

The Future of Christian Healing

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Several years ago St. Luke's Hospital in Kansas City, MO released the findings of a study that was a duplicate of one performed some years prior at San Francisco General here in the Bay Area. The research was a double-blind study of 990 heart patients admitted to the hospital's coronary care unit, all of whom had "serious life-threatening cardiac conditions." Unbeknownst to either the patients or physicians attending them, psychiatric researcher Dr. Wm. Harris and his team divided the patients randomly into two groups, one of which was prayed for daily by five separate individuals in the Kansas City area who volunteered to help out. None of the individuals was told anything about the patient he or she prayed for other than the first name. Each patient was made the subject of prayer for 28 days, starting one day after admittance. The conclusion: "The patients who were prayed for" said Harris, "just did better." By better, he said, "I mean everything that word implies."

This study is significant in that it duplicated the previously mentioned effort at SF General which came to the same conclusion. As you can imagine these studies are highly controversial with many physicians wondering just what this proves. There have been many clinical studies (well over a thousand) that have substantiated the beneficial role of religious faith and spirituality in the health care of individuals. However, to many, these studies could be explained either by the relatively healthy living habits of the religious or the beneficial effects in the human body of the relaxation response brought on by prayer and meditation. For those with a more psychiatric bent, many studies emphasize the role of an individual's thought and belief on his ability to recuperate. However, these two studies introduce a decidedly different element.

Being a double blind study, in that neither the patient nor the physician knew about the prayers being given, the research isolates more effectively the role of prayer in an individual's experience and to a very large part eliminates the mind over matter syndrome. The study is controversial because it calls into question "logical" rationales for improvement and launches one into the unknowns of religious theory. What the studies should do is lay open the hitherto closeted questions of "what is the power behind prayer," "what is the role of the individual who prays relative to this power," "what place does medical practice hold in the domain of prayer," and "what is it that is actually being prayed for?" The future of Christian healing largely depends on the understanding and agreement to the answers of these questions.

Who will answer these questions? I would submit to you that while we can all pray that the divine intelligence reigns and is in everyone, these questions must be answered persuasively by those who have first hand experience in them and are willing to hone their answers in ways that others can understand and grasp. While heartened to see the willingness of many physicians to grapple with the role and power of prayer in the healing of the sick, it became obvious to me in observing conferences called to do just that that there is a very crucial role to be played by the thought of those not bogged down in material and medical theory. Those of us who have experienced healing in our lives through prayer alone carry the responsibility for the future of this healing method, the responsibility to answer the questions that are raised from its practice.

A century and a half ago Mary Baker Glover was embarking on a study of just these questions. The mid nineteenth century was still a pretty ill-defined place medically speaking. Much of medical practice was at best guess work and the forms of exploration, homeopathic and allopathic remedies, were often times quite harsh, so much so that many felt the newly minted fragile mystique of womanhood precluded women from undertaking them. Mary Glover, eventually to be known as Mary Baker Eddy, had a deep seeded conviction that healing had to be more divinely natural. Practicing healing by prayer from a young age, in her late twenties she agreed to take a patient who had been given up by her physician. The woman had a severe case of dropsy (edema). (She details this case in **Science and Health** pg. 156.) At first she prescribed homeopathic remedies which she later found out the physician had prescribed, and the patient improved. Fearing over attenuation, she dispensed with the pills substituting unmedicated ones without telling the patient. The woman continued to improve. Eventually the patient was cured. This case to Mrs. Glover proved to be "a falling apple" in her exploration of a more divinely natural healing process. It proved to her two things: the same remedy that proved impotent when the physician administered it became effective when she prescribed and administered it, and the unmedicated pills were just as effective as the medicated ones. She realized that the thought of the patient and the physician were the determining factors in the case, independent of matter.

Finally there is more research being done today on just this conclusion. Many physicians are realizing the need to consider seriously the belief structure or mental terrain of the patient in their efforts to affect a cure. Some are even realizing the beneficial or deleterious effects their own prognoses are having on their patients. There is growing recognition of the dire effects some prognoses may have when patients are informed of what they can expect in terms of symptoms or length of recovery or life. This understanding will eventually prove to be no sidebar to the healing process. The role of the quality of thought in each case will eventually be accepted a crucial determining factor. Mrs. Eddy was no stranger to these conclusions and encouraged physicians to consider this impact; she wrote in her seminal work, **Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures**:

