

Appendix III Talk on Discernment of Energy: Fr. Bob Sears, SJ

Last year, I spoke on discerning energy at this workshop. Since that time, I am more aware than ever about the need for discernment and I would like to bring these reflections to your attention.

Three cases I have been alerted to can help to raise the question.

The first has to do with Reiki. I was informed by a member of the Detroit Charismatic Renewal (Arlene) that Fr. Francis Martin at first recommended Reiki to people as helpful for healing. Later, after a deep personal experience, he took back that recommendation and spoke of it as non-Christian and as actually detrimental to one's Christian faith. Jesus should be enough for a Christian. Reiki is a form of energy healing, using Chi energy, which, when treated with certain movements and gestures, brings healing. In some cases, participants are guided by deceased Reiki masters. On the other hand, a member of one ACT region felt called after taking time to discern it, to look into Reiki, and now finds it a very powerful healing tool. Two discerning men came to two different conclusions.

The **second** case deals with a new type of therapy called **Consegrity Therapy**. It was developed by a medical doctor, Dr. Mary Lynch, who was a graduate of Georgetown Medical School. Her specialty was sports medicine, but she found after 13 years that she was only managing illness, but curing it. She could do a knee operation, but later arthritis would develop. She was determined to learn what illness was and how it might be cured. After traveling around the world and sampling some 70 different therapies, she found some worked for some people, others for others, but nothing worked for everyone. What was the common thread? Through trials, she learned that cells have a particular electrical wave pattern that is unique to each individual organism. Trauma hinders and eventually blocks energy exchange in the cell, which then leads to degeneration, a change of cell structure (like cancer) or death. She found that one could tune in to that pattern, with its distortions, by means of questions asked silently of the spirit of the person. If the facilitator kept a healthy awareness in the NOW as he/she tuned in to the person, the blocked cells in the person would begin to be restored to their original structure. In other words, they would heal themselves. She gives training groups in her method, and a friend of mine took part in one. She was healed of chronic tiredness and received fresh energy for her work, well beyond what she could do before. On the other hand, several others who were in Mary Lynch's training group were very uneasy with her method which seemed to focus on impersonal energy. They broke away and started their own Christian group, using Christian terms and texts where Mary Lynch had been eclectic from many sources – mostly non-Christian. Mary Lynch was Catholic, but she had moved away from Catholicism through her work. I initially was interested in pursuing Consegrity, but on praying about it and through the prayer friends, I decided not to get training in it. On the other hand, my friend, who is quite discerning and always prays to Jesus as she is using Lynch's method, has found it very helpful both for herself and others she has treated with it.

A **third** case had to do with the **Enneagram**, which is not directly connected to energy healing, but it did introduce me to discernment of these spiritual healing methods.

The enneagram was introduced to our Jesuit School of Theology in Chicago around 1973 by Fr. Bob Ochs. This was the beginning of what is now wide-spread theory in Catholic circles throughout the country. Bob had studied with Claudio Narango and offered a workshop on the enneagram at JSTC, as the school was called. I was intrigued by what I heard and was about to become a member of SAT (Seekers After Truth), the sponsoring organization of the enneagram. As I was about to join, I heard the Lord tell me (not audibly but clearly), “**No, I’ll do it.**” Jesus would be the healer for me. I was more than happy to believe Jesus, so I didn’t get further involved with the enneagram, beyond finding out about the nine types and their implications so I could understand those who knew it. The enneagram was a theory about the distribution of energy, based on an Eastern (Sufi) worldview. The Lord said nothing directly about it, only that He would take care of my healing. On the other hand, **Richard Rohr** has written a fine little book on the Enneagram, with good insights into traditional Christian spiritual growth.

In each of these cases, we have what could be treated as “scientific” approaches. The enneagram could be studied much as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Mary Lynch is developing research studies on the effectiveness of Consegrity Therapy, and studies have verified the existence of energy fields (not unlike Reiki) around living organisms. On the other hand, each case came to be dealt with in a “religious” way by many people who turned them into “spiritualities” rather than mere psychologies. Reiki is pursued by many through Ascended Reiki masters, the enneagram purports to be rooted in Sufi mysticism, and Consegrity seems grounded in impersonal energy fields that led Mary Lynch out of Christian faith and into New Age type affirmations. It would seem we cannot simply affirm these approaches the way they are often presented. But they also seem to promise very effective healing approaches that it is the business of a healing association to understand in light of Christian faith. Can this be done?

