

FAITH HEALING

ROGER T. MICHAEL CLASS '68

When man appeared on earth, he began to deal with pain and illness that overcame him. Man was cured of many diseases by non-physical methods directed towards their minds rather than their bodies. This began long before the Christian Era and long before anything that could be called medical science was born. The science of medicine has some of its roots in magic and superstition while religion has some of its roots in instinctive emotions and tendencies. As a result there is a crossing of these two disciplines resulting in what is known as faith healing.

Faith healing is a form of "mind cure", characterized by the doctrine that pain and illness really exist, but these may be neutralized and expelled by faith in divine power. This is a basic tenet in faith healing but there are many theories proposed as to the mechanism by which the patient was cured of his disease.

An animistic theory of disease was held by the European faith healers. The animists believed that men were inhabited by souls which exist in a separate state and that the soul is the vital organizing principle of the universe. Used in this sense, faith healing is indistinguishable from the early savage leechcraft which seeks to cure disease by expelling the rival spirit in the diseased portion of the body. This was also illustrated in the early remedies of toothaches, warts etc.

From the psychological point of view most kinds of "mind cures" depend on suggestion. In faith healing powerful, direct suggestions are usual while the religious atmosphere helps in aiding the patient for co-operation to the suggestions. This is shown clearly when cures take place during a period of religious revival where large assemblies and strong emotions are found.

As we look back in history it will be seen how these two above theories were manifested in the practices of the various times. In the fossilised remains of the Palaeolithic man, it was seen that they wore charms and amulets to ward off diseases. Their belief in magic and superstition resulted in the wearing of these articles, which together with the performance of certain rites and rituals helped in the curing of diseases.

During the Greek Era, Aesculapius, the Greek God of Medicine, is believed to be the originator of the art of healing by means of both scientific and religious methods. Temples were erected to him; and Hygeia, the daughter of Aesculapius, was worshipped in these temples which were built near healing springs or high mountains. The practice of sleeping in these sanctuaries was very common and it was supposed that the god or goddess effected cures or prescribed remedies to the sick in dreams. What actually happened was that priest-physicians prepared the minds of the patients before sleep by means of lectures and talks, and during sleep they whispered suggestions in the name of the god into the patient's ears. The effectiveness of this method is realised by the fact that the patient was asleep or awake or between these two states and the priest was acting for the god while the patient was in a highly suggestible state. The results of these healings were discovered in votive tablets which recorded the names, disease and manner in which they were healed. Although Aesculapius was exalted to a god he was in fact a historical character and a famous physician.

To the other extreme came Hippocrates about 470 B.C. He came to a world full of superstitions with the people believing that disease was due to distant planets and supernatural causes. He was the first to deny the supernatural origin of disease. He believed it had a natural cause just as other diseases had. He wrote, "Men think it is divine only because they do not understand it."

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With the beginning of the Christian Church, the tradition of faith healing dates back from the earliest days of Christianity. From the scriptures of the New Testament follow cases of healing first by Jesus Christ and the Apostles then by their successors. After the third century, faith healing was transformed into trust and belief in relics. With the reformation, faith healing proper appeared in different groups of the population who put their trust in prayer and anointing with oil. Many shrines are in use throughout the world of which the most famous is at Lourdes, France. To these shrines come many pilgrims in hope of being cured but the percentage of those cured is very small. Also many of the so-called "miracles" have taken place at the tombs of St. Louis, Francois of Assisi and Catherine of Siena. From the eighteenth century to the present day many new sects and religions were founded and many of these recommended healing by faith. A brief examination of the different religious sects will give us a clearer understanding as to the nature of faith healing in this 20th Century.

One of the best known and most strongly supported of all the modern movements of healing through religion is the movement called Christian Science. It is a religion founded in the 19th Century by Mary Baker Eddy. The religion is set forth in her book "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures". One of the main teachings of this book is its dealing with the implications for health and treatment of disease. The teachings are so closely linked to Christianity that it becomes a religious doctrine with the full force of Christian belief behind it. They believe that God is the only might or mind and this mind is the only thing that exists. All matter of the entire objective universe is denied. Evils, sin, disease and death are all classed as being unreal and that beliefs in their existence are simply errors or illusions of the mortal mind. Since sickness is simply an erroneous belief, a person ceases to be sick when the mind disavows of this belief. That is, this religion tells its adherents to overcome every form of error or evil on the basis of its unreality by demonstrating the true idea of reality. The practice of Christian Science is not merely mental but also spiritual. This philosophy is then linked to Christianity by interpreting the scriptures to appear that Christ came to redeem men not only from sin but also from sickness and death and that we may choose his methods of healing ourselves.

