

**A Biblical Evaluation of Theophostic Ministry
by the Staff of Community Evangelical Free Church
Elverson, Pennsylvania
September 28, 2001**

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Theophostic's Pragmatic Approach to Defending its Validity	2
Theophostic's Doctrine	
- Theophostic presents an unscriptural view of effort in the Christian life	3
- Theophostic does ill justice to the sufficiency claimed by Scripture	4
- Theophostic displays a superficial view of sin	6
- Theophostic presents a distorted understanding of the doctrine of man	8
- Theophostic's focus on past traumatic events is absent in Scripture	11
- Theophostic materials pervasively misuse Scripture by violating fundamental principles of exegesis	12
- Theophostic does not fit Scripture's model for Christian ministry as distilled in 2 Cor. 10:4-5	14
Several other objections to Theophostic	17
Then why does it work?	18
Endnotes	20

Introduction

"Theophostic Ministry" — from *theos* (God) and *phos* (light) — is the term coined by Dr. Ed Smith for a ministry approach that, he believes, God revealed to him following years of less-than-successful counseling of people traumatized by past events. Theophostic operates under the premise that "all of us are emotionally wounded and need our hearts and minds healed by Jesus" (*Genuine Recovery*, p. 1).¹ Our woundedness comes from painful past experiences — not from the experiences themselves, but from lies associated with those experiences that our memories persist in believing. Much of the sin we commit stems from such lies as well.

Theophostic is a prayer ministry, "a process of divinely accomplished miracles" (p. 5). During the process, Jesus Christ speaks directly to the hearts and minds of wounded people, exposing the specific lies that bind them. When this occurs, recovery is immediate, not gradual, and permanent — that is, recovery is "genuine" as opposed to progressive. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). This does not mean that the person is suddenly free from all of life's issues, problems and concerns, but from the lies that bind them in that specific memory.

Theophostic Ministry has been the subject of much study, discussion and prayer by the CEFC Elder Board for nearly a year. As a result, we have concluded that we can neither actively nor passively endorse this approach to Christian ministry. Our reasoning is presented as follows. We encourage readers to carefully and prayerfully study the issues themselves.

Theophostic's Pragmatic Approach to Defending its Validity

The primary apologetic for Theophostic Ministry is experiential. Although Dr. Smith quotes the Bible, the core argument for the ministry's validity is that Theophostic "works." Dr. Smith writes, "All I know is that the people who have experienced this healing were blind (depressed, hopeless, shamed) and now they can see!" Several further quotes:

* "I have witnessed the Spirit of God use Theophostic Ministry to accomplish this [freedom from lies and pain] hundreds of times" (*Genuine Recovery*, p.10).

* Regarding skeptics of Theophostic: "These people have not looked very deeply into what the Lord Jesus is doing with hurting lives throughout the world" (*Genuine Recovery*, p.3).

Our major concern under this point is that Scripture gives a dual criteria for testing a ministry's legitimacy. The two criteria are "results" and "truth." Clearly it is not unbiblical to consider the results of a ministry. Jesus says, "By their fruit you will recognize them" (Matt 7:16, 20). He also says, "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves" (John 14:11).

But the Bible warns against evaluating someone's ministry on the basis of results alone:

"If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, {2} and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' {3} you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul." (Deu 13:1-3)

Moses' signs before Pharaoh were matched by the magicians Jannes and Jambres (2 Tim 3:8; Exo 7, 8). False prophets "will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect — if that were possible" (Matt 24:24). The works of the Antichrist will be "displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (2 Thess 2:9). Even Paul's ministry seemed bested by men whom he dubbed, literally, "super apostles," while his own ministry appeared "unimpressive" (2 Cor 10:10; 11:5 and elsewhere). In other words, the "super-apostles" could boast of better "results."

In the eighteenth century, Jonathan Edwards described in detail the Great-Awakening phenomenon of parishioners having intense spiritual experience, some of which later proved spurious. William James, in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, collected stories from around the world of people who have been changed, sometimes drastically and for the good, by spiritual experiences that were anything but Christian. Cult meetings often include testimonies of changed lives. Regarding the Church of Scientology, David Barrett writes,

"Members say that whatever attacks are made on the movement, they believe in Dianetics and Scientology because they work" (*The New Believers: Sects, 'Cults', and Alternative Religions*, p. 447).

We are not saying that Christians who use Theophostic are in a cult. We are saying that "results" are an insufficient apologetic for any ministry practice. The results of Theophostic must be tested by the doctrine of Theophostic. As we continue, we hope to show that Theophostic doctrine is in substantial error.

* * * *

Theophostic's Doctrine

Theophostic presents an unscriptural view of effort in the Christian life

Dr. Smith criticizes approaches to ministry that urge struggling people to "go out and try again" (*Genuine Recovery*, p.8). Here he addresses a real weakness in much Christian care of the soul — legalistic, reductionistic methods that lack any of Christ's supernatural life and power. Dr. Smith rightly observes that such just-try-harder approaches simply discourage people.

But Dr. Smith expands his criticisms to include all spiritual exertion — both exertion on the counselor's part to diagnose a struggler's problem, and exertion on the struggler's part to overcome his problem. He likens such spiritual exertion to the works-righteousness attacked by Paul in Galatians. Dr. Smith repeatedly takes biblical passages that denounce man's attempt to by-pass the cross and earn salvation through self-righteousness, and applies them to spiritual exertion of all kinds.

* "Our best effort is like filthy rags."

* [Dr. Smith calls his former counseling "humanistic" because it was] "based on Ed Smith's knowledge and their willingness and determination to apply it. That's nothing more than self-effort. That's a works salvation."

* "I prided myself in my ability to diagnose a person's trouble and come up with biblical steps of action. The problem with this approach is it requires the person to do something they are not able to do. This really is not any different than the Old Testament approach to keeping the law" (*Genuine Recovery*, p.9).

He virtually mocks the notion of self-effort in the Christian life. Genuine recovery — where all pain, fear, shame, and panic are dealt with — "is permanent and maintenance-free." During a Theophostic session, Dr. Smith doesn't "leave the memory" until the struggler reports 100% peace and calm. This healing is instantaneous the moment the person receives peace from Jesus.

