Is 'divine healing' in the 'Faith Movement' founded on the principles of healing in the Bible or based on the power of the mind?

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ABSTRACT

Many people plagued with incurable diseases or diseases that seem to be resistant to medical treatment, in desperation turn to preachers who claim to administer divine healing. These divine healers make certain claims, based on their interpretation of the Scriptures and a so-called revelation of God's will. They furthermore preach that healing and health are included in atonement and that nobody should be sick. Illness is an indication of a lack of faith on the part of the believer. It could also be attributed to an attack from the devil. In order to obtain healing, a process of ignoring the symptoms, followed by an unyielding and repeated confession of the healing needed, based on selected verses from the Scriptures, is proposed.

This article is based on the contention that the healing practised by these divine healers is nothing more than a 'mind-over-matter' approach, leading people into confessing over and over that they have been healed. These practices are reminiscent of the utilisation of affirmations that lead to positive thinking, which will evidently result in a change of behaviour on the part of the confessor. No indication of Godly intervention seems to be evident in this healing ministry, and neither is any submission to the will and purpose of God.

INTRODUCTION

The post-modern era is characterised by different attempts to downplay the position of Christianity. One way is to question the existence of God. An advertising campaign recently launched in the United Kingdom by the British Humanist Society aims to establish the belief that God does not exist. The slogans that have been posted on buses in London read: *There is probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy life* (BBC News 2009:1).

Even more alarming are attempts from within the Christian faith itself to focus on human potential for health and prosperity, thus moving the focus from theocentric providence to anthropocentric health and prosperity. Advocates of the prosperity gospel claim that it is God's will for every believer to be prosperous and healthy. The implication is that a sick or poor person finds himself/herself outside God's will with regard to his or her life (Sarles 1986:329). Those terminally ill or poor believers in the movement often succumb to a heavy burden of guilt.

Divine healing, in its simplest form, is complex. Some believers are healed through prayer, while the condition of others may deteriorate even more, regardless of prayer. Some believe that the absence of divine healing indicates a lack of faith on the part of the believer. Others see it as the result of insufficient faith on the part of the person praying. Perhaps divine healing is not a reality or, if it is, perhaps only God determines who will be healed. If that is indeed the case, does it mean that the believer's prayer is in vain?

Some reject divine healing as fiction, lacking any basis in reality, while others recognise that there may be some truth in it. Many view the reports of divine healing as an exaggeration of what really happened. Another attitude is the acceptance of accounts of healing as facts and accurate statements, which are then perceived as reality. The issue is even further categorised, namely those with faith, those with little faith and those with no faith. The afore-mentioned issues clearly portray not only different viewpoints, but also a limited understanding of divine healing.

This article will attempt to focus on the spirituality of divine healing in the 'Faith Movement'. According to the Faith Movement, divine healing is part of God's will for the believer. The presuppositions of divine healing in the Faith Movement will be discussed and investigated so as to answer the question: Is divine healing, as propagated by the Faith Movement, not merely a metaphysical process – the result of positive thinking and confessing? Information for this article was collected by means of a literature study as well as personal experience through years of active involvement in the movement.

DEFINING DISEASE AND HEALING

In order to determine whether a person has been healed, it is essential to understand what is meant by disease and healing. Healing of any kind is a mystery. The intricacies of the immune system, as it combats disease, are hard to explain, let alone understand. A cure for viral infections has not yet been developed and the immune system must combat these infections by itself. No one can explain why the same treatment will cure one person, but not the next; how doctors succeed in healing one person, but not another with the same condition; how a sick person suddenly recovers against all expectations.

To be healed implies that a person has been cured of a disease or illness. But what exactly is meant by healing and what is understood by the terms 'disease' and 'illness'?

A disease is a serious affliction of health with special symptoms and a name.

> *This term broadly refers to any abnormal condition that impairs normal functioning. Commonly, this term is used to refer specifically to infectious diseases, which are clinically evident diseases that result from the presence*

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of pathogenic microbial agents, including viruses, bacteria, fungi, protozoa, multicellular parasites, and aberrant proteins known as prions. An infection that does not produce clinically evident impairment of normal functioning is not considered a disease. Non-infectious diseases constitute all other diseases, including most forms of cancer, heart disease and genetic diseases.

