

Psycho-Energetic Psychotherapy*

Charles L. Zeiders, Psy.D.

Growing interest in psycho-energetic therapies makes it important for the Christian therapist to understand that Christian psychotherapy has psycho-energetic dimensions, that is, components of therapy that concern energy and recognize it as part of the healing enterprise. This article traces Christian psycho-energetic healing from its origins in the first century, to the development of a healing tradition, and eventually to some of the documented and unmistakably psycho-energetic healing experiences of the twentieth century. Care has been taken to frame this look at Christian healing through the eyes of credible, practical theologians, among them Agnes Sanford and Francis MacNutt.

Christian counselors and therapists have become aware of a rise in interest in psycho-energetic therapy. Psycho-energetic therapy consciously deals with a subtle healing force or energy in the pursuit of healing for the client. Bio-energetics, Core energetics, Therapeutic Touch, Acupuncture, and Yoga are all examples of such therapies.¹ In light of this, it is important for Christian therapists to realize that a tremendous legacy of psycho-energetic healing inheres in the Christian tradition. As the following article makes clear, God has vast resources that can enter into the healing enterprise, sometimes as a palpable, perceptible flowing force, as therapists imitate Jesus Christ by participating in His healing ministry.

Oskar Estebany, who “felt that he was a channel for Jesus the Christ” (Krieger, 1979, p.6), had a reputation as a healer of people, and has participated in several well documented, tightly controlled studies with mice. Experimental mice suffering from wounds and malnutrition responded to Estebany’s healing technique in such a way that experimental results were statistically significant and in the direction of health (Murphy, 1992). The Roman Catholic Estebany believed that an *energy* passed from him to his patients (Rorvik, 1974).

Like Estebany, a number of Christian therapists believe that certain spiritual interventions can decisively impact the mental and physical health of their clients. These interventions are prayer and the laying on of hands. Inherited from the Christian religious tradition, these healing practices are utilized by theologically minded psychologists and counselors to move some force, usually configured as the grace or power of God, into the client’s psychological wound. Once a Christian healer introduces God’s grace to the wounded psychological area, it begins to re-order in such a way that it conforms to God’s image of mental health for that person. In this article, I will trace the development of Christian healing and discuss its theory and practice with an emphasis on its energetic component. Naturally, any such discussion begins with Jesus.

Jesus of Nazareth: Healer

Holy Writ guides Christian thinking about psycho-energetic healing. From scriptural records, Christians learn that part of imitating Jesus Christ is to heal people. This is because so much of the New Testament involves Jesus intervening to restore dysfunctional minds and bodies. For instance, in Mark’s Gospel, which most scholars believe was the primary source for Matthew and Luke, 209 verses out of 666 are about the healing miracles of Jesus. That is just over 31 percent (Grazier, 1989, p. 82).

Similarly, assuming that the ancient writings are correct, one sees in Jesus a man with a very definite healing mission. According to the four Gospels Jesus healed:

- Four cases of blindness: Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46; Matthew 20:29-34; Luke 18:35-43); the blind man of Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26); two blind men (Matthew 9:27-31); and the man blind from birth (John 9:1-34).
- Two cases of fever: Peter’s mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:30-31; Luke 4:38-39); and the official’s son (John 4:46-54).
- Eleven lepers: a single leper (Matthew 8:1-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16) and ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19).
- A deaf mute (Mark 7:31-37).
- A woman with a hemorrhage (Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48).
- A man with a withered hand (Matthew 12:9-13; Mark 3:1-5; Luke 6:6-10).
- A man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6).
- A centurion’s servant with paralysis (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10).
- A wounded slave of the high priest (Luke 22:50-51).

