child in California whose parents took him off insulin because they were convinced by a religious faith healer that he had been cured. They joyfully watched as the boy's condition worsened and eventually died, believing that he would be miraculously raised from the dead as a public testimonial to the power of God! This quality of faith is commonly urged by the

preachers on the healing circuit of America's lower-class religious groups. They use a "catch 22" type of circular reasoning that cannot be disproven. It goes something like this: Do you have faith, or simply hope? Hope wants to be healed, it desires it, wishes for it--but faith knows! There's no doubt with faith. Hope is not enough, you must have faith! If the victim doesn't believe definitely that he has been cured, he has only demonstrated hope, not faith, so the failure is his, not the healer's. If he really has faith, he will publicly announce and testify that he has indeed been healed, despite any objective evidence to the contrary. McNutt points to this,²⁹ as do others.

Nolen³⁰ gives an account of a young woman suffering from cancer who was convinced by Kathryn Kuhlman that she was healed and it was no longer necessary for her to wear her neck brace. This resulted in the partial collapse of a vertebra, causing terrible pain and hospitalization. She died four months after having been publicly "cured" by Miss Kuhlman.

Another dimension of the problem expressed in this case which controvenes the positive psychological effects found in faith healing referred to earlier in this monograph is the depression experienced by those who are not healed. The self-deprecation which might occur following a failure, especially when one has called for all of the faith they can consciously muster, could be quite devastating. We aren't apt to hear much more about these individuals because they don't give testimonials and, even if they did, who would publicize them? Certainly not the healers, who are the source of most of what the public

hears on the matter.

Taking into account the powerful mind/body relationships and the potential for either good or harm from a psychological point of view, plus the possible hazards resulting from taking actions to demonstrate one's faith, it seems that the process of faith healing, while of some value, is as potentially dangerous as any drug or surgical procedure in the armamentarium against disease and a great deal less predictable or dependable.

One of the most disturbing aspects of faith healing is its great potential for exploitation by the unscrupulous. While always reluctant to accuse someone of deliberate fraud, especially after having studied how easily the most sincere can be confused by their perceptions and faulty assumptions when dedicated to a particular belief system, the modus operandi of public faith healers is usually quite obvious to the incredulous.

One very dramatic method is when the healer tells a sufferer whom he has not seen before the location of his malady and then pretends to heal it. This is done sometime after a special prayer has been offered on behalf of all, during which he asks everyone to place their hands upon their place of illness in a gesture of faith. No one seems to care that T.V. tapes are being continually taken of the crowd, and the healer is coming and going almost continuously on and off the stage where he cannot be observed, enabling him to study the Video Tapes in order to select individuals for this piece of showmanship.

Those who are touched by the healer often experience a feeling of "electricity" in their bodies. This is accomplished by placing the hand upon the victim's forehead and pushing the

head backward so that pressure is exerted on the cervical vertebrae and the medulla. At the sound of the exclaimed words "heal, heal," the healer adds compressive thrusts to the position of the head, causing a shock wave to run from the base of the skull down the spine.

One of the boldest things these public healers do is to announce to their audience that the Spirit has told them that a certain number in the room will give \$100 (or more) to him to further his work. They generally guarantee some special benefit will result from listening to the Spirit at this time. Warning them not to resist the Spirit's impressions, they demand quick response. If necessary, they tell of some horrible disaster which recently struck someone who failed to respond quickly. Such exploitation only survives because of the protection afforded by freedom of religion, a value we cherish more than we abhor charlatanism.

Deception also has played a large role in the success of the so-called "psychic surgeons" of the Philippines. Numerous observers concur that sleight-of-hand involves the substitution of animal organs and blood,^{31, 32, 33} and in some cases red betel nut juice which appeared as blood to the untrained eye. It now seems clear that the wonderful stories from the Philippines were the wishful thinking of the desperate and the naive, encouraged and enhanced by unscrupulous travel agents involved in a scam to promote business. It is always interesting to go back and review the convincing testimonials of those who were so certain of the authenticity of some form of paranormal healing which is subsequently exposed as a fraud, such as has

been the case with the psychic surgeons. It should serve as a reminder to anyone relying upon eyewitness evidence just how unreliable eyewitness reports really are.