(Wikipedia 2009c:1)

The real nature of disease and healing lies therein that the normal functioning of the healthy body of the patient begins to function abnormally when it gets sick and that, when it becomes well again, it resumes its normal functioning.

(Mes 1975:17)

The words disease and illness are negative in that they literally mean, 'not healthy'.

What is illness?

Illness is another word used to describe the malfunctioning of the human body. Illness also refers to a lack of health, but it further points to something faulty and deficient.

(Oxford Dictionary 1970:401)

Conditions of the body or mind that cause pain, dysfunction or distress to the person afflicted or those in contact with the person can be deemed an illness. Sometimes the term is used broadly to include injuries, disabilities, syndromes, infections, symptoms, deviant behaviour, and atypical variations of structure and function, while in other contexts these may be considered distinguishable categories (Wikipedia 2009b:1).

A deficiency in the body may refer to some deformity or disability – for example someone in a wheelchair who has lost the ability to walk due to a spinal injury. Another person may have lost the ability to see or hear. Others may have been born with bodily defects visible on their hands, arms, spinal cord, feet or legs. Illness can also be the result of the malfunctioning of an organ in the human body, for example the malfunctioning of the pancreas resulting in different levels of diabetes.

Disease, sickness and illness describe some form of abnormal functioning of the human body, resulting in a person being described as being unwell.

Sickness and suffering constitute a mystery; the great mystery of evil. Through the ages, many, including church fathers, have attempted to provide explanations. In the end they all agreed that reconciling evil in the universe with the will of an all-wise and compassionate God lies beyond human comprehension (MacNutt 1977:126).

What is meant by healing? Healing by regeneration refers to an injury that is healed through the regeneration of cells. The cell type that was destroyed must be able to replicate. Most cells have this ability, although it is believed that cardiac muscle cells and neurons are two important exceptions. Healing by repair refers to an injury to cells that are unable to regenerate, such as those of cardiac muscle or neurons.

Healing is an uncommon word in modern medicine. Therefore, it is very restricted in ordinary medical usage. It refers only to the above-mentioned process of wound, ulcer or fracture repair. In all these cases there is a loss of continuity of tissue, skin or bone, and healing refers to the restoration of the continuity of the tissue by the normal process of tissue or bone repair. If the word is used in other medical contexts it often carries the suggestion of quackery rather than medical practice. It is therefore commonly assumed that healing is distinguished from the normal practice of medicine (MacNutt 1977:3).

What is meant by health? Mental health refers to an individual's emotional and psychological well-being. Physical health is described as soundness of body, or good bodily health (Oxford Dictionary 1970:377). Health is officially defined by the World Health Organization as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (MedicineNet.com 2009:1). Health thus refers to the absence of any malfunctioning in the human body.

The ministry of divine healing, on the other hand, does not include the described processes of healing. In ordinary usage, within the context of the divine healing ministry, however, healing refers to the restoring of a sick person, irrespective of the illness or disease, to health (MacNutt 1977:3).

Healing has two different meanings. Healing can take place (a) without intervention, when a person is sick and, after a period of time, the person is healed. The meaning of healing in this case portrays the verb as intransitive. Healing, in a broad sense, has taken place as part of the dynamic functioning of the body that resists and combats sickness through the immune system; or (b) something is done or someone intervenes and the person is healed. In this case the meaning of the verb is transitive (Mes 1975:8). In this sense the disease is viewed as something in a sick person. It is reminiscent of the rudiments of the idea pervading all primitive medicine, and even the New Testament, which regarded disease (both physical and mental) as evil, or as the presence of malignant spirits who had to be cast out by magic or any other available method in order for the person to be cured (Mes 1975:16).