- The sick of Capernaum (Matthew 8:16-17; Mark 1:32-34, Luke 4:40-41).
- Many people from Tyre, Sidon, and Galilee (Matthew 12:15-21; Mark 3:7-12; Luke 6:17-19).
- Those by the shore at Gennesaret (Matthew 14:34-36; Mark 6:53-54).
- The sick at Bethsaida (Matthew 14:14; Luke 9:1-11) and at Tiberius (John 6:2).
- Crowds at entering Judea (Matthew 19:2), (Murphy, 1992, pp. 260-261)

For the Christian therapist, to be like Jesus is to be a healer, and imitating the healing ministry of the Nazarene has psycho-energetic implications. Christ's healings imply that he had the power to conduct some kind of positive energy into his subject's wounds. This idea is illustrated in the story of the healing of the woman with a hemorrhage.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who was subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that *power* had gone out from him. (*The New International Version Study Bible*, 1985, Mark: 5:24-31; p. 1503; italics mine).

Some scholars propose that in the above event Jesus felt an energetic force move as a healing vitality from his body to the body of the hemorrhaging woman. In the original Greek, the word translated as "power" is *dynamis* "which has to be understood as the power of the Lord to heal" (Fitzmyer, 1981, p 744). The Anglican priest Harpur (1994), however, suggests a different translation of *dynamis*; instead of translating the word as *power*, Harpur would have the word translated as *energy*. Harpur's discussion of Jesus' healing ministry portrays Jesus as a conduit for a healing energy that proceeds from the mind of the God whose concern is for the wellness of His children.

... in healing the sick [Jesus was] an agent or channel for the Divine Energy flowing from the heart of the universe, the very breath or presence of the dynamic Spirit of God. (p.60-61)
Jesus healed, at least in part, via a divine energy, and his followers began to do the same.

The Development of Healing After Jesus

James, the brother of Jesus and head of the Jerusalem church, also believed that God made healing power available to believers through the avenues of touch and prayer. Harpur's interpretation of James' instructions regarding healing techniques is especially enlightening, because it lays bare the interaction of mind, body, energy, and health.

In the fifth chapter [of his epistle] James writes, "Is any among you ill? Let him call for the church elders and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins they will be forgiven him. Admit your faults to one another and pray for each other that you may be healed. The active prayer of a just person has an enormous effect" (James 5:13-16).

In addition to underlining the fact that healing, through prayer and anointing with oil, was considered normal in the primitive Christian Church, this passage gives further witness to the near universal religious conviction that there can be times when an illness may be the result ... of unresolved sins or faults. An obvious example would be problems created by deliberate abuse of one's body through neglect ... But James is not implying that sickness and disease are always somehow a sign of wrong-doing ... What James is stressing is that confession of known sins—a frank facing up to the specific times and places when one has fallen short of what one knows one should have done or been—and the assurance of forgiveness remove the spiritual blockages that prevent healing energy from flowing in (pp. 70-71).

What Harpur clarifies here is the apostle's contention that psychological conditions influence an individual's ability to receive energy and heal.

The *Acts of the Apostles*, written by the physician Luke who had a keen interest in healing, records healings accomplished through St. Peter and St. Paul. These healing events appear to have implicit psycho-energetic components. In these stories, touch, prayerful intention, and the unleashing of healing power converge. Writing to the fledgling church at Corinth, St. Paul emphasized that the Holy Spirit gives healing

power to believers and the ability to perform “deeds of power.” According to biblical accounts, there were times when articles of clothing which the apostles touched conveyed healing power to sick people. From a scientific point of view, these stories are not unlikely.

Evidence from studies of healing with plants and animals indicates that healing may be conveyed by such vehicles as water and cotton wool. This is consonant with ... reports dating back to the Bible, when Christ and the Apostles gave healing through handkerchiefs. Modern day healers confirm ... that this works well (Benor, 1992, P. 74).

The apostles may have been able to endow articles of clothing with healing energy, which in turn could be conveyed to the sick through the application of the energized garment to the person to be healed. Regardless of the mechanisms involved, however, healing became a vital part of the early Church and became a permanent part of the Christian tradition.

The Development of the Tradition

In the centuries following the Ascension, church fathers and many saints solidified the position that the healing *dynamis* flows through healers and cures physical and psychological pathologies. They viewed a person’s ability to heal others as a present from God, often bestowed to the believer at the time of baptism (McDonnell and Montague, 1991). The great spiritual geniuses of the early Church wrote enthusiastically about such power,

Justin Martyr wrote in AD 165, “In our city, many Christian friends have been healed and have healed other sick persons in Jesus’ name.”