II. World Sacral and Grace Sacral

In approaching this challenge, I call your attention to an article I wrote in the *Journal* in vol 21, #1, Spring, 1999, pp. 15-34. about discerning spiritualities. There I distinguished between “world sacral” and “grace sacral”, following the German Catholic theologian Heribert Muehlen. I want to explain that distinction here because I see it as essential for casting light on our present issue. Traditionally, theologians distinguished between “nature” and “grace.” Nature is what we are on a purely human level, grace is our participation in divine life mediated by Jesus and the Holy Spirit – our “new birth” in Christ. **Nature** and grace, however, are static terms. Muehlen wanted to understand dynamically how we can differentiate the operation of nature and grace in our living experience. Nature is not just a given, but a **process of unfolding** to ever greater experience, understanding and expanded choice. It beckons through “**fascination.**” What motivates us to grow in knowledge? To seek love? To expand our experience of the world and space? Is it not nature – what Muehlen calls “world sacral,” the kind of fascination the world holds on us. Is this “world fascination” not what led Mary Lynch to discover her way of healing, or the discoverer of Reiki to find his way, or the developers of the Enneagram? World sacral is what motivates most of our actions – our desire for home, for security, for a greater responsibility for others, etc. This is what it is to grow up to be fully human.

On the other hand, **grace** also is **not a static “sanctifying grace”** but operates in our living experience. However, its movement is usually more subtle, and initially not as forceful. It comes from God through Christ and returns to God. It is like the “still small voice” that Elijah heard after God was not in the wind or fire or thunder. It doesn’t force but invites our free response. Looked at dynamically, grace-sacral presents subtle differences from world sacral. Muhlen calls attention to *one major difference: world sacral is always reaching to what is “not yet given.”* We fall naturally in love only to find ourselves falling out of love. We are drawn to the moon, only to find it a barren wasteland in comparison to our earth. We can never learn enough, never get enough money or power or security. On the other hand, **grace sacral** rests in the presence of the future, the “*already*” is predominant even though open to the “*not yet*.” If we experience graced love, we rest in the future even as we open to receive it as gift. We are already loved in an absolute way. If we are drawn to the moon, it is to experience more deeply the mystery of God’s creation which we already possess. Learning is a response to God’s gift, not a power we gain more and more of. Money is a trust for helping God’s people, not a source of personal security.

There are **many other differences**, 1) grace touches our person and elicits a free interpersonal response, nature draws us to develop our freedom and gifts, but it is left open how we will decide to use them. 2) Nature is drawn by the fascination of human potential, grace by the touch of God’s love in Jesus and the invitation to grow in that love.

What comes out clearly as we consider these differences is that **both nature and grace deal with the same realities!** It is not as though “love” is only nature, nor is it only grace. Both dynamics can be at work at the same time. In fact, *all natural fascination is ultimately grounded in grace*, for it is God who creates us as free human beings in order that we might surrender ourselves to God’s grace. *Nature by itself is ultimately grounded in emptiness*, it is to die to its independent existence in order to be surrendered and raised with humanity to union with God. **Rom 8: 20** says, “Creation was made subject to futility...that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.” You might say that grace itself drives our nature to grow to its full potential so that it can die and be transformed by God. We cannot love God “with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our body” unless we develop all our heart, soul and body. We develop our heart through releasing our affectivity, etc. which is the work of psychotherapy and relationships with family and friends. We develop our soul (mind and human spirit), through schooling and learning, and through the arts, etc.. We develop our body through exercise but also through healing, through freeing our cells to be restored to their healing ways. But this development is not its own end. It is to be surrendered to God in Christ.

We know what can happen *when we only focus on God and spirituality*. We can become *narrowly fundamentalistic*, unaware that we are distorting God’s call to love through projecting our own lack of openness onto God. It is precisely this narrow judgmental God-image that *Jesus broke open by eating with publicans and sinners*. On the other hand, we can become so fascinated with human growth that we miss the call of grace to surrender all to God. *Then we end up as enlightened humanists but not saints*. God has subjected all creation to futility (emptiness) for the sake of the freedom of the

children of God. *Christian faith frees us from worshiping world powers, but by that very fact it frees us to investigate all the potentials of creation.*

Paradoxically, **history shows** that Christianity has “demythologized” the fascinations of the world. In the Roman Empire Christians were known as atheists because they did not worship the Roman gods. In our day, faith in Jesus will demythologize energy healing of whatever sort. Energy is a creature, not God, and all energy healing methods are ways of cooperating with nature for its full development and healing. *But that very freedom from divinizing creation should free us to fully investigate all aspects of creation, for it is God who works both in our creation and in our transformation by grace.*

We understand God ever more deeply and widely as we open to the mystery of creation. We know the *grandeur* of God when we realize the extent of space – the billions of galaxies (some 200 billion) each with billions of stars, and each star light years away from each other. We experience the *patience* of God who waits on the smallest particle and respects the limited existence of creatures till it unfolds in 15 billion years to be ready for humans. We experience the *love* of God who reveals such beauty in creation and who humbled himself to become human in Christ and bring creation back to living unity with God.