The doctor's mind reaches that of his patient. The doctor should suppress his fear of disease, else his belief in its reality and fatality will harm his patients even more

than his calomel and morphine, for the higher stratum of mortal mind has in belief more power to harm man than the substratum, matter....The materialistic doctor, though humane, is an artist who outlines his thought relative to disease, and then fills in his delineations with sketches from textbooks.... A patient's belief is more or less moulded and formed by his doctor's belief in the case, even though the doctor says nothing to support his theory. His thoughts and his patient's commingle, and the stronger thoughts rule the weaker. Hence the importance that doctors be Christian Scientists. (pp. 197,198)

These words become all the more significant when we realize the degree to which self-diagnoses has become common place today through the education of self-help medical encyclopedias and internet research. Such education has bolstered the common beliefs pertaining to many maladies and thus constitutes a more determined resistance to its cure. Mrs. Eddy recognized the place the majority of opinions or common consent of belief held in many cases:

If a dose of poison is swallowed through mistake, and the patient dies even though physician and patient are expecting favorable results, does human belief, you ask, cause this death? Even so, and as directly as if the poison had been intentionally taken.

In such cases a few persons believe the potion swallowed by the patient to be harmless, but the vast majority of mankind, though they know nothing of this particular case and this special person, believe the arsenic, the strychnine, or whatever the drug used, to be poisonous, for it is set down as a poison by mortal mind. Consequently, the result is controlled by the majority of opinions, not by the infinitesimal minority of opinions in the sick-chamber. (pp 177, 178)

Mrs. Eddy also recognized, however, that the "stronger thought" is not always that of physicians or the majority of human opinion – that the thought instructed with what she calls divine Science, or the laws of God, can supercede them. Consider this case: a woman called a practitioner to help her husband; he had come home from work not feeling well and quickly his conditioned worsened to the point that he could not stand. She encouraged him to seek some remedy either through Christian Science treatment or medical treatment. He declined to do either. At that point she called his parents who came to their house and took their son to the emergency room. The doctor told the family that he had an untreatable virus and sent him home to wait it out. At this point the wife called a Christian Science practitioner. The practitioner, recognizing not only the fear in the family but the implications of the doctor's prognosis, set to work to reverse mentally the imposed mental

conviction that the patient was suffering from an incurable disease. The practitioner replaced that morbid belief with the assurance that came from the laws of divine health and harmony, notably that disease was unknown to God, divine Mind, and for that reason it had to be unknown to the patient, who spiritually was the expression or manifestation of that Mind. The practitioner knew enough to undue the majority opinion with the thought that came from divine intelligence. The practitioner worked with this passage from **Science and Health**:

The universal belief in physics weighs against the high and mighty truths of Christian metaphysics. This erroneous general belief, which sustains medicine and produces all medical results, works against Christian Science; and the percentage of power on the side of this Science, must mightily outweigh the power of popular belief in order to heal a single case of disease. The human mind acts more powerfully to offset the discords of matter and the ills of flesh, in proportion as it puts less weight into the material or fleshly scale and more weight into the spiritual scale. (pg. 155)

Shortly the patient retired for what was left of the evening and slept through the night, awakening free of the difficulty and going back to work. Some months passed and the family moved to a new locale. One day the wife was called by the administrator of the health clinic to which the case had been referred by the doctor. The administrator carefully inquired whether her husband was "still with us?" When assured that indeed he was, the administrator said that they had been repainting the clinic some time ago and found the referral which had slipped behind a file cabinet. She told this man's wife that her husband had been diagnosed with meningitis which was in its final stages and that he was not expected to recover. The clinic had been given the job of placing the family in quarantine and inoculating anyone with whom the patient had come into contact. Since he worked in a restaurant, this was considered to be a daunting task. The administrator apologized for the lack of follow through and was certainly relieved when the wife assured her that they had no intention of seeking regress.

Let's revisit a phrase I quoted just a minute ago: "*and the percentage of power on the side of this Science must mightily outweigh the power of popular belief in order to heal a single case of disease.*" That phrase will need to be understood and practiced more than ever before in the coming decades by the alert Christian healer; one cannot expect to ignore the mental climate in which one heals and find success. Already those skilled in this practice know that stubborn claims of disease often evidence unhandled mental malpractice or the intrusion of thought that argues injuriously regarding the welfare of the patient. The "who" of mental malpractice is not nearly as significant as the "what" – what argument of thought is providing credibility for the perpetuation of this discord? Is it medical diagnoses, professionally or self-induced? Is it "consentaneous human belief" or the majority human opinion regarding some situation? Is it a sense of heredity that assumes one is predisposed

to conditions? One's sophistication in this detection is an important skill in healing and is gained through spiritual maturity.