According to this viewpoint or belief pertaining to disease, a healer is needed. Health and its related words were first brought to Britain by the Anglo-Saxon invaders and were used in the translation of the Psalms and the Gospels into Anglo-Saxon. The word comes from the Teutonic root, hal, which means 'whole' and gives us the adjectives *whole*, *hale* and *holy*, as well as *healthy* (MacNutt 1977:3).

In the case of divine healing or faith healing, the verb is used in a transitive manner – healing is viewed as the result of Godly intervention. Faith healing is an attempt to utilise religious or spiritual means, such as prayer, mental practices, spiritual insights, or other techniques to prevent illness or to cure disease and improve health. This healing is the result of faith in the power of the Divine to heal the believing person, or in the power of the preacher who administers the healing. Faith healers claim that they can summon divine healing or supernatural intervention on behalf of the ill.

Faith healing does not belong exclusively to Christianity, but also forms part of the spirituality of other religions.

Christian Science teaches that healing is possible through the understanding of the underlying spiritual perfection of God's creation. The world, as perceived by man, is believed to be a distortion of the underlying spiritual reality. Healing is possible through prayer, insofar as it succeeds in correcting the distortion.

Spiritualism holds the belief that contact between the living and the spirits of the dead is possible. Although Spiritualism does not promote 'mental' cures, its proponents believe that help from the spiritual world is sought and this is regarded as being central to the healing process.

Islam believes that its followers must seek appropriate medical attention, but believes that no medicine will work if God does not want it to work. Medicine is obtained from the doctor for treatment and prayer to God is needed to cure the person.

The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints has a long history of faith healings. Most healings are the result of priesthood blessings (Wikipedia Faith Healing 2009a:1–3).

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DIVINE HEALING IN A CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

Divine healing is used by the majority of Christians to refer to the belief that God heals people through the power of the Holy Spirit. Divine healing, according to Kydd (1998:XV), means the restoring of health through the direct intervention of God. The products of such an intervention constitute miracles. This practice is often exercised by the laying on of hands.

Accounts of Jesus curing physical ailments are recorded in the four Gospels. Jesus cured the woman who had a discharge of blood for twelve years and suffered much under the physicians of the time, resulting in her financial predicament and a worsening condition. However, Jesus also endorsed the usage of medical assistance. The actions of the Good Samaritan who treated the battered man with oil and wine were portrayed as those of a physician and he was presented as a role model to the disciples (Wikipedia 2009a:1).

Healing in the Old Testament

Healings took place in the Old Testament. There is the account of General Naaman, suffering from incurable leprosy, who was healed after a sevenfold dipping in the river (2 Ki 5:14). A world-renowned ruler of Babylon was struck by a disease that affected his senses and he started to live like an animal, but seven years later he fully recovered and resumed his international prominence (Dn 4:33–34). Miriam was healed of leprosy (Nm 12:13). God even restored people to life. The Zarephath widow's son was healed by the hand of Elijah (1 Ki 17:17–24). Elisha raised the Shunammite's son from the dead (2 Ki 4:18–37) (Mayhue 1983:25).

If the events recorded in the Old Testament are carefully considered, the following aspects come to the fore. God brought about affliction. This, to some believers, is a difficult aspect of God's character to grasp. Yet, God brought about physical affliction on numerous occasions. God struck the first-born in the land of Egypt when the Egyptians refused to free the Israelites from slavery (Ex 12:29–30). Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, offered strange fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them to do. Fire came down from the Lord's presence and engulfed them and they died on the spot (Lv 10:1–2). Ezekiel lost his wife in the midst of his prophetic ministry. God took Ezekiel's wife so that he could be a model of mourning for Israel (Ezk 24:16–18).