We learn many things about God from energy healing:

- 1) It is focus in the **NOW** that releases energy to its natural course, and God is I AM. There is a book, *The Power of Now*, by Eckhart Tolle that illustrates the dynamism released by getting beyond every day attitudes.
- 2) The other universal healing attitude is **LOVE**. Love is what heals, whether we know the source of it or not. This is the insight of Louise Hay, *You Can Heal Your Life*, and of Karol Truman, *Feelings Buried Alive Never Die*, and of many other healers. See *Healers on Healing*, ed. Richard Carlson and Benjamin Shield (Los Angeles, Jeremy Tarcher, 1989).
- 3) In **Consegrity Therapy**, it is **compassionate tuning in** to the disturbed energy patterns of the other that restores cells to their natural functioning. God is such an interpersonal loving Trinitarian community revealed analogously in the community of cells with one another. Further, the facilitator’s “bowing” to the distorted energy pattern in the other is precisely what Jesus did (and reveals God to do) when he let himself experience our sin in himself. God made him to “be sin” so that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21).
- 4) There is a similar pattern in **homeopathic** medicine, where the remedy “mimics” the symptoms and energy patterns of the disease and thus brings healing.
- 5) In each case, it is the energy field’s correction that is prior to the healing. One sees the fault in the energy field before it becomes visible in one’s body. So also, it is the “**field**” of **resurrection energy**, the new phylum begun in the risen Lord, that transforms us and ultimately empowers all healing. Practitioners will certainly have other ways their work opens them more to the mystery of creation and so to God the creator. Creation is not just an object outside God, but an analogous revelation of God’s own way of being.

Yet revelation is also a step beyond creation, and it is this step that needs to be our foundation. We do not seek human growth for its own sake, but for the glory of God. Ultimately, it is God who glorifies God. Each of us individually has to discern

what God wants for of us. I was pointed away from studying the Enneagram and later from studying Consegrity therapy, whereas Richard Rohr was led to write about the Enneagram in a Christian way, and my friend was blessed by God through Consegrity therapy. In both cases, it was important that God be seen as the ultimate healer, but God wants us to cooperate to the best of our ability, whether that means going to school to get degrees, as St. Ignatius decided to do, or find a method that meets one's healing needs, as my friend did. "Whoever is not against you is for you," Jesus said in Mk 9:40.

Some principles and criteria that can help one discern are given in the *article by Doug Schoeninger and Sheila Fabricant "Evaluating Methods and Theories of Healing."*

Based on what I have said about nature and grace and the relevance of our individual development I would like to highlight several of their points.

1) ***Discernment is individual and relates to one's stage of development.*** Paul commented about eating meat sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8:1-11), the enlightened know that "there is no God but one," so there would be no opposition to eating such meat. But not all have this knowledge, he goes on, and my eating may scandalize a weaker brother or sister. So for their sake he will not eat such meat. We notice two things: 1st people in different developmental stages discern differently, for the enlightened it may be all right, 2nd For any who are scandalized or who would scandalize others, it is not to be done. Can we not apply the same principle for energy healing? Some may be comfortable and even feel called to investigate energy healing, others may find it opposed to their faith. Both need to be respected and loved.

2) ***Discernment presupposes a kind of co-natural knowledge – that is, the more one is in tune with God in oneself, the better one will be able to tell whether some practice is in tune with God.*** The authors say how important it is to have a positive God-image (vs. a fearful, judgmental image) when discerning. According to my presentation, nature is good and its attractions are good, even though in need of a higher ordering. Nature is to be used and developed in so far as it helps us to "seek and find God" and "to glorify God." A hidden fear of an accusing God or a rejection of the goodness of creation is not a reliable guide to discernment. Judgmental people find a judging God, even though Jesus said, "God sent the Son not to judge the world but to save it" (Jn 3:17).

3) ***The central criteria: "Is Jesus present in the beginning, middle and end of our involvement with any method, theory or philosophy?"*** The authors put it well: Did we ask Jesus whether we should start? Do we discern the ongoing effects on ourselves and others of our involvement? Is involvement leading me more deeply into faith in Jesus and harmony with the Scripture? It is not just unfamiliar methods like energy healing that must be evaluated by this criterion, but ordinary medical methods. Do they increase my faith in Jesus or lessen it?

4) Related to 3, ***"Is there a quality of warm personal presence of Christ rather than an exclusive emphasis or abstract truth of "energy" in this method?"*** The God of Jesus is personal (Father/Mother not just "ground of being"). God saves us in a freely chosen covenant relationship. If our method is ultimately grounded in Christ, it will strengthen that relationship, not just be a repairing of our body. Again, this criterion, as all the others, applies both to unfamiliar energy and familiar medical methods of healing. They also can treat one as an object, not a partner in healing.

5) A further criterion is how open the method is to all: ***Is everyone welcome to come and learn?*** And further, ***"Is my use of a particular method open to dialogue with person of questioning or dissenting perspectives?"*** Jesus' healing was for all, and all were invited

to take part. It was also quite open to any who would wish to critique it. “I have spoken quite openly,” Jesus said, “ask those who heard me” (Jn 18:20-21).

6) *Are we open to understanding the universe in new ways, or are we rejecting the unfamiliar out of fear of the unknown and legalism?* All creation is being subjected to Christ, (1 Cor 15:27). The Holy Spirit leads us into “all truth” (Jn 16:13), so we need not shy away from any aspect of reality. However, it may be that the individual may not be called to investigate a certain area. There may even be danger for a person there, of getting fascinated by an unknown truth or of losing one’s faith because of it. It is not the truth that is at fault, but the seeker who was not yet ready.