Bishop Ireneus wrote in AD 180, “...those who truly are His disciples receive grace from Him to perform miracles in His name and they really cast out evil spirits. Others pray for the sick by laying hands on them and see them healed.”

Origin wrote in AD 250, “Some prove through healings that they perform what tremendous power they have through faith, in that they do not call on any other name over those who need help than the name of Jesus and God. In this manner we have seen many persons delivered from terrible misfortunes and mental disorders and innumerable other sicknesses....”

In AD 275, Clement gave the following advice to young preachers, “Let them, therefore, with prayer and fasting pray for people in faith and trust in God ... as men who have received gifts to heal for God’s glory” (Grazier, 1989, P. 77).

In the third century Hippolytus of Rome wrote that healers have a special status because they derive their gift from the Holy Spirit (Powers, 1985). Following Augustine’s death in AD 430, the saint’s friend and biographer Possidius wrote that Augustine recanted an earlier writing that healing had ceased, when he laid hands on a sick man whom God healed immediately following Augustine’s touch (Gardner, 1986, P. 137).

Healers in History ²

Healing became part of the Church’s tradition and healers emerged from Church history. St. Patrick healed the blind. St. Bernard made the lame walk, the dumb speak, and the deaf hear. Edward the Confessor, King of England from 1042-66, healed scrofula by touching his afflicted subjects. In the mid 1600’s Valentine Greatrakes gained notoriety in England for his ability to cure the sick. “[He] found to his amazement that he could cure epilepsy, pains ... and fevers, so that the people went home rejoicing and praising God” (Major, 1940, p. 169). Explaining his power Greatrakes remarked, “God gave my hand this gift” (p. 169). In historical records of Christian healings the experience of energy is often implied but frequently under-reported.

Christian Healing and the Experience of Energy in the Twentieth Century

In this century the church (Christian therapists included among its members) continues to experience healings, but those exposed to gifts of healing tend to address the issue of energetic experience more directly than in the past. It should be noted, however, that even today very little literature directly addresses the experience of energy in the context of Christian psychotherapy. Reports of energy remain anecdotal, and when energy is addressed, it is rarely the main focus of articles or books.

The renowned healer Kathryn Kuhlman clearly had a gift. Medical case studies compiled by Casdorph (1976), show that some of those medically verified as healed by Kuhlman experienced energetic sensations described as “electrical” during her services. For example, a bank executive diagnosed with kidney and bone cancer experienced “a sensation like electricity running throughout his body during the service” (p.99). Examining him, befuddled physicians noted “healing” of his cancer. Similarly, a seventy-eight year-old Ph.D. speech therapist with a well documented history of rheumatoid and osteoarthritis attended a Kuhlman service. She “had the feeling of an electric current going down the outside and the inside of my leg to the knee ... I was virtually in a trance. It was the most peaceful, joyful experience” (p, 109). Feeling healed, she discarded her leg braces and soon received a clean bill of health from her doctor.

Gardner (1986), like Casdorph, a physician, also compiled case studies of healings that he felt were medically reliable and miraculous. In some of these cases, there are reports of extraordinary healings characterized by an interrelationship of faith, healing touch, and the sensation of energy. One dramatic healing is that of a school teacher who lost his eyesight as the result of injurious exposure to intense photographic lights. Eye doctors despaired that the man would regain his sight, so, in desperation, he made an appointment with a Christian healer. He writes

When I went into the house I was filled with peace. I became relaxed in the presence of this total stranger and felt that I was no longer in despair, the situation was no longer hopeless. We spoke together, I told him of the accident, he told me of the healings that our Lord had channeled through him and we prayed together. There was no doubt in my mind that Jesus was in control of the situation. He laid hands on my head and over my eyes, but nothing dramatic happened, so I arranged to [meet with him again] (p. 33).