* "If I have to expend energy in maintaining my pain control *or behavior*, then I have not truly received healing" (*Genuine Recovery*, p.16, emphasis ours).

* "Recovery is not building strong defenses against the lies or controlling undesirable behavior. Genuine recovery is freedom from the lies that control and dictate such behavior" (*Genuine Recovery*, p.10).

* "If a person is truly recovered, then relapse should not be a concern..." (*Genuine Recovery*, p.12).

But contrary to this perspective, Scripture continually prompts us toward Spirit-energized striving and self-control:

"Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control" (Prov. 25:28).

"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Prov. 4:23).

"A wise man keeps himself under control" (Prov. 29:11).

"Each of you should learn to control his body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen" (1 Thess. 4:4).

"Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Pet. 1:13).

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

"Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge and to knowledge, self-control..." (2 Pet. 1:5-6).

Consider also the multiple New Testament phrases about "effort" in the Christian life. They portray the Christian life as a boxing match (1 Cor 9:26), a long-distance race (Heb 12:1), a farming of crops (2 Tim 2:6), and an infantry battle (Eph 6:11-12). They command us to "struggle" (Eph 6:12), "stand firm" (Eph 6:14), "do not let" (Rom 6:12), "do not offer" (Rom 6:13), "be careful" (1 Cor 10:12), "hold firmly" (1 Cor 15:2), "stop sinning" (1 Cor 15:34), "be on your guard" (2 Pet 3:17), "be strong" (2 Tim 2:1), "resist" (Jam 4:7), "flee" (1 Tim 6:11), "avoid" (2 Tim 2:16), "purify" (2 Cor 7:1), "watch" (1 Tim 4:16), "be diligent" (1 Tim 4:15), "be strong" (Eph 6:10), "do good" (Gal 6:9), "consider" (Rom 6:11), "persevere" (Heb 10:36), and a host of other things. This is an astounding refutation of the effortless overcoming that Dr. Smith speaks of.

In fairness, we should say that Theophostic teaching does not claim to replace the need for discipleship and spiritual growth. Hence, presumably it does not denounce the need for Spirit-empowered effort in the Christian life. No doubt Dr. Smith would not wish to quarrel with the scriptural exhortations in the above paragraph. But Theophostic teaching inadvertently drains such passages of their effect. It does so by taking an array of problems traditionally seen among Christians as "discipleship" or "growth" issues (issues that Scripture addresses and that require the effort of meditation, obedience, and so forth) and re-categorizing them as "woundedness" issues — and thus as issues that only Theophostic Ministry can address.

According to Scripture, sanctification takes work — Spirit-empowered work, we hasten to add — but work nonetheless. Theophostic Ministry, perhaps unintentionally, offers an end run around such work.

Theophostic does ill justice to the sufficiency claimed by Scripture

Theophostic literature and video lectures speak highly of Scripture and include biblical quotations. But while Scripture is professed as valued, its sufficiency is minimized. In practice, Theophostic does not view the Bible as making the man of God "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). The Bible is valuable. It is true. It is often quoted in Theophostic material. But, in practice, Theophostic cannot say that the Bible is adequate for Christian ministry.

This is seen first from the way in which Theophostic Ministry began. It was not derived from a study of the Bible. Rather, during a particularly frustrating counseling session, Dr. Smith believes God led him into using, for the first time, the principles that later came to be called Theophostic Ministry. Dr. Smith denies that he claims to be the recipient of special revelation:

"Some have suggested that I am advocating . . . new revelation. Nothing could be further from the truth. . . . There are some who are saying that I believe that I have been given a new revelation from God. I am very sorry to disappoint them, but I cannot claim such notoriety."

Rather, he says:

"I do believe that God provides His Church with new insight in new methods and applications of leading people to Jesus and into healing" (*Genuine Recovery*, p. 6).

That Theophostic offers new "methods" is indisputable. But that it offers new "applications" (presumably of Scripture) would be hard to establish. The proposal that Jesus Christ must directly reveal to a struggler the specific lie he is believing (not through Scripture or through bringing Scripture to mind, but *directly*) — that He does this only as painful memories are re-visited — and that Jesus himself must then personally refute that lie in that person's heart, not merely in general but *while the person is recalling the life context in which he began embracing that lie* — these are not notions derived from a study of Scripture. They are new revelation.

That Theophostic in practice (though not in theory) sees the Bible as inadequate for ministry is seen not only in how Theophostic began, but also in the ministry principles it promotes. The quotes in the section below are from the "Beyond Tolerable Recovery" basic training videos unless noted otherwise:

* "No one, including myself, can talk me out of the lie — only Jesus can. Not even memorizing Scripture can."

* [In cautioning people to be discerning about those from whom they receive alleged Theophostic ministry, Dr. Smith says:] "They should not be giving you truth..." [He adds:] "If they are telling you what they think God wants you to know, then they are not doing Theophostic Ministry" (*Genuine Recovery*, p. 2).

To use Scripture with wounded people who are believing lies — and in Theophostic training materials, this means most everyone — is inadequate and thus a mistake. Dr. Smith now realizes that he "was doing Jesus' job" by trying to help people identify the lies they believe. So what do people need? "They need an experience." People need Jesus Christ to talk directly to their souls. This is not the secret work of the Holy Spirit, blowing like the wind, regenerating a person or strengthening him with power in his inner being (Ephesians 3:16). This is the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, directly speaking extra-biblical (although not anti-biblical) content into the person's heart.

* "Most truth is given cognitively through a teacher or preacher passing it from their mind to the recipient's mind. Theophostic Ministry is the process of God speaking directly to the hearts and minds of His wounded little lambs. True sheep still hear His voice" (*Genuine Recovery*, p.6).

* "Somewhere along the way the Church exchanged experiencing Jesus (faith) with learning about Jesus (cognitive)."

* "I won't do well until Jesus brings truth to my experiential side."

This difference between experiential knowledge and logical truth is "one of the most important principles of the Theophostic process" (*Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, p. 203). Because of this, Dr.

Smith says he "no longer gives advice," which means even advice from Scripture. When we are enmeshed in a lie, the discipline of forcing our minds to meditate on "logical truth" — even that of Scripture — "doesn't do a whole lot of good."