To answer adequately the question, "Does it work?" faith healing must be subjected to the rigorous scrutiny of scientific investigation. The chances that this will happen are better today than ever before. With acute diseases and trauma well under control, medical science is now turning its attention to preventing chronic diseases and healing the mind of man from the effects of stressful living in a modern technological society. Concepts of "holistic medicine," and "treating the whole man" are very much in vogue today, and apparently are the wave of the future. A study of the history of medicine will show that we have come full circle, back to the methods of primitive medicine when the spiritual dimension of man was the critical factor. Investigators are studying the healing rites of primitives currently in an attempt to get a handle on the critical factors which might be mobilized to heal the body through the mind.³⁴

What Will it Take to Prove it Works?

The Southern California Council Against Health Fraud is interested in conducting research into paranormal healing and has formed a subcommittee for that purpose. In attempting to study this difficult topic, it has become clear just how complex this problem is. It has become apparent that effect will be far easier to establish than cause. The question, "Does it work?" will be answered long before "How does it work?" Therefore, we plan to concentrate our efforts in that direction.

In our approach to the problem we have defined paranormal healing as all types of healing purported to be brought about by means which appear to include an essential element which supersedes the current understanding or explanation of conventional medical science, whether it be of a religious or secular nature. It is intended that the term encompass what are commonly known as "faith healing," "psychic healing," "divine healing," "spiritual healing," "healing through prayer," "laying on of hands," and so forth.

It is not the purpose of the Council to prove or disprove the validity of religion or pass final judgment upon each case brought to its attention, but rather to provide some scientific criteria whereby incidents which purport to involve unusual manifestations of healing can be evaluated. Our primary efforts will be aimed at establishing whether or not some special healing event has actually occurred based upon the available data.

This approach to the investigation to paranormal healing should be of interest to religious and secular observers alike. For the religious it can provide a basis for recognizing a "miracle" if and when it has occurred. Although many religious persons willingly designate any fortuitous event as a miracle, even if the mechanisms are completely natural, we think of miracles in the more strict terms of "contradicting known scientific laws" (Webster's). For the secular it may provide a clue for researchers to follow which could lead to a discovery in medical science which has eluded us thus far. For the highly skeptical, it can provide a means of taming the therapeutic miracle and taking from the charlatan another means with which

he deceives the credulous.

Basic Assumptions

In order to study any phenomena it is necessary to begin with certain basic assumptions. In the study of something as difficult as paranormal healing, these must be stated as clearly as possible. The first basic assumption is that it is possible for paranormal healing to occur. The admission of such a possibility, it seems, is a prerequisite to studying it. More definitively, it is possible that praying for, laying hands upon, performing a ritual, or some other act which has meaning to the healee but no known therapeutic value can elicit a healing response which is unlikely to have occurred by any other means. No limit is placed on what the response might be, nor are supernatural forces ruled out as a possible cause for the healing event.

The second assumption is that a supernatural explanation for an event is inappropriate when a natural one will suffice. This includes the point that the likelihood of a paranormal event having occurred does not increase as the number of rival hypotheses dispensed with increases. As long as a single natural explanation remains, it must be regarded as the most plausible. Only when all of the most stringent criteria can be satisfied can no other explanation but the supernatural remain. By this we are following the rule of logic which says that the evidence demanded must be rigorous in proportion to the manifest incredibility of the phenomena.

The third assumption is that evidence of a cure must include more than simply the relief of symptoms in the healee.

While all realize that from the point of view of the sufferer relief may be all that is important to him, it is well known that psychosomatic relief can often occur, although objective evidence of the disease still exists.³⁵

Fourth, that the rules for indication of paranormal healing having occurred are impossible on a single-case basis without hard, objective evidence obvious enough to demand complete agreement by qualified observers. Pathologists have noted that it is just as much a physiological impossibility to restore a destroyed neuron which cannot be readily observed but would be necessary for healing paraplegia, organic blindness, nerve deafness, or some other major loss of body function as it would be to restore a missing limb that can be seen by all. Since body functions can also be impaired by psychosomatic causes, the requirements for irrefutable evidence are for a therapeutic event so obvious that even the most skeptical cannot ignore the fact of a cure. Nothing short of the restoration of a previously confirmed missing external limb or organ would suffice.

Such a stringent demand seems very severe, but on the other hand, it would take only one such case to remove all doubt concerning faith's ability to heal. The same thing cannot be said for other types of paranormal events. In water-witching, for example, there have been many spectacular cases involving water-witches out-performing scientific technicians, and yet even the best of such performances is not sufficient to rule out chance as a rival hypothesis for the success. The same can be said for many areas of controversy, but for the therapeutic miracle,

one such well-documented case would go far in establishing once and for all the fact of paranormal healing in whatever form it had been demonstrated.