One may ask, "But isn't healing really a matter of relying on God to be the healer and the great revealer of all factors necessary for consideration?" Yes, certainly the power of divine intelligence, Love, is the healer, but if this is all the explanation there is to healing, why the discovery of divine Science. Does not the concept of science mean that there are laws to be understood and practiced? If all there is to healing is having great faith that God will take care of us, why did not Mrs. Eddy call this discovery Christian Faith rather than Christian Science? It is easier for the human mind to take the route of mere faith because it requires less work. Who would not like to believe that all one has to do to heal is just implore the name of Deity and await the result? That's comforting and simplistic but it does not tell the whole story. The fact of the matter is that this kind of healing is claimed to be a science for a reason and the future of its practice relies on our willingness to accept the implications of dealing with it as a science.

Many may know that Mary Baker Eddy was a prolific healer throughout her life. While most of her more notable healing works came after her discovery of Christian Science, she did, nonetheless, heal before that discovery. Those healings were, by her own admission, accomplished by an abiding faith and conviction that God is the healer. Certainly that point did not change with her discovery of Christian Science but evidently that point alone was not the demand of God in addressing this human need for healing. The discovery of this healing method was not simply to reiterate that God is a healing power,. That was, after all, the explanation of how Christian healing had taken place for centuries. The discovery of this healing method was based on recognition that there are divine laws that govern creation and that as we come into accord with those laws harmony in our everyday experience ensues.

Now at the risk of being considered "politically incorrect" and well mindful of the need to present this healing method in terms that all humanity can accept, I am going to suggest that this healing method is more accurately stated as "Christian" than "spiritual" and that its future lies in the understanding and acceptance of its Christian roots. Certainly in a universal sense Christianity is more than sectarian and is rarely found in the denominational arguments that abound about it. But at the root of Christianity is the teaching and the practice of the Christ – the concept that there is a coincidence or agreement of the divine with the human. This coincidence that was so apparent in the life of Jesus is the divine power behind effective Christian healing. To leave out or downplay the presence of the Christ in healing is eventually to risk losing one's healing effectiveness. All religions add to the advancement of humanity in some fashion, but not all religions approximate the understanding of the Christ to promote scientific spiritual healing. In her sermon Christian Healing Mrs. Eddy makes this observation:

The difference between religions is that one religion has a more spiritual basis and tendency than the other; and the religion nearest right is that one. The genius of Christianity is works more than words; a calm and steadfast communion with God; a tumult on earth, – religious factions and prejudices arrayed against it, the synagogues as of old closed upon it, while it reasons with the storm, hurls the thunderbolt of truth, and stills the tempest of error; scourged and condemned at every advancing footstep, afterwards pardoned and adopted, but never seen amid the smoke of battle. (pp 1,2)

Several concepts ring out from this statement for the healer. First is that healing is a calm and steadfast communion with God. I'm sure that you realize that being steadfast means "being fixed, firm, immovable"; it also means "loyal." In the coming decades of Christian healing, we are going to have to be loyal to the fact that this healing power comes from our communion with God, our wholehearted reliance on God. Reliance on God has a particular connotation – turning to God means willingness to yield to the divine character – redemption, regeneration. Are those terms too religious for a growing secular society? They don't have to be if we know that they appeal to the very spirit of humanity to be better. This kind of healing has to do with change of thought, heart, character. We need to see that only the power of God can bring that desired result. If healing were merely a matter of changing physical appearance or symptoms, then perhaps we could see why interjecting physical means and approaches would be a help. But if we understand that healing is something more, and I would submit different, than physical change, then we should not corrupt the process. I can remember once when cooking Thanksgiving dinner I was stirring cranberry sauce as directed, allowing it to thicken with the ingredients included. It didn't thicken to my liking as quickly as I thought it should. So I decided to speed up the process and add some clear gelatin. That didn't work to my liking either. So I added tapioca. Well, it certainly did thicken after a while but ended up not looking much like the desired cranberry relish. I didn't stay loyal to the ingredients or the process, and what I got was a mess. Analogies have their shortcomings, and I certainly wouldn't want to try to hang my argument on the need for steadfastness to God in healing on cranberry sauce. But this I can tell you after a third of a century in the healing ministry: I have certainly seen more messes than successes that have come from trying to alter the recipe for prayer-based healing.