As we have noted, Dr. Smith insists that Theophostic does not replace the need for discipleship and Christian growth. But his references to discipleship and "normal" methods of growth are sparse and lack the same enthusiasm shown for Theophostic procedures. It is clear that the real key to progress in the Christian life is to be set free from lies by a direct word from Jesus Christ — and this by way of a process that, as of this writing, was revealed to the Christian church only about three years ago, via Dr. Smith.

Theophostic displays a superficial view of sin

Dr. Smith asks the question, "What keeps us from soaring?" By this he means something like, "What keeps us from living productive, contented Christian lives?" Theophostic replies that the problem is not "a lack of truth" — for most Christians already have all the truth they can absorb. Nor is the problem a "lack of desire for more" — for "most people are spiritually hungry."

(Pausing for a moment, can we truly accept that most western Christians know the Bible's truths well? Do they study it? Are their thought patterns permeated by it? And are "most people" — presumably, both Christians and non-Christians — truly hungry and thirsty for God, rather than for his benefits? Does not Romans 3:11 say that "there is no one . . . who seeks God"?)

Dr. Smith goes on to say where the true problem lies — it is that Christian churches and ministries "haven't given them the goods." The "goods" are the tools and perspective of Theophostic. In contrast to the "sin-based theology" of traditional Christianity, Theophostic promotes a "lie-based theology" that finds the root problem of many people, apparently most people, not in their sinfulness but in their belief of lies. Sin is real, but a belief in lies is the even deeper reality. These lies grow in the soil of pain and woundedness that we experienced in past difficult situations. Sin is not focused on in Theophostic literature. Neither is ignorance of the Bible, or a failure to hide its truths in our hearts. But the human experience of pain, and the lies bred by pain, are spotlighted and scrutinized. When sin is discussed, it is acknowledged as real and as requiring a prayer of confession during which God's grace and pardon is claimed. But a mention of sin in Theophostic literature leads quickly into qualifiers such as, "It is important to note that not all guilt or shame is genuine. Most of the time the guilt and shame coming from childhood is false. . ." (*Genuine Recovery*, p. 42).

Consider this quote concerning people embroiled in perpetual arguments, marital or otherwise:

* "I find people are not really in conflict; they are just wounded, 'bumping' into each other's wounds or lie-infested painful memories" (*Genuine Recovery*, p.9).

Yet how does Scripture diagnose conflict?

"What causes fights and quarrels among you? *Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?* You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. . . ." (James 4:1-2).

Consider these quotes from Dr. Smith:

* "If we have lies stored in our experiential knowledge *we will have little choice* but [to] act out accordingly or else live a life of constant struggle and self-effort."
(emphasis added)

* [Regarding our "primary choices" which are made from "experiential knowledge" and not "logical truth"]: – "[People] *don't have much option.*"
(emphasis added)

Here, people entangled by spiritual lies are presented far more as victims than as sinners. But Scripture presents the belief in such lies as less than innocent. For example, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 discusses those who will be deceived by the counterfeit miracles of the Antichrist. Satan's work through him "deceives" them. What are we to make of such deceit? The passages use these phrases in parallel:

"they refused to love the truth" (verse 10)

"they will believe the lie" (verse 11)

"[they] have not believed in the truth" (verse 12)

"but have delighted in wickedness" (verse 12)

Here, believing spiritual lies is called "refusing to love the truth" and "delighting in wickedness." That is, this passage views unbelief *itself* as sin. Why? Because we have a vested interest in not believing certain, unpleasant truths. Non-Christians don't want to believe that they are as sinful as Scripture depicts, or that God will hold them accountable. Even Christians have an interest in disbelieving Scriptural truths.

Let us imagine a fire-fighter who tried desperately but failed to rescue his comrade from a burning building. Understandably, he is shaken. He cannot forgive himself. Let us say that years later he still cannot lose this feeling of being responsible. His feelings persist. He is "unable to believe" God's words in the Bible that he is loved by God, that God alone controls the day of people's birth and death, and so forth. Yet other fire-fighters have been able to recover from the same trauma. Why not this man? As with all of us, this man has heart-motives he is unaware of. "All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the LORD" (Prov 16:2). Perhaps for this fireman to embrace the fact that he wasn't responsible for his friend's death would mean facing the fact that he himself cannot control the world as he imagines — and perhaps control is highly important to him. Or perhaps another motive drives him. But his inability to believe God does not grow out of a vacuum. He is driven by values that are precious to him — values that are not strictly innocent. His unbelief, therefore, though understandable, is not innocent.

Consider a non-Christian's disbelief in the Gospel. Perhaps professed Christians have mistreated and cheated him. Perhaps a minister ran off with his mother and split his family, or a drunken deacon ran over his son with a car. His pain leads him to believe that "all Christians are hypocrites" and that religion is a hoax. His unbelief is to some extent understandable. We sympathize with how these experiences make faith more difficult. But God still calls upon him to repent and believe the Gospel. His unbelief is a guilty unbelief — so guilty that if he does not turn from it, he will perish eternally. Most Christians would agree with this paragraph.

Now imagine that this unbeliever becomes converted. Imagine too that, as a Christian, he undergoes a painful experience that tempts him to believe lies — lies whispering that God does not love him, or that these trials happened simply because he is dirty. As a Christian, his unbelief is made of the "same stuff" as before his conversion. Perhaps his unbelief is quantitatively less, but qualitatively it is identical. It may be understandable, but still it is sinful.

Theophostic Ministry seems to make no account for this fact. It speaks of unbelief as if it were neutral, or as simply the natural response of a victimized person. Theophostic does grant that sin may keep a person from experiencing deliverance. It acknowledges the existence of "appropriate shame and guilt" that must be confessed and that can be forgiven by Christ's blood. But belief in lies is not itself focused on as a sin problem. The focus is upon the suffering person's pain and status as a victim needing the reassuring words of Christ.

This view of sin grows out of Theophostic's view of man.