- It seems that God has no fixed healing method. All the accounts of healing mentioned earlier differed. Miriam was healed seven days later – after Moses had prayed for her. Nebuchadnezzar was healed seven years later, according to God's plan and schedule. Naaman was healed after he had been dipped seven times in the river.
- Sickness was not only the result of sin, as saints also fell ill. Sometimes physical affliction was brought about due to personal sin, although the person afflicted was not always the sinner. Aaron led the people into idolatrous worship, yet the Lord smote the people but not Aaron (Ex 32:35). The child born of David and Bathsheba died as a result of their sin (2 Sm 12:1–23). In the case of Miriam, she was chastised because of her own sin of questioning Moses' leadership (Nm 16:1–50).
- Some illness (here disability) is inexplicable. Mephibosheth, for instance, was dropped as a baby by his nurse and remained lame for life (2 Sm 4:4).
- God did not only heal those who believed. The healings of the Syrian general and the Babylonian king serve as examples (Mayhue 1983:27–29).
- The way God intervened in the lives of different people during this period in time leaves us with no clear pattern of how God's healing works. Furthermore, it does not empower us to come up with a specific formula. Instead, it leaves one to conclude that God, in his sovereignty, performed these miracles.

Healing in the New Testament

Healings abound in the public ministry of Jesus Christ. At no other time in history were so many people healed. However, at the base of the many healings recorded in his ministry lie reasons that need to be considered in order to understand the healing ministry of Christ. Reasons given seem to authenticate the person of Jesus as the true Messiah, as well as his authority to forgive sins and proclaim God's kingdom (Mt 8:17; Mt 9:6; Mt 11:2–19; Mt 12:15–21; Mk 2:10; Lk 5:24; Lk 7:18–23; Jn 9:3; Jn 11:4; Jn 20:30–31; and Ac 2:22).

What form did the healings that Jesus performed take on? The following aspects of Jesus' healing ministry are emphasised by Mayhue (1983:32–36):

- It seems that Jesus did not perform healings arbitrarily. He did not heal everyone (Jn 5:3–5); neither did he give signs or perform healings on request (Mt 12:39–40). He never deviated from the purpose of his ministry, but always directed his actions towards the purpose discussed above.
- With the exception of three, the healings Jesus performed took immediate effect. The healings were complete and people were restored to perfect health. No relapse occurred after a while, and neither were there any misunderstanding about the healings – they were perfect and complete healings. The three delays were only for minutes. For example, the blind man at Bethsaida. When Jesus eventually spat on the blind man's eyes he saw people as walking trees, but when Jesus laid hands on him, his sight was restored perfectly (Mk 8:22–26).
- Healings were abundant and pertained to different diseases and illnesses. Jesus cured the dumb, the crippled, the lame, the blind and those suffering from leprosy.
- He never set up special times or places for the healings. As he travelled through Palestine, he healed the people. He never selected attendants from the masses – only those few who would see him; rather he healed all who came.
- Healings took place even if Jesus was absent. His presence was not necessary to ensure healing. He merely thought or spoke a word and healing took place. The centurion's slave (Mt 8:5–13) and the Canaanite's daughter were healed in this way (Mt 15:21–28).
- Jesus' healing methods varied. Christ touched the person who needed healing (Mt 8:15), or simply gave an order (Jn 5:8–9). He used spittle (Mk 8:22–26) and plugged a man's ears with his fingers and placed spittle on his tongue (Mk 7:33–35). Jesus mixed soil with his spittle and placed it on the blind man's eyes and ordered him to wash his eyes (Jn 9:6). The afflicted touched Jesus' cloak in order to be healed (Mt 9:20–22).
- Jesus' healing was undeniable and authentic. Not only his followers but also his enemies were amazed and astounded by his miracles and did not deny or discredit them. The chief priest and the Pharisees gave him credit by saying that Jesus was performing many signs (Jn 11:47–48).
- The healing ministry of Jesus is spread over the entire period of his ministry. The healings he performed were not pre-arranged, but took place in the normal course of his daily ministry. There were no big announcements of healing crusades to come.
- Jesus' ministry was unique. After Jesus had cast out an evil spirit from a dumb man, the crowd said: 'Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel' (Mt 9:32–33).
- Jesus' healing powers came from God the Father:
  - He cast out demons by the Spirit of God (Mt 12:28).
  - The power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick (Lk 5:17).
  - He announced that the Son can do nothing by Himself (Jn 5:19).
  - God performed signs through him (Ac 2:22).
  - Christ healed because God was with him (Ac 10:38).