The practice of Christian Science as a healing method consists of these ideas transformed into religious doctrine. When a "Scientist" becomes ill, he treats himself by making himself dwell upon the thought that illness does not exist and endeavors to shake this erroneous belief from it. If the erroneous belief cannot be treated by himself he may call in a Christian Science healer. The healer must come with the right attitude in his own mind, to awake the patient of the dream of sickness. The practitioner strives to create in the patient's mind an attitude of receptivity, and to make him feel that he is under the control of the "Divine Mind". The healing process takes the form of arguing down a false belief, that is convincing the patient that the sickness is not real and conversely persuading him that he is quite well. He treats each symptom in turn, refuting the testimony of the material senses and repeatedly affirming the health of the patient. A practitioner may give absent treatment, with the assumption being that one mind is able to have an effect upon another even at a distance. These methods of healings are applicable to all types of diseases because they believe that all are erroneous to the mind.

To Christian Science, medical science and practice are in a world of make-believe. That is, whatever success a doctor may have with a patient is due to the faith the patient has in the doctor or remedy. Christian Scientists if they are true to their founder must not have any encounters with medical practitioners or their measures. As a general rule, Christian Science practitioners will not treat a case unless the patient chooses between his ministrations and those of the medical physician.

In practice, the teachings of Christian Science are not followed as rigidly as their rules are laid down. Medical aid is usually obtained during childbirth, fractures and dislocations. They also go to dentists as do other people. They allow themselves to be

vaccinated and quarantine laws are respected. Not only are illnesses treated but evils such as unemployment or domestic troubles may be treated by the practitioner. Although Christian Science is considered a religion, a sect of Christianity, it is essentially a therapeutic system which uses religion as its instrument of healing. The most disturbing element in Christian Science practice is the treatment of children. When children complain about pain and are rebuked for so doing, then it is necessary for a change in doctrine of this sect. A great deal could also be discussed as to the disadvantages of this practice but space does not permit this now.

There are many groups outside of Christian Science which denote various forms of healing. Broadly considered, they come under the term New Thought. Some of these groups are small containing a leader and a handful of followers while other groups are large, thus having a number of centers and publishings to be subscribed to by followers. The basic belief is that a Divine Mind permeates the universe. This mind is what is behind all and to them it is God. By realizing this fact and trying to achieve a oneness with Him, man is able to help himself in his many diseases and sufferings. Their system of belief is based on optimism. By thinking thoughts of health, youth, vigor and success, one is able to show these things as an outward portion of himself.

The essential ideas of Christian Science and New Thought are basically similar but differ in that New Thought teachings are toned down as compared to Christian Science. Also New Thought does not disapprove as much as Christian Science the encountering with Medical Science. Both these groups are tending toward placing a greater emphasis on the healing of spiritual ills such as attainment of happiness, self-confidence, success and prosperity rather than the healing of the body diseases. As a result this tends to commercialize these movements for the selling of their ideas and beliefs.

The practice of Yoga, which is a form of fareastern religion, has similarities to the previous religions. The followers of Yoga are called Yogis and they believe in attaining a oneness or communication with God. This form of communication is achieved by the Yogi using his will power, faith, reason and concentration. This takes the form of an auto-hypnosis in which the Yogi attains a prescribed bodily position and with tremendous power of concentration on God, one is able to achieve this communication.

The medulla oblongata in the posterior part of the brain, tapering off into the spinal cord, is the "Mouth of God". From here the Life Energy for the body is distributed. By concentrating on this area of the body, a Yogi is able to come into harmony with God and help in bringing about good health. They know that autosuggestion is very important for these changes to come about. Therefore if a mind is capable of producing ill health, it also is able to produce good health. As a result, with the use of will power and emotions, together with the repetition of affirmations as to the curing of a disease, one may evoke enough "Life Energy" into the body to eradicate the ill feeling. This type of auto suggestion is powerless on a person characterized by strong will power but is useful on a man whose temperament is chiefly emotional.