Theophostic presents a distorted understanding of the doctrine of man

Key to Dr. Smith's approach is a strong differentiation between the human soul (which is only partially redeemed in this life) and the human spirit (which, in a Christian, is totally redeemed and righteous in this life). This leads to a trichotomistic (threefold) view of man as Body, Soul/Mind, and Spirit — a threefold view far more extreme than the more modest trichotomistic view held by many mainstream evangelicals. This is not a mere academic issue, for the unspoken but inescapable inference is this: Scripture speaks to the spirit, but the deeper human problem is in the soul, and the soul is not the Scripture's specialty. Lies nestled in the soul "cannot be dealt with logically" (translate "cannot be dealt with by biblical truth") — they must be dealt with directly by God.

THE SPIRIT

According to Theophostic teaching St. Paul was speaking of human spirit, not the human soul, when he penned 2 Corinthians 5:17. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (KJV). When someone becomes a Christian, his spirit alone is made new — but this newness is absolute and complete. There is nothing "old" still about the spirit. It is totally righteous, Theophostic teaches. Even if a Christian acts unrighteously, this does not affect his soul's righteousness. The spirit, not the soul, is the "new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph 4:24, KJV). The following quotes about the spirit are from the "Beyond Tolerable Recovery" basic video training series unless marked:

* "We are not in the process of becoming like Jesus but rather are on a journey of discovering who we are in Him."

* "We already are like Jesus; we just don't know it."

* "I am in Christ and what I was before (lost, depraved, sinful) has all passed away (in my spirit man) and all things have become new whether or not I believe it, feel it, or know it. My lies tell me I am shameful, guilty, imperfect, less than others or unacceptable. God's Word says I am redeemed, perfect, righteous and holy. Who are we going to believe?" (*Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, p. 204).

THE SOUL/MIND

In contrast, the soul is still in need of attention. It is the the part of a person that interacts with the outside world. It stores and processes information. It tries to make sense out of a person's life experiences. It develops the person's values by how it *interprets* those events. The soul is thus the seat of the conscience. It "rewards" or "punishes" the person according to its values, making

him feel guilty or innocent. These values are "based on the mind's current thinking," which may or may not be correct.

HOW THE SPIRIT AND SOUL INTERACT

The spirit, being totally righteous, always wants to choose the good. But when the spirit chooses to act, its options are limited by the condition of the soul (or mind) — that is, by what the mind or soul is thinking or believing. Any darkness in the mind or soul "cripples the spirit."

* "The righteous spirit desires to act righteously but is limited to the information of the soul's experiential knowledge."

* "The righteous spirit of man . . . is limited to the thinking of the soul. I can only act as far as I can think" (*Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, p. 205).

The problem is that the soul/mind, not being fully regenerated by Christ, may be believing lies. These lies stem from its false interpretations of past traumatic events.

* "My righteous spirit 'bumps into a lie' and is crippled. This is what Romans 7 is talking about when it says, 'It is no longer I that am doing it but rather the members of my flesh.'"

What is the answer to this dilemma? The mind (not the spirit) must be renewed. Theophostic teaching reminds us that Scripture speaks of this renewal, for Romans 12:2 commands: "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." Other passages urge the same thing:

* "Receive the implanted word which is able to save (rebuild, restore, renew) your soul" (James 1:21) (from *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*).

* "Be made new in the attitude of your minds" (Ephesians 4:23).

* "I am completely regenerated spiritually the moment I come to Christ in repentance and faith. . . . Yet my soul/mind stays the same unless I choose to renew it" (*Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, p. 204).

How is the mind renewed? Through the Theophostic process. The above passages are not used to urge Christians toward study the Bible and meditation on its precepts. Rather, they are used to propel us to seek a "memory picture" of past traumatic events, re-access the emotional pain, discover the original lie, and have Jesus come and directly contradict that lie in our minds.

EVALUATION OF DR. SMITH'S VIEW OF MAN

At least two problems stand out concerning Dr. Smith's understanding of the nature of man. First, the whole Theophostic system leans on a trichotomistic view of Scripture that is difficult to sustain exegetically. True, Hebrews 4:12 appears to differentiate between soul and spirit:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 also seems to point to a trichotomy:

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But how do we then interpret Mark 12:30? "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." If we woodenly take each element of the person listed here as separate from the others, we must conclude that the mind and soul are *separate* entities — and both are separate from "the heart." Is this what Scripture really intends? In an excellent article on this subject, counselor Winston Smith comments: "Jesus is not proposing a four-fold view of people as heart, mind, soul, and strength, but commanding us to love God *with our entire being*."²

Many other biblical passages point in the same direction, interchanging these various terms, now using one, now using another. Death is described both as "giving up the soul" (Gen. 35:18; I Kings 17:21; Acts 15:26), and as "giving up the spirit" (Ps. 31:5; Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59). The dead are described as "the spirits in prison" (I Pet 3:19) and as "the souls of those who had been slain" (Rev. 6:9). The Bible sometimes designates man as "body and soul" (Matt. 6:25; 10:28) — at other times as "body and spirit" (Ecc. 12:7; I Cor. 5:3, 5).³ Many similar verses could be mentioned which are problematic to a strict threefold view of man. Yet, Theophostic Ministry places enormous weight on the absolute distinction between soul and spirit.

A second problem with Dr. Smith's view of man is his teaching that our spirits become perfectly holy at conversion. He writes, "God's Word says I am redeemed, perfect, righteous, and holy" (*Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, p. 204). But in what way does Scripture call us "perfect, righteous, and holy?" Paul answers this in Romans 4:5.

"However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is *credited* as righteousness" (Rom 4:5). That is, Christ's righteousness is imputed to our account. This is a righteousness "on the books," a legal declaration of "Not Guilty" — what theologians call a forensic righteousness. Our ledgers are put in the black, our debt is forgiven, even if we could righteously be put into debtors' prison. Romans is describing our *position* before God, not the *condition* of our hearts.