During the healing ministry of Jesus, he avoided public approval and reward. He ordered his disciples rather to rejoice in the fact

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that their names were recorded in heaven than in the power to heal (Lk 10:20). Faith on the side of the afflicted also seemed not to have been necessary. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (Jn 11), as well as Jairus' daughter (Mt 9) and the widow's son (Lk 7). It could also be assumed that when Jesus healed the multitudes, they were mostly unbelievers. At other times Jesus healed when faith was displayed by someone other than the afflicted. Jesus also healed those who had faith. Jesus healed the ten lepers who called on him (Lk 17:11–19). Jesus' healing continued via his disciples (Mt 10:1–15). Seventy other disciples were also ordered by Jesus to preach and heal (Lk 10:1–16).

In conclusion, the healings that Jesus performed seemed to have served a purpose, namely to authenticate the person of Jesus as the true Messiah, as well as his authority to forgive sins and proclaim God's kingdom. Yet, healing continued via the apostles, as can been seen in the Acts of the Apostles.

Healing in the Faith Movement

One of the first proponents of the 'Word of Faith', also known as the Faith Movement, was E.W. Kenyon (1867–1948). Kenyon's theology can be summarised in the following phrase: 'What I confess, I possess' (Wikipedia 2009d:1).

The father of the modern-day Faith Movement, Kenneth Hagin, was heavily influenced by Kenyon's writings. He elaborated on the teachings of Kenyon and constructed a four-part formula, namely: 'Say it; do it; receive it; and tell it' (*ibid*. 2009d:1). Many teachers of the Bible have been influenced directly or indirectly by Kenneth 'Papa' Hagin and his 'revelation'. The most recognised include Kenneth Copeland, Jerry Savelle, Joel Osteen, Charles Nieman, Charles Capps and Joyce Meyer.

The provision of healing according to the Faith Movement is found in atonement. A trilogy of passages from the Scriptures is used to support this notion. The first one is Isaiah 53:5: 'By his scourging we are healed.' This means that Christ was the substitute for all forms of illness, so that, through the cross, healing is as readily available as forgiveness of sin. Matthew 8:16–17 is presented in the second place to confirm Jesus' healing ministry as the fulfilment of what Isaiah had said. A further conclusion is drawn from this passage, namely that while Jesus healed all who came to him in those days, he still does the same today. The third reference is to be found in 1 Peter 2:24: 'By his wounds you have been healed.'

Other important passages used to substantiate these teachings are Deuteronomy 28, which is used to demonstrate that sickness is a curse of the Law. Galatians 3:13 is introduced alongside Deuteronomy, to prove that Christ has redeemed the believers from the curse of the Law, which includes the curse of sickness (Hagin 1983:11–14). The conclusion of these teachings is that it is never the will of God for anyone to be sick. The following statement made by Hagin illustrates this point:

> *Don't ever tell anyone sickness is the will of God for us. It isn't! Healing and health are the will of God for mankind. If sickness were the will of God, heaven would be filled with sickness and disease.*
>
> Hagin (1983:16)

A whole number of passages are utilised to substantiate this claim.

How is this healing or health obtained? The possession of healing comes through the exercise of faith. Popular phrases in these circles are: 'Name it and claim it' and 'Believe it and receive it'. Faith is defined as speaking or confessing with authority in the full expectation that what is spoken will happen. Underlying this view is the interpretation of Mark 11:23–24;

> *Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea', and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him.*
>
> (Mk 11:23–24)

The believer should speak to the disease in the same manner. As Hagin phrases it: 'Faith confessions create reality' (Hagin 1976:23). If healing does not take place, the problem is supposedly overcome by patience and persistence. The seriously ill are exhorted to persist in their confession and build up their faith to the level necessary to obtain the promised healing. Bennett, another minister in the Faith Movement, gives the following counsel to those who did not get healed immediately: 'It just means they're not yet open to receive the particular healing they need. We need to continue to break through the barriers that keep us from receiving' (Bennett 1982:53).