Although Yoga and many other Eastern religions are lightly regarded in the materialistic West, there is much to be learned from many of these Eastern practices. The discipline of the devotional life, the importance of the spiritual world and the power of the mind are examples of what may be learned from these religions. The elucidation of the soul-mind-body relationship by the study and practice of these religions may someday afford many people to direct their energies into psychological states. The manifestations of these states may possibly take the form of telepathy or ability to read the subconscious of a patient so that diagnosis will be easy and treatment direct.

The practice of Homeopathy was started by a German physician Samuel Hahnermann in the 18th Century. The essential tenets of homeopathy are that the cure of diseases are effected by drugs that are capable of producing in a healthy individual the symptoms similar to the disease treated. To ascertain the curative virtues of any drug, it must be

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proved on users of both sexes in a state of health in gradually increasing doses. The manifestation of this drug action so produced, is recorded and after verified by its many users. This constitutes the distinguishing feature of homeopathy

In his own treating of his patients, Hahnermann believed that the nature of disease was of the subjective nature. He refused to admit the presence of "Humors" etc., and all other hypothetical entities which traditional medicine imagined to be behind the patient's disabilities and feelings of illness. He concentrated his attention on symptoms and so the patient's own story became of paramount importance. He urged his followers to take a deep interest in the patient's past and present experience and that each case should be received as being unique as the personality himself. This is exactly what is done now in dealing with cases of neurosis and psychosis.

He recognized that emotional disturbances had an effect on body function. He advocates treating patients first and foremost as human beings in trouble and insists on the basic fact that friendly relations are necessary between doctor and patient. He deprecates the treatment of physical ailments in an entirely technical and impersonal way. His remedy is Kindness for the mentally troubled and where there is bodily disease this sympathy takes the form of patience and interest in the patient's feelings.

The original homeopathic system had other striking features which made it impressive to the public. It was linked up with "folk belief" and appealed to the mystic and neurotic. It had a practical advantage of dispensing harmful doses of prescribed medicine. But its main features of continuing on are due to its interest and kindness it showed to the patient and the development of an indirect suggestion of cure because of the great confidence of the patient in the physician. Although Homeopathy does not deal directly in faith healing it has a more practical application of some of the basic ideas used in the curing of patients besides the use of technical procedures.

The Christian churches have been interested in "healing" since early history of Christianity. Except for Catholicism, it has declined to about a vanishing point. But during the last century, there has been a resurgence in interest and activity. It is believed that this may be due to the success of Christian Science and other allied religious healing sects.

The Catholic Church has always had an interest in healing and many of its churches today contain relics which are believed to possess curative powers when supplicants touch or are touched by them. The sick may address their prayers and make sacrifices to saints who were renowned during their lives for miraculous healing powers. Various ceremonies and services are held with the sick person entering in with the idea of becoming cured. At the various Catholic shrines these cures are usually carried out, as Lourdes in France and St. Anne de Beaupre in Quebec.

The Episcopal Church has shown a great interest in religious healing. Healing missions are a part of a definite form of helping the sick. These missions have an evangelistic emphasis and they aim to heal the spirit as well as the body. The attitude of the church towards medicine is one of co-operation. It believes that prayer and religious faith are therapeutic agents which complement the therapeutic methods of medicine.

From time to time these Protestant Churches have opened their doors to evangelistic teachers and healers, but in general it can be said that any systematic fork can hardly be said to have penetrated into these churches. The Church leaders show sympathetic interest to cold hostility to this question of faith healing.

We have now examined a few of the many theories behind faith healing. Although only a few of the groups have been explained, there are a great many minor groups that have their basic religion and beliefs based on healing. A great many only vary in their rites and rituals but employ the same basic methods for the conversion and healing of their followers.