From the moment of salvation, God treats the justified man as *if* he had lived Christ's life. To be sure, at salvation God does a work in our hearts that reflects what he does on our ledgers. He begins to make us holy inside in a way mirroring our being declared holy. We are "born again" (John 3:3). God takes from us our "heart of stone" and gives us "a heart of flesh" (Ezk 36:26). We experience "the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). But the Bible consistently stresses that, while this washing is complete with regard to our account or standing, it is incomplete with regard to our internal holiness. Hebrews 12:23 calls those who have gone to heaven "righteous ones who have been made perfect" — that is, at the cross they were *declared* righteous, but at death their hearts were *made* perfect. Jesus taught that the person who has been washed at spiritual rebirth "needs only to wash his feet" (John 13:10). That is, he has been cleansed — but he still needs to wash! This daily "washing" by confession of sin is *not* just for our souls, according to 2 Corinthians 7:1 — "Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body *and* spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." Here the *spirits* of Christians are liable to contamination — something which Dr. Smith must totally deny.

Thus, Theophostic has similarities to Roman Catholic theology's confusion of imputation and impartation. In contrast, Scripture presents us as perfect in God's eyes because Christ's righteousness has been imputed, or credited, to us. This teaching has been historically known as the doctrine of Justification (by faith alone). The Protestant Reformers correctly saw this as "the doctrine on which the Church stands or falls." In contrast, Catholic doctrine defines justification as God's act of *infusing* or *imparting* grace or power into Christians enabling them to do good and

thus attain merit. Theophostic's error, while not identical, is dangerously close. We suspect that Dr. Smith's low view of sin (discussed earlier) is related to his teaching that the spirits of Christians have been made perfectly holy.

Theophostic's focus on past traumatic events is absent in Scripture

Theophostic places strong emphasis on remembering. "Present discomfort is rooted in an unresolved historical moment." The "echo" of that moment, "the feeling you experience each time your painful memory is accessed," must be faced in order to gain authentic release (*Genuine Recovery*, 18). The quotes below are from the "Beyond Tolerable Recovery" basic training video series:

- * "The present is a reflection of the past."
- * "We need to get to the source of where it first occurred."
- * "What I feel now is coming from someplace else."
- * "Get to the original lie."
- * "Trying to resolve present conflict without finding healing from the past wounds at best gives only temporary relief."
- * "But if I heal my past I redeem my present."

The Bible, too, talks a great deal about remembering. But its focus is very different. The psalmist remembered God's long ago miracles (77:12), his ancient laws (119:52), and his name (119:55). God told Israel to wear garments with tassels — "Then you will remember to obey all my commandments . . ." (Numbers 15:40). After forty years of wandering, he tells them, "Watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen . . . Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb. . ." (Deut 4:9-10). He says:

(Deu 5:15) "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt . . ."

(Deu 8:2) "Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years . . ."

(Mat 16:9) "Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?"

That is, remember all God's goodness. But he also commands:

(Deu 24:9) "Remember what the LORD your God did to Miriam [in causing leprosy]. . ."

(Luke 17:32) "Remember Lot's wife!"

That is, remember God's punishments on the rebellious. He says to remember the Sabbath (Exo 20:8), to remember his ways (Isa 64:5), to remember the poor (Galatians 2:10). Avoid judgment by remembering God's commands (Jude 1:17; Rev 3:3). Having stumbled, we should remember

the heights we fell from (Rev 2:5). Remember Paul's chains (Colossians 4:18). Remember Paul's ministry (Acts 20:31). Remember when you were without hope (Eph 2:11-12).

Remember the bad things too — past traumatic events. Remember how the Amalekites attacked you so you can act accordingly in the future (Exo 17:14). Of Israel, God predicts : "You will remember your conduct and the actions by which you have defiled yourselves, and you will loathe yourselves for all the evil you have done" (Ezk 20:43). That is, you will remember so that you learn to despise sin.

Remember so as to consider. Remember so as to restrain yourself. But not a word about remembering so that "I can confront my wound . . . face-to-face and feel its fresh fury again," in order that "the pain will lead us to the root of our trouble" (*Genuine Recovery*, p. 17-18). There simply are no Scriptural commands to that effect. The New Testament contains twenty-one epistles of detailed instructions for sanctification and Christian living — and one hundred and fifty psalms about the deepest matters of the heart — yet not a verse outlining anything remotely resembling Theophostic practice. Theophostic is an approach novel to the history of Christianity. For twenty centuries the Church has spread without it. Yet Theophostic casts itself as integral to effective Christian ministry.

Theophostic materials pervasively misuse Scripture by violating fundamental principles of exegesis⁴

Two verses in particular have been used in answer to the question, "Where in the Bible can one locate the principles or practices of Theophostic ministry?"

* "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:36)

* "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called *Wonderful Counselor*, *Mighty God*, *Everlasting Father*, *Prince of Peace*." (Isa 9:6)

Let us examine these, and several other passages treated in Theophostic literature, one by one.

"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Dr. Smith uses this verse to contrast Theophostic with counseling approaches that yield only "tolerable recovery." That is, struggling Christians who try to grasp God's Word only cognitively may be "free" in a limited sense, but they won't experience the total freedom from painful lies — the genuine recovery — that Theophostic offers.

In the context of John 8, Jesus was debating the Pharisees. During the debate, many believed in him (verse 30). To these he said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. . . and the truth will set you free" (vs. 31-32). Offended, the people answered, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" By this they showed their misunderstanding of Jesus' teaching that their slavery was to sin and Satan. So Jesus responded in verses 34-36:

I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

In essence he was saying, "You think you are free, but you are really slaves to sin. A slave has no permanent place in the household he serves. But I'm the Son of my Father and therefore have a permanent place in his home. If you are with me, the Son, and I set you free, you will be free indeed. Your physical relationship with Abraham guarantees you nothing. I guarantee you true freedom."

Does Jesus here use the phrase "free indeed" in contrast to the bondage of someone's struggling under the load of painful memories? Is he alluding to a girl who, molested at a young age, cannot later shake the mistaken belief that she herself was to blame for the incest? Is he contrasting the spiritual ups and downs of a struggler undergoing traditional Christian counseling with the Christian whose transformation under a process like Theophostic "is instantaneous the moment they receive peace from Jesus," and whose "genuine recovery is permanent and maintenance free"?

No, he contrasts those "free indeed" with self-righteous unbelievers who are self-satisfied in their sins but still slaves of it. He is talking about salvation and the freedom from sin that comes with it — partial in this life, complete in heaven.