Another characteristic of Faith Movement teachings on healing is denial of the symptoms. Kenneth Copeland addresses the symptoms of sickness in the following manner: 'I refuse to consider my body, I refuse to be moved by what I see and what I feel … I am going to choose His Word, instead of what my body is saying …' (Hanegraaff 1993:244). Hagin (1966:20) responds in the same vein: 'Real faith in God – heart faith – believes the Word of God regardless of what the physical evidence may be … A person seeking healing should look to God's Word, not to his symptoms.' Copeland (2009:1) advises his followers to take five steps based on Hebrews 4:12–16 in order to receive healing. The steps are: find a scripture in the word that fits your situation and that you can present; lay the promise before the Lord and worship and pray; make your petition (write it down); prepare yourself to receive; and praise God for the manifestation of glory. Followers are also encouraged to make the following written declaration;

> *I…agree with God's Word that these scriptures are in full operation in my life. God's Word is life to me and health to all my flesh! I declare it is done in Jesus' Name. It is finished! Amen.*
>
> (Copeland 2009:1)

The assertion that one is to state or confess that something is there when in reality it is not leads Hagin to the inevitable result of his logic, namely the denial of reality (Neuman 1990:34).

The Faith Movement has at its foundation one basic presupposition upon which everything is built, namely that every Christian, without exception, should be physically healthy and materially prosperous. It is included in Christ's atonement, and therefore it is available here and now for all who believe. Hagin (1979:21) expresses this clearly:

> *'I am fully convinced – I would die saying it is so – that it is the plan of Our Father God, in His great love and His great mercy, that no believer should ever be sick; that every believer should live his full life span down here on this earth, and that every believer should finally just fall asleep in Jesus.'*
>
> (Hagin 1983:16)

IS THE HEALING PROPAGATED BY THE FAITH MOVEMENT DIVINE OR OF HUMAN ORIGIN?

The healing propagated by these faith healers is viewed as divine healing, as an intervention by God, although this intervention seems rather indirect via the faith healer and the obedience and confession of the believer.

Evaluation of the premise of the Faith Movement teachings

It is clear from the above discussion that healing and health are viewed as a gift from God, provided through atonement. The possession of healing, however, comes through the exercise of faith on the part of the believer. It speaks of a kind of partnership; God has provided and the believer must possess. Can this healing indeed be described as 'divine'?

A few problems emerge with this approach: The first and fundamental issue to consider is the authority of these teachings. Is the authority indeed based on a proper interpretation of the

Bible? Although many Biblical texts are quoted to substantiate the authority of their teachings, very little or no attention is paid to literary and historical context, semantic nuances or grammatical indicators (Perriman 2003:92–95). This results in a set of human ideas and principles regarding healing which is based on a distorted textual meaning. Proponents of the Faith Movement take the 'plain meaning' of the text as the first rule, as well as the ultimate goal of all valid interpretation. The plain meaning has, in the first place, to do with the author's original intent; in other words, that which would have been plain to those to whom the words were originally addressed. It does not, therefore, have to do with how someone from a suburbanised white American culture of the late 20th century reads his own cultural setting back into the text through the frequently distorted prisms of the language of the early 17th century (Fee 1984:40).

The procedure followed by these teachers is that they use their own experience as a foundation for their teachings, and a number of Biblical verses are marshalled in defence of their claims. In reality, however, the verses are removed from their original context and are then misinterpreted.

Secondly, the advocates of these teachings consider the Word of God as the revealed truth of God. No consideration is given to the verbal, plenary, inerrant inspiration of the Scriptures. The revelations, prophecies, dreams and visions of the teachers that underlie and support their teachings indicate an inspiration beyond the text. This is clear from many recorded prophecies supported by the phrase: 'Thus saith the Lord' (Sarles 1986:337).

Thirdly, the doctrine of God, and especially the will of God and his sovereignty are flawed. The proponents of the Faith Movement claim that they know God's will. According to them it is God's will that everybody should be healthy. The question is, however: Did God decree that every believer in every society and in every generation will be healthy? The Scriptures that are utilised to substantiate this claim fall short.