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There can be found a common basis in faith healing disregarding the superficial dissimilarities mainly due to dogma and theory. The methods and practices of the faith healers have much in common. That is, each system introduces a cure into the mind after it is prepared by one means or another to accept it. The fundamental principal being that any idea possessing the mind tends to materialize in the body. The practice of faith healing also involves hypnosis. There are many stages of the mind which can be recognized during suggestivity. Be it auto-suggestion, suggestion from the healer, or the belief in optimism throughout life, a person may become effectively controlled by an idea that takes full possession of his mind and may show an outward or material change in that person.

Religion has been seen to have a marked influence on faith healing. The possibility of whether methods of suggestion are possible without religion in healing of patients is still an open question. It is believed that a person with a religious philosophy may feel a sense of buoyancy and power from the belief or realization that he is a part of the Divine Universe. The ideas of health and cure are made more forceful with the complex ideas of religion which are so interwoven into the practice of faith healing that it is impossible to separate them to give the direct influence of religion on the practice.

It is a truism in medical science that unless the causes of disease are healed, there is no permanent healing. It is also believed that if people do not banish negative thinking and release hidden sub-conscious tensions, there will be many people who will have disorders in mind and body resulting in tensions and disease. It goes without saying that some diseases have been cured by their cause being discovered, but many diseases still flourish because their causes have not been discovered. As a result an examination of the social structure and treatments of today will give us a better understanding as to the cause of the growth of faith healing.

The practice of medicine is a product of its time and cannot maintain itself far in advance of the culture of its patients. If people do not understand the practice of "Scientific Medicine", then other forms of medical practice will flourish. The people pay for the medicine they want and as a result pressure is brought to bear upon the development of medical practice. This cultural and economic pressure is brought upon religion also and its changing views are observed at the present day. As a result we get a bearing upon the treatments of diseases and how the patient should be treated by the changing beliefs of the day.

From the physician the patient demands something over and above technical services. Although technical advances over the past century have been enormous, one would think that orthodox medicine would triumph over most faith healing groups. But this is not the case. This is due to the fact that the subjective function of the patient not only produces disease but also helps in the removal of physical and mental disease processes themselves. It is believed by certain people that the physician does not accomplish all the demands a patient makes of him, namely in the relief of the suffering. That is, the physician finally relieves the suffering but cannot produce an immediate cure. This pretense together with the fact that disease causes an incapacity for general enjoyment and its subjective aspects and developments in the patient provide a great hindering block for the physician in the total curing of the patient.

The circumstances and personality of the patient has a great deal to do with the idea of joining a healing group. Anyone who could not be helped by scientific medicine, or at least the medicine practiced by their physicians, would fling themselves to any new "cure" that came along. The healer with his simple explanation of disease, his confidence and his promise of cure makes him a greater magician than the physician. The type and character of the illness has a marked effect on the person and the number of people cured. The major diseases that were believed to be cured by faith healing were nervous disorders, rheumatic disease and respiratory diseases such as asthma. Many of the so-called incurable diseases are the ones treated by the faith healers. It is at this point that the patient turns from the practice of medicine and seeks something

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which to him is greater than the technical practice of medicine.

It is the opinion of many people that the rise of Christian Science and other religious healing groups has been due to the physician's disregard for mental, nervous and emotional factors. But this is not valid today, because treatment of mental illness is a major branch of medical practice. It is believed that Christian Science helped in focusing attention onto the mentally retarded. The sufferers from psychoneurosis were able to escape from the complaints to which their troubles were due in the first place.

The economic states of the patient is not of such influence as to the followers of the groups. One exception is the Christian Science religion which has followers which are mainly prosperous. This is due to the fact that no poor diseased individual is going to believe that the poverty and sickness which he is encountering is not real. As a result, most of its followers are prosperous and do not realize how it is to live in sickness and distressful surroundings.

The employment of psychological or religious therapy by individuals not trained in the medical sciences, and who are not able to understand the limitations of this therapy, has its dangers. Whatever harm exists can only be eradicated through education of both physician and patient. The recognition of the mental elements in physical disease and the development of psychotherapeutic methods of treatment as effective as, if not more effective than, the methods used by religious leaders today will be necessary for the complete understanding and treatment of diseases that are now supposedly cured by faith healing.

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