* * * *

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor . . ." (Isaiah 9:6).

Does this passage hint at, or at least set the stage for, Jesus directly speaking truth to the heart of a believer in a Theophostic manner — that is, where the "logical truth" of Scripture has proven inadequate?

First, consider the term "counselor" in the Old Testament. The term described a king's advisor, one who held a position similar to a cabinet office in the United States today. It was generally used regarding affairs of government. During a political revolution in David's time:

While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he also sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, to come from Giloh, his hometown. And so the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom's following kept on increasing. (2 Sam 15:12)

Ahithophel had given advice to David in matters of state; now he is conscripted by Absalom. The prophet Balaam gave King counsel as to the fortunes of his political enemies (Num 24:14). Job wishes he could sleep "with kings and counselors [that is, high officials] of the earth" (3:14). King Rehoboam listened to the counsel of his young advisors rather than his old (2 Chron 10), and so forth.

In the beginning of Isaiah 9:6 (the verse we are considering), it is prophesied that when the Messiah comes, "The government will be upon his shoulders." That is, he will bear the responsibility for it. Thus, the Old Testament commentator Leupold writes that "Wonderful Counselor" is written about the Messiah in his role as statesman. It emphasizes primarily that he will be most effective in planning, in formulating a plan for action. A great work is to be done by him, even the greatest ever attempted. He had an adequate plan, the only one ever devised that measured up to the things to be attempted. To read into this word the modern notion of a therapist, or personal ministry person, helping another through personal pain is to stretch the meaning.

* * * *

"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away" (Isaiah 64:6).

Dr. Smith uses this verse in discussing the efforts of Christians toward personal holiness who do not have the benefit of proper ministry. Their efforts, he says, although sincere, are described by this verse in Isaiah. "Our best self-effort is like filthy rags." But does the verse even address efforts at spiritual growth and sanctification? Again, the verse is wrenched from its context. Consider the preceding verses:

Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him. You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways. But when we continued to sin against them, you were angry. How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins. (Isa 64:4-7)

Isaiah wants God to "come down" and help Israel. But Israel continues to sin, and God is angry. Isaiah describes this sinning with the words "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" — that is, "We act good outwardly, but are unchanged in our hearts." Proof of this is found in the very next verse: "No one calls on your name or strives to lay hold of you" (verse 7). The passage is thus not criticizing the efforts of God's people to fight sin in their own flesh — it condemns the fact that they are not fighting sin at all.

This lack of sensitivity to context is not merely occasional in Theophostic literature and lectures. It is pervasive.

Theophostic does not fit Scripture's model for Christian ministry as distilled in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

At one point, Dr. Smith quotes 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 as illustrative of Theophostic practice: "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." Yet in reality, this passage lays out a model of Christian ministry — we might call it a distillation of much of the New Testament teaching about ministry — which is radically at odds with Theophostic principles.⁵

In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul begins several chapters that affirm his apostolic ministry and defend against attacks by the false apostles at Corinth who argue this way: "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing" (10:10). They argue that Paul not only lacks rhetorical flourish and sufficient acquaintance with philosophy, but he also lacks stage presence.

These men have mistaken Paul's decision not to preach "with eloquence or superior wisdom" as ignorance (1 Cor 2:1). They see his coming with "weakness and fear and much trembling" as spinelessness and lack of leadership rather than a deliberate ministry style that relied on the Holy Spirit's power and not the messenger's skills (1 Cor 2:3). They take his imitation of "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" as cowardice and impotence (2 Cor 10:1). They paint him as promising to visit Corinth and then cavalierly changing his mind, calling his change of plans "fleshly wisdom" (2 Cor 1:12-23, especially vs. 23). In fact, they say that Paul generally lives "according to the flesh" and not "in the Spirit" as they themselves do (2 Cor 10:2)!

In response, Paul admits that he does indeed "walk in the flesh" in the sense of being subject to the laws and limitations of frail mortal beings. But he insists that he does not "war according to the flesh" — that is, he doesn't conduct his ministry in the self-seeking manner of an unregenerate person (2 Cor 10:3). Make no mistake, he does wage war, constantly, and is about to wage it in his following four chapters! But he will not do it according to the flesh.

How then does he conduct warfare? What weapons does he use (for anyone who wars must have weapons)? Since he fights satanic forces that are not flesh and blood (Eph 6:12), it would be folly to fight them with weapons of the flesh. Only the armor of God will do. So rather than rely on human wisdom, stage presence, rhetoric, an entertaining speaking style, and a display of massive organization, he uses the weapons outlined in Ephesians 6 — truth, righteousness, evangelism, faith, salvation, the Word of God, and prayer. And he wields these while maintaining the character of a Christian, which includes meekness and humility, even when he must be confrontational and "not spare" rebels in the church (2 Cor 13:2). These are the weapons scorned by the world yet most feared by the powers of darkness.

In 2 Cor 10:5 Paul describes the strongholds assailed by the Christian warrior: "We demolish *arguments* and every *pretension* that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." In the *New International Commentary on the New Testament* series, Philip E. Hughes writes, "It is noticeable that [the strongholds] belong to the realm of will and intellect. . . . for a man's inner motives are the fount of his action." So, the Greeks of Paul's day worshiped human wisdom, making the word of the cross seem like foolishness. Yet Paul's strategy against such entrenched foolishness consisted in the insistent preaching — yes, arguing — of that very message which was deemed so foolish. We quote Hughes at length regarding Paul's assault on the human mind as it rebels against God:

Hence it is that the Christian warfare is aimed at the casting down of the reasonings which are the strongholds whereby the unbelieving mind seeks to fortify itself against the truths of human depravity and divine grace, and at the casting down also of every proud bulwark raised high against the knowledge of God. This metaphor emphasizes the defiant and mutinous nature of sin: sinful man does not wish to know God; he wishes himself to be the self-sufficient centre of his universe. The knowledge of God is available to him, indeed he cannot escape from it: it is a knowledge which is constitutional to him, for he himself is God's creature, made, moreover, in the image of his Creator; it is a knowledge which the whole created order clearly and ceaselessly proclaims, witnessing as it does to the eternal power and godhead of the Creator (cf. Ps. 19:1-4; Rom. 1:19f.); and it is a knowledge livingly and graciously revealed in Christ Jesus, preserved in Holy Scripture, and presented in the preaching of the gospel (cf. 4:6). But sinful man rebels against this knowledge of God. He holds down the truth in unrighteousness. Knowing God, he refuses to glorify Him as God. His senseless heart is darkened, so that, though professing himself to be wise, he becomes a fool. In short, he exchanges the truth of and about God for a lie. It is thus that Paul analyzes the intellectual motives of unbelief in Rom. 1:18-25. And this analysis reveals, starkly and precisely, the nature of the high tower raised against the knowledge of God within which proud, unregenerate man immures himself. But unless it is cast down by the gospel of God's grace in Christ Jesus, his tower becomes his tomb.