The teacher waited for five days, feeling confident that God would heal him. When he and the healer met again, something dramatic happened as soon as they prayed.

... as soon as his hands were placed on my head I experienced a sensation of power in the form of a greatly flowing electric current which flowed through his hands and through my skull. I also became aware of the most vivid and beautiful color blue ... even though my eyes were closed—and the color and the electric sensation persisted until his hands were removed ... I also experienced the most amazing feeling of strength and warmth passing, in a tingling sensation, through my fingers and into my wrists and arms ... I felt that I had been reborn into God’s service and able to administer His healing power too (p. 33-34).

Healing, faith, and the sensation of energy converge in this unusual report. Given the dramatic fact that the flow of the *dynamis*, the power, the energy of healing was so strong in this report and in the reports regarding Kuhlman’s healings, one cannot help wondering from a scientific perspective what measurable phenomena may have accompanied these theological experiences. Gerber (1988) notes that the hands of some healers, measured by SQUID technology, show electromagnetic field strength measured at one hundred times higher than normal body activity during healer associated conditions. A currently unanswered question is: Is increased electromagnetic activity a common component of the Christian healing experience? A review of the literature leaves one empty-handed.

The Two Seminal Influences on Christian Psycho-Energetic Psychotherapy

Agnes Sanford and Francis MacNutt have had the most influence on Christian psychotherapists who pray for their clients’ mental health and experience energy. Their books are widely read among such professionals, and MacNutt, still living, lectures on healing to ministers and therapists throughout the world.

Agnes Sanford (1972a), whose understanding of Christian healing became famous among Christian therapists, thought of divine healing as having a definite energetic component. She referred to the power that proceeds from the Holy Spirit as a “healing vibration” and a “divine current” (p.90). When laying hands on people and praying for them she experienced heat, electrical sensations, and vibrations (Riffel, personal communication, 1994). Addressing the relationship between divine energy and the importance of exercising healing gifts, Sanford wrote:

God's life is a flow—it is living water—it is active electricity—it is love vibrating at a definite wave length and intensity. In order to keep the current flowing we must give it as an outlet so that it can complete its circuit. If we do not do so, the channel of its flow becomes clogged and it runs more and more thinly and finally ceases altogether. (p.91)

To be a healer one must constantly be open to allowing the healing energy, a manifestation of God's love, flowing through one's being and into the world. Additionally, Sanford advanced an energetic viewpoint regarding the interactions of body, mind, and God.

The very chemicals contained in the body—"the dust of the earth"—live by the breath of God, by the primal energy, the original force that we call God. This being so, it is strange that we do not establish a closer connection with God in prayer, we would receive a more abundant flow of energy. The creative force that sustains us is increased within our bodies. (p. 18)

To Sanford healing others of physical infirmities and of mental problems was a natural outgrowth of prayerful communion with God.

Especially important about Sanford's contribution to psycho-energetic healing is the fact that she herself once suffered from debilitating depression. According to her autobiography (Sanford, 1972b), she struggled vainly against her dysphoria until an Episcopal priest placed his hands upon her head and prayed that she would psychologically heal. She did heal, and this inaugurated a ministry during which she had a special sensitivity to bringing holy, healing energy to the wounded mind in the name of Jesus Christ. She writes that when praying for others psychological problems, the healer should not tell the subject that faith is requisite to bringing God's healing energy into the afflicted portion of his mind.

If you will search the scriptures you will see that Jesus did not demand faith of one whose mind was darkened or disturbed. He did not require faith of Jairus' daughter or of the centurion's son or the maniac of Gadara. He took the power of God in His own hands and spoke for them the word of faith (Sanford, 1966, p. 41).

She also provided specific instructions for conducting healing energy into the disturbed mind. She insisted that the Christian healer of mental illness can pour into the disturbed person's mind

... the light and life of God through our own minds and bodies. For this purpose the laying on of hands in the sacramental way, upon the head, is most valuable ... I do not try to explain the actual radiation of life and light that comes through the human being, as light shines through the light bulb, for their minds [the minds of disturbed people] are too confused to understand. I do not explain that as my words reach their conscious minds, so God's words flow through my body and my hands into their bodies and reach the unconscious mind that is the storehouse of the emotions (pp. 43-44).