I remember one case where a man suffered cardiac arrest; both his family and he decided that they could not let this go much longer and they went off to the hospital. The physicians confirmed that he was having a heart attack and after a while administered an anti-coagulant to prevent clotting but instead of having the desired result it actually induced a stroke. He lost control of his speech, as well as arm and leg on one side. At that point concerned with what course to take, the physicians simply decided to wait it out. At this juncture a Christian Science practitioner was called in. Since the man was under no medication at that time, the practitioner began treating the man, applying a healthy dose of

acknowledgment that divine Mind alone regulates every function of the real man. Now in that knowing is the recognition that divine Mind knows its own sense of functioning, that functioning being spiritually mental. The treatment did not assume that divine Mind was governing material functioning because matter is unknown to the divine Mind. But Mind does express itself as mental activity or function, so the treatment replaced the belief that this individual was the victim of the whims of matter, alias mortal belief or thought, with the recognition that man, this individual, was the expression of Mind's functioning and activity and that this process was never compromised, either at the point of attack or at the effort of cure. While the man remained in the hospital for several more weeks for observation, no medical treatment was given, and the man returned home completely free and functioning normally. The recovery process by virtue of the prognosis could have taken months; it may not have even occurred. It did occur but through the might of Mind not through the allowance of the majority of human opinion regarding stroke recovery.

The second point in that passage (it's been a while back, I realize) is that the genius of Christianity is a "tumult on earth." You know, my friends, there is no way of getting around that concept. The application of the concepts of Christianity is meant to shake things up. That can be fun or not solely dependent on how we choose to engage the process. Making the human yield to the divine is what prayer is about; it is what the Christ mission is about. Assuming that one is going to slip these revolutionary concepts by the sentinels of material existence is just plain naive. But this process of "tumult" does not have to be dreaded, escaped, or painful. One could look at it as a wonderful moment in history where a totally new concept takes hold. Some historians like Thomas Cahill make the argument with some justification that not much has really changed in human experience beyond primitive man's original tendencies. As Henri-Charles Puech say in his work *Man and Time*: "No event is unique, nothing is enacted but once...; every event has been enacted, is enacted, and will be enacted perpetually; the same individuals have appeared, appear, and will appear at every turn of the circle." Cahill suggests in his book *The Gift of the Jews* that the Jews were the first people to break out of this circle, to find a new way of thinking. They were, after all, the first people to break out of the belief that God was to be encountered by impersonal manipulation by means of ritual prescriptions – they developed a face-to-face friendship with God. We are ready to break out of the circle once again by seeing reality not through the glass darkly but through the lens of Spirit.

The future of Christian healing will thrive in the understanding that ours is the task to move human consciousness from its reliance on the dark glasses, alias matter or mortal thought, to the acceptance of seeing face-to-face the nature of God as Spirit and its spiritual creation. Every healing holds at its roots this wonderful tumult of rousing human thought "from material belief to the apprehension of spiritual ideas." Every healing promises to leave the world, as well as the patient, different from where it found it. No longer is the goal of healing to restore the material mechanism to normalcy but in fact to discard the material mechanism all together for the reality of spiritual fact. We must be willing to fulfill

our role to break out of the circle no matter how much tumult it involves, never even surmising that this process will go gently into the night. But eagerly and persuasively we must present the task of breaking "earth's stupid rest."

Over the years I have seen the regrowth of limbs where it was deemed impossible, the restoration of vision where the material organism had been destroyed, the natural development and growth of a child with no gland to promote growth, the restoration of carious bones over twenty years decayed, all through the acceptance that it was not matter but spiritual idea that constituted substance and activity. The goal in these healings was to establish what true substance is not to restore an old sense of substance, matter, to its original form. Are we finding some kinds of healing resistant to our best efforts? Maybe we are not striking high enough for a better result. Maybe we need to take the charge to break out of the circle and fulfill the destiny of this process of Christian healing. We need to strike for the greater purpose; in this I believe God is pleased. God's chosen have never been those who are fundamentally different from anyone else just those who are more obedient. Mrs. Eddy's words are just as challenging to us today as they were in earlier times:

We are in the midst of a revolution; physics are yielding slowly to metaphysics; mortal mind rebels at its own boundaries; weary of matter, it would catch the meaning of Spirit. (Christian Healing, pg. 11)

See to it, O Christian Scientists, ye who have named the name of Christ with a higher meaning, that you abide by your statements, and abound in Love and Truth, for unless you do this you are not demonstrating the Science of metaphysical healing. The immeasurable Life and Love will occupy your affections, come nearer your hearts and into your homes when you touch but the hem of Truth's garment. (pg. 16)

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