Not only are strongholds and high towers cast down, but prisoners are taken captive in the Christian warfare. *These prisoners are the thoughts — the cogitations and intentions — of man's mind*, and they are led captive, every one of them, into the obedience of Christ. In this way the genuine Christian position is established. The rebellion is quelled, the truth of God prevails, and the divine sovereignty is acknowledged. . . .

Unfortunately, while the thinking of regenerate man is in principle entirely subjected to the obedience of Christ, in practice it is not always entirely so. The philosophies and sophistries of the "natural" man are frequently permitted to usurp a position of influence in the redeemed intellect. This was the case with some of the Corinthian believers who, through failure to submit their thinking consistently to the obedience of Christ, were being deceived by the specious logic of the false apostles whose teaching differed fundamentally from that delivered to them by Paul, their true and authentic apostle (cf. 11:2ff.). Paul is determined to expose the perversity of mind and will of such imposters. He earnestly desires that the members of the Corinthian church may learn what it means to bring both mind and will into complete submission to, and therefore harmony with, the mind and will of Christ.

(pp. 351-353, emphases added)

If ever there was a time for Paul to stress the need for a ministry such as Theophostic proposes, it was here. Paul is discussing how people's minds are deceived, how strongholds must be overcome. Powerful weapons are needed to free people from lies. Human weapons will not do, they must be "divinely powerful." Here is the time for Paul to say something like this:

When you encounter people who seem simply unable to embrace the truth of the Bible, you should stop telling them what you think God wants them to know. They don't need truth given through a preacher or teacher, passing it from his mind to theirs. No — such people are wounded. Most of them are spiritually hungry. The reason they are not finding help from Christian churches is because we have not given them the goods. People experience life on an *experiential* level, not on the level of logical truth. No one can talk them out of the lies they believe — not even memorizing Scripture can. Only Jesus can. God must speak directly to the hearts and minds of his wounded little lambs. You must help them face the pain from their past experiences, and in that pain identify the lie that insulates them from the truth. Then, resist the urge to address that lie with the truth you think they need to hear. Rather, ask Jesus to address it himself, directly to their souls.

But Paul never mentions going back into painful past memories — in this passage or anywhere else. Rather, he refers to strongholds within the mind as "pretensions" that "set themselves up against the knowledge of God" that must be "demolished," "made obedient," and "taken captive" (2 Cor 10:4-5). That is, he argues that wrong thinking flows from sin and requires surrender, for wrong thinking is simply the intellect in the service of the heart's rebellion against God.

This is what Paul is saying in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12. There, people who believe Satan's lies are not innocents — there, Satan's counterfeit miracles "deceive" only "those who are perishing." But why are they deceived? Why do they fail to embrace the truth? Because of life's painful experiences? No, it is because "they refused to love the truth" (vs. 10). As Romans 1:18 says, "they suppress the truth."

But why would anyone suppress the truth? It is because "although they knew God," to acknowledge what they know and to believe his words would mean "glorifying him as God" and "giving thanks to him" (Rom 1:21). Paul teaches that belief in lies is a moral issue, not merely a pain-generated one. He equates "not believing the truth" with "delighting in wickedness" — (2 Thess 2:10-12). And because of this, God actually "sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie" (2 Thess 2:11). In other words, many people believe lies because God is judging their prior unbelief.

If the "normal" weapons of truth, prayer, and so forth do not overcome the embedded lies in such disobedient strongholds, Paul in 2 Corinthians 10 knows only one other step to take. It is not to investigate the painful past. Rather, he says, "we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience" (10:6).

Note that in describing the weapons that fight such strongholds of false thinking, Paul doesn't list those weapons. He assumes that the Corinthians already know what "weapons" he is talking about. This is because he writes about such weapons on virtually every page of his epistles, and he constantly models their use. These weapons are truth, righteousness, evangelism, faith, salvation, the Word of God, and prayer, wielded by a Spirit-filled Christian who maintains a Christian character in his ministry — the "normal" weapons of Christian warfare employed by every generation of the church from the beginning. Paul says that such weapons "demolish" these strongholds. They demolish them in the minds of unbelieving people whom God has determined to save — and in the minds of Christians whom God is determined to sanctify.

Several other objections to Theophostic

We mention only briefly several additional concerns:

THEOPHOSTIC INCONSISTENTLY COMPARES ITS APPROACH TO THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST

Dr. Smith writes concerning his pre-Theophostic counseling ministry: "I knew that the results I was seeing was [*sic*] not consistent with what I saw in the New Testament" (*Genuine Recovery*, p.9). His point is that Jesus affected people in radical, immediate, and lasting ways all out of proportion to what Dr. Smith's former ministry accomplished. Yet had not Jesus promised in John 14:12 that "anyone who has faith in me . . . will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12)?

Yet, in the Gospels, the "works" of Jesus included not merely spiritual and psychological restoration, but physical healings, miracles of nature, and raising of the dead. If the "spectacular" results of Jesus are the model for our ministries today, why limit what we seek to remarkable healing from psychological pain? If the Gospels require us to "be consistent with what we see in the New Testament," as Dr. Smith proposes, why be selective? Christian ministry should include not only the healing of physical illnesses, but the authoritative stopping of storms and raising of the dead.

Should not this point make us examine whether Jesus' promise of greater works relates rather to the scope of the spread of the Gospel, or some such thing?