In Sanford's conception of psycho-energetic healing, neither faith nor insight based on verbal understanding is necessary for healing. The healer merely lays hands on the subject and allows the restorative *dynamis* to flow into the mind of the sufferer and to restore it.

MacNutt (1974), one of Sanford's disciples and Christendom's acknowledged living expert on psychological and physical healing, originally advised healers to expect occasional energetic sensations, including heat, trembling, and "something like an electric current" passing through them (p 304). In the years following that statement, MacNutt (1977) developed a more elaborate understanding of the nature of the energy.

As Christians we know that we share the very life of God himself (in Catholic terminology: grace) and it makes sense that something of that life giving power in the physical order can be shared and communicated when we touch a sick person. It seems to me that this current of energy is what so many people feel when we pray for them ... The way I understand it ... is like this: the Christian shares the life of God himself ... The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit live within us. Somehow (and here is my conjecture) the energy generated by this life can overflow, can be communicated and flow from one person to another through touching that other person. In all of us there are areas where sickness, sluggishness and death are at work spiritually, emotionally, and physically. But when another

Christian ... gathers around to pray, the life, the love and the healing power of Jesus can be transmitted to the sick person ... It's like God's radiation treatment. (pp. 3 7-3 9)

In MacNutt's view, God lives in the Christian. When a Christian prayerfully lays on hands, the love of the God who lives in him flows out in the form of healing energy.

Since developing these ideas and gaining confidence as a Christian healer, MacNutt has set up an institute for healing in Florida, staffed primarily by psychotherapists. The work of this institute is to encourage therapists and other helping professionals to develop a spiritual life that enables them to conduct the radiating power of Jesus into their clients and patients. MacNutt has cautioned that the experience of energy is not necessary for healing to occur, although it frequently accompanies the laying on of hands. MacNutt (1977) has also remarked that people in need of healing often require more than one session of prayer. They may need a course of treatment, just as cancer patients need a course of radiation treatment. This type of ongoing prayer he calls "soaking prayer" (p.39).

Who Practices Christian Psycho-Energetic Healing Today?

Christian psycho-energetic healing is practiced by pastoral counselors and by Christian psychotherapists. Interventions such as the laying on of hands continue. Pastoral counselors like the charismatic Father DiOrio (1984) of New York, recommend applying psychological principles to the problems of sick parishioners and, after establishing an empathic understanding of the client, praying for their psychological distress, usually laying on hands. DiOrio's experience is that an energy sensation can accompany the intervention.

Francis Schoeninger (1992) of the Institute for Christian Counseling and Therapy holds the position that energy, in her terminology *life energy*, moves from the Holy Trinity, through the therapist to the client. She asserts that a disruption of a person's internal, ordering energy can cause mental, physical, or spiritual distress.

In the dominion that God has given us and in the ordering of the line of authority, a way in which to begin to take authority over what is out of order [in the client] emerges. The line of authority through which *life energy* communicates our proper "being" is Godhead (Trinity), Holy Spirit (within the Trinity), to human spirit, then throughout our being (spirit, mind/emotion and physical body). Within each [aspect of human being] ... *life energy* flows connecting all to all, instructing and ordering. In an area that is restricted for any reason, and the message [of the *life energy*] is not received correctly ... function ... and order can be disrupted (italics hers) (p. 15).

Schoeninger believes that God provides "blueprints" for a person's healthy mental, physical, and spiritual functioning. These blueprints are encoded in an energy that emanates from God and endows the human being. When, due to trauma, sin, disease, etc., the ordering life energy is subverted, it needs to be reinvigorated by more divine energy. This divine energy comes from the Holy Spirit, through an intermediary like a therapist, and flows into the afflicted area wherein the original energetic blueprint has been degraded. Once re-energized, the client's mind or body begins to heal according to the divine plan encoded in the life energy. This may sound complicated but the intervention is simple. The therapist listens, understands the problem, then prays for the client (Schoeninger, personal communication, 1994).