Yet, even in such an undeniable demonstration, the question of cause would still be subject to speculation. Once all forms of deception had been ruled out, the question of whether the power had come from the healer, healee, or some outside supernatural force would require much study. If the power had come from within the healee, it could easily be regarded as simply an extension of the already recognized ability of the body to heal itself and, therefore, a natural phenomenon. How to tap into it on demand would be the point to establish scientifically.

If, however, the power were to be determined as coming from an outside force, whether it be the healer or something beyond him, the problem would exist, at least for a Christian, as to whether it was a good or evil force because of Christ's warnings that false prophets would cast out devils in his name.³⁶

This does not rule out evaluating the effectiveness of faith healing on diseases or conditions which manifest only subjective symptoms, however. In such instances, while it would be impossible to dispense with a myriad of rival hypotheses, including hysteria, placebo effects, psychosomatic illness, hypnosis, and other suggestive reactions on a single-case basis, it would be possible to establish a beneficial effect of some type of special healing ritual by subjecting it to an experimental design and a statistical test.

An experiment involving faith healing would not be difficult to design, using either carefully matched controls, or larger

numbers of randomly-divided groups of sufferers. Patient improvement could be evaluated using "single blind" observers. It would be essential that improvement be effected on a long-term basis to substantiate real improvement, due to the ability of many conditions to temporarily regress.

Fifth, outward expressions of belief or non-belief on the part of the healee are unreliable as indicators of potential psychological reactive effects. This is because of a person's vulnerability to the "conversion" phenomena brought about by the weakening or disruption of their belief structure which is apt to occur as an anxiety response to illness, either through the threatened destruction of the organism, or great excitement induced by the healer. It seems prudent that the only rule to be properly applied in this regard is the same used in behavioral research concerning reactive effects; that is simply, did or did not the subject know he was being acted upon? If he knew special efforts to heal him were being used on his behalf, he would have been vulnerable to any of a multitude of reactive responses.

It would be possible to conduct a faith healing ritual unknown to the prospective healee by choosing someone at random and working in a nearby room, pretending to be involved in some other act or attempting to heal someone in a coma.

Additionally, as has been noted, the potential for harm is significant and cannot be ignored. Therefore, it would be necessary to test the crucial dimension of harm which might result to those who were ritualized but failed to respond as well. From such investigation it should be possible to determine

what types of people and conditions are most likely to respond favorably to the faith healing ritual without a potential adverse response due to failure. Eventually, this would permit physicians to write a kind of "faith healing prescription," thus placing faith healing rituals within the realm of responsible activity which must be adhered to by scientific medicine.

On the subject of harm, it already seems advisable that we endorse Weatherhead's recommendation³⁷ that faith healing not be performed publicly because of the great potential for inducing hysteria or putting great pressure on the healee to demonstrate his faith by attempting activities which might cause serious injury.

The actual testing of each case requires a well-documented chronology of all pertinent events. This includes unquestionable verification of both diagnosis and cure, a complete recounting of all other therapeutic procedures undertaken in the healee's behalf, testimony by a sufficient number of unbiased, perhaps randomly-selected experts that the course the case took was indeed anomalous, and evidence that the improvement has been permanent. It is readily acknowledged that these requirements are severe, but they are no less stringent than those necessary to establish the value of any therapeutic treatment. It would be unfair to apply any less to faith healing.

Faith healing has persisted as a phenomenon in western civilization, despite two centuries of tremendous growth of scientific medicine. Paradoxically, it could be that very growth which causes paranormal healing and other forms of unorthodox healing to thrive. Hunter and Roebuck³⁸ suggest that when

medical science gets too far ahead of the people for them to understand, they become confused. This might cause them to seek simpler forms of healing they can relate to more readily. Faith healing could no doubt continue its existence as an unorthodox curiosity dabbled in by the credulous and the desperate if it were not for the fact that medical science has now reached the point where it is ready to treat disease in a holistic manner. Faith healing now is being invited into the scientific arena to measure itself against the standards of scientific investigation. Should it succeed, medical science could have a valuable new therapeutic tool at its disposal; should it fail the test, there is little doubt but what it will continue to survive and even flourish among those who currently find it so appealing. Religious phenomena have clearly demonstrated the ability to survive without scientific endorsement. Hopefully, however, such a failure would cause responsible, clear-thinking churchmen and physicians to curtail the use of an activity which has such great potential to do harm.

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