THEOPHOSTIC TOO FREQUENTLY - ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY - USES THE MODEL OF SEXUAL ABUSE TO VALIDATE ITS METHODOLOGY

Most people, religious and otherwise, acknowledge that any attack or abuse of a sexual nature results in problems far more difficult to overcome than most any other. Yet in setting forth an apologetic for its principles of ministering to *people at large* — for we are "all" wounded, it is only a question of how much — Theophostic consistently uses illustrations from those sexually abused. If Theophostic proposed a methodology solely for helping sexually abused people, the objections raised in this paper, while serious, would at least be open to greater discussion. But arguing for general ministry principles based upon a special category of problem is ill advised.

DR. SMITH DOES NOT SEEM TO INVITE CRITIQUE FROM THOSE OUTSIDE THE THEOPHOSTIC FAMILY

In advising people where they can seek Theophostic help, Dr. Smith does advise them to question the potentially ministering person in this way: "Are you under the authority and spiritual covering of a recognized ministry, church or professional organization?" He adds that "If the person is a 'lone wolf,' be careful" (*Genuine Recovery*, p. 2).

Such advice is Scriptural. But on page 53 of *Genuine Recovery*, the orientation notebook containing Theophostic's basic principles, Dr. Smith writes:

***Principle six:
Traditionalists will try to discredit the process.***

When I first began to share this concept with fellow therapists, I was not received with much favor or enthusiasm. I was called a quack and a charlatan. I was told that what was happening would not last, or at best, it was post-hypnotic.

However, the results that Dr. Smith viewed proved more convincing to than the remarks of his critics.

Certainly every Christian must make theological decisions and, having made them, not return daily to re-examine his entire edifice. "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom 14:5). But he should be open to sincere questioning. And his process of decision-making should include substantial interaction with those who disagree, especially if one's theology is at odds with the generally accepted views of the Christian church. We do not know the history of Dr. Smith's interactions with others regarding the type of concerns raised in this paper. But the concerns are serious, and the materials we have seen give little indication of any serious engagement with arguments like them.

On pages 232 to 236 of his larger work, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, Dr. Smith gives a running commentary on Romans 7 and part of Romans 8 that attempts to see in that passage many of the specifics of Theophostic principles. These pages stretch interpretive principles to their maximum and beyond. Page 233 contains a small box of text with this disclaimer:

This section is an Ed Smith interpretation of Romans chapter 7, presented through the grid of Theophostic Ministry principles. I know that this smacks in the face of some of our traditional thought. Bear with me, hold to what you can, and look past what you cannot. I am in theological transition as I allow *the Holy Spirit* to teach me and correct me where necessary. I hope you are as well. (Emphasis ours)

Dr. Smith does not invite teaching or interaction from theologians or other counselors. Rather, he allows the Holy Spirit to teach him. With such an apparent isolation during a time of "theological transition," it is not surprising that one would come to embrace the views criticized in this paper.

Then why does it work?

We might ask, "Suppose Theophostic is shown to be in error — how do we explain that it often seems to help people?" God alone can answer this. But two suggestions follow.

First, in some cases God may indeed be helping people during their Theophostic encounters. His mercy is beyond all telling. He often rains down grace when people's understanding is deficient, or even when they are rebelling. The woman who touched Jesus' robe in Mark 5:25-34 did not "do it right" when she approached Jesus. Her faith was misguided — she attempted to receive healing not by a personal encounter with the Savior, but by stealing a touch of his garment, as if it were magic. Her faith was also selfish — suffering a discharge of blood, she knew that touching anyone else would render that person ceremonially unclean, and her plan was to slip off unnoticed without a word of thanks. Yet Jesus graciously healed her. Or consider when God told Moses to gather seventy of Israel's elders to the entrance of the tabernacle so the Spirit would rest upon them and they could assist in Moses' labors. Two of the elders, Eldad and Medad, failed to come but "remained in the camp." "Yet the Spirit rested on them" as well, and they too prophesied (Num 11:16-17, 24-26). Or consider that twice the prophet Balaam resorted to sorcery in seeking God, yet God granted him an oracle each time (Num 23).

Do any of these cases prove that the supplicants' methods were justified? Not at all. They prove only that God sometimes responds generously to our misguided — or even sinful — approaches toward him. Many people no doubt pray sincerely during Theophostic sessions. God is at liberty to answer any of them with mercy, even while his Word demonstrates the error of their approach.

Second, in many cases people may merely be imagining that Christ speaks to them or that they receive divine help. The power of suggestion is very strong. Researchers have long noticed the "healing" effects of placebos not only on those *using* experimental medicines but on those *administering* them. In *Abnormal Psychology*, David Holmes describes this phenomenon in experiments with depression medication:

The effects of suggestion influence not only the participants in experiments but also raters who are evaluating the participants. For example, if a depressed person is given a treatment that the therapist thinks will help, the therapist may selectively notice improvements in the patient . . . and ignore behaviors that suggest lack of improvement (e.g., lack of activity).⁶

Since virtually every religion, philosophy, medicine (real or quack), counseling method, and psychic reader in history boast testimonies of those marvelously helped, we must avoid the lure of anecdotal evidence as our primary means for establishing what is true. For the Christian who seeks the best means for curing wounded souls, the only sure testimony is that of Scripture. Even with Scripture, Peter warns that "ignorant and unstable people distort" it, and Paul warns that only the Christian workman who "correctly handles the word of truth" is approved — surely implying that many Christian workmen are not.

ENDNOTES

¹Smith, Edward. *Genuine Recovery*. (Campbellsville, KY: Alathia Publishing, 1996, 2000)

²Smith, Winston. "Dichotomy or Trichotomy? How the Doctrine of Man Shapes the Treatment of Depression." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 18 (Spring 2000) : 21. Emphasis ours.

³Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939, 1941).

⁴In this section, Scripture passages under consideration are quoted in ***bold, italicized letters***.

⁵We are much indebted in this section for many thoughts and even phraseology in Philip E. Hughes' outstanding commentary on 2 Corinthians in the *New International Commentary on the New Testament* series.

⁶Holmes, David. *Abnormal Psychology*. (Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon, 2001), p. 113.