Conclusion

Christian psycho-energetic healing began early in the Christian tradition. Healing prayers, at times accompanied by energy experiences, are recorded in the New Testament. Jesus Christ felt power or energy flow from him in the course of healing the hemorrhaging woman. The apostle James recommended a healing touch, combined with prayer to remove disease. St. Peter and St. Paul appeared to be capable of energizing garments with healing energy, a feat consistent with modern research findings. The church fathers believed that touch and prayer were honored by God in such a way that the healing energy was communicated to the sick. In modern times, energy experiences have accompanied medical miracles accomplished through healers like Katherine Kuhlman and others. Christian thinkers who have had the most impact on Christian therapists are Agnes Sanford and Francis MacNutt. Both were major influences on pastoral counseling. Both addressed, if briefly, the fact that energy appears to flow from God, through healers, into the sick, out of love, in the name of Jesus Christ. Today practitioners like Father DiOrio and

Francis Schoeninger practice psycho-energetic healing from a Christian perspective and continue to advance its understanding.

Reference Notes

1. See Oschman (2000) for an excellent treatment of the scientific basis for such therapies. See p. [need to add page number] of this book for *Christian Holism's* theologically orthodox, spiritually progressive approach to energy medicine.
2. Recent Scholarship (Palmer, 2001) shows that, beginning in 640 A.D., Nestorian Christian monks dialogued with the Buddhist and Taoist communities that flourished during the Tang Dynasty. Attempting to make their version of Christ's teachings intelligible to the Chinese mind, the Nestorians wrote the Jesus Sutras, wherein the Nestorians depict a Jesus who strengthens his disciples by providing them with "qi" or invigorating life energy.

References

- Barker, K. (Ed.). (1985). *The NIV study bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Bible Publishers.
- Benor, D. (1992). Lessons from spiritual healing research and practice. *Subtle Energies*, 3, 1, 73-78.
- Casdorff, H. (1976). *The miracles*. Plainfield, NJ: Logos International.
- DiOrio, R. (1984). *Called to heal*. New York: Doubleday.
- Fitzmyer, J. (1981). *The gospel according to Luke I-IV* (Vol. 28). New York: Doubleday.
- Gardner, R. (1986). *Healing miracles: A doctor investigates*. London: Darton, Longman, and Todd.
- Gerber, R. (1988). *Vibrational medicine*. Santa Fe: Bear & Company.
- Grazier, J. (1989). *The power beyond*. New York: Macmillan.
- Harpur, T. (1994). *The uncommon touch*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart
- Krieger, D. (1979). *The therapeutic touch: How to use your hands to help or heal*. Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Co.
- Major, R. (1940). *Faiths that healed*. New York: Appleton-Century Company.
- MacNutt, F. (1974). *Healing*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press.
- MacNutt, F. (1977). *Power to heal*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press.
- McDonnell, K. and Montague, G. (1991). *Christian initiation and baptism in the holy spirit*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press.
- Murphy, M. (1992). *The future of the body*. New York: Putnam Publishing Group.
- Oschman, J. (2000). *Energy medicine: The scientific basis*. Philadelphia, PA: Churchill Livingstone.
- Palmer, M. (2001). *The Jesus sutras: Rediscovering the lost scrolls of Taoist Christianity*. New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group.
- Powers, D. (1985). *Gifts that differ: Lay ministries established and unestablished*. New York: Pueblo Publishing Company.
- Rorvik, D. (1974). The healing hand of Mr. E. *Esquire*, February, 70, 154-60.
- Sanford, A. (1972a). *The healing light*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Sanford, A. (1972b). *Sealed orders*. South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing.
- Sanford, A. (1966). *The healing gifts of the spirit*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Schoeninger, F. (1992). A Vision of Life Energy. *Journal of Christian Healing*, 14, 4, 12-16.

* This article was first published in *The Journal of Christian Healing*, Volume 18, #3, Fall, 1996, pp. 3-15.