Actually, evidence in the Bible portrays just the opposite. Jesus' earthly life is not typified by material prosperity. He was born into and grew up as part of an impoverished family. During his travels, he informed his students that he had no place to lay his head (Mt 8:20). Also, upon his death, he left no riches behind. He was furthermore tempted and attacked by the devil and people who threatened to hurt and even kill him.

Fourthly, the sovereignty of God is seriously undermined by the teachings of this Movement. God is turned into a god who adheres to the demands and the wishes of human beings. It is especially evident in the self-assured manner in which Robert Tilton describes the failure of God's plan with mankind in the Garden of Eden: 'God hoped for things. He had a plan. He had desires. He hoped they would come to pass, but they failed' (Tilton 1985:113).

Tilton continues to point out that humans can inspire God. If humans start to believe, God will start believing and things will happen (Tilton 1985:109). The sovereignty of God is further undermined by the notion that humans can demand from God what they need. This is clear from the phrase: 'God cannot turn against His own Word.' The above approach does not only undermine the sovereignty of God, but indicates an exchange of roles – namely God becomes the servant of man, who demands action.

Lastly, something on the way in which the Faith Movement deals with John 10:10, where the abundant life offered by Christ is gratuitously assumed to imply material prosperity, and scripture is utilised as a tool to press unaccommodating text into shape. The problem with this approach is that Scripture is controlled by the established doctrinal position (Perriman 2003:83).

New Thought teaching

Another striking aspect of the teachings of the Faith Movement is the way in which healing is obtained. The process of obtaining healing is as follows: have faith in the Scriptures, which declare that healing comes through the atonement of Christ; deny any symptoms of sickness, but instead confess the Word that declares healing; and persist with the confession, over and over, until healing manifests itself.

Once again there are no Biblical grounds for this process. Instead it reveals a parallel with what is known as 'positive thinking'. Positive thinking refers to the notion that change can be created by using affirmations that lead to positive thinking. Positive thinking affirmations are simple statements that are repeated over and over again. Through constant repetition your subconscious mind picks up the message and you start taking action to create change. It is a way of changing behaviour so as to achieve a goal.

Perriman (2003:66) argues that the roots of the Faith Movement lie in 'a theological indiscretion' and that the Faith Movement is not really Christian but actually a 'cultic wolf dressed up in Pentecostal clothing'. The source of the Faith Movement is presented as New Thought teaching with its substitution of self-realisation for submission and self sacrifice its opposition toward the traditional debasement of creature before Creator. Furthermore, its power in human thoughts and words to shape its circumstances and its promises of health and prosperity serve as a natural corollary of various spiritual laws that can be put into action.

Perriman (2003:69–70) continues to indicate the parallels between the New Thought and Faith Movement. Firstly, the same elevation of humanity and emphasis on the human being's capacity to shape his/her own destiny exists. Secondly, the same belief in the power of thought and language to influence material circumstances for better or for worse is demonstrated. Thirdly, the same extensive use of the notion of spiritual laws to reinforce the trustworthiness and efficacy of faith is evident. Lastly, the fact that the New Thought developed alongside the rediscovery of divine healing within the Holiness movement also suggests a strong affinity between the two metaphysics. This direct tie connecting the modern Faith Movement with the New Thought metaphysics of the early 20th century was already indicated earlier by McConnell (1995:70).

The proponents of the Faith Movement attempt to sanitise the metaphysical concept of the 'power of the mind' by replacing it with the 'force of faith'. According to Hanegraaff (1993:29), they have made a distinction without a difference. Warren Felt Evans, a New-Thought writer, wrote that 'faith is the most intense form of mental action' (Evans 1885:152). Evans explains that, in treating a patient, the effect of the suggestion (or positive affirmation that the patient is well) is the result of the faith of the subject. It is always proportioned to the degree in which the patient believes that (Evans 1885:152).

Hanegraaff (1993:30) continues and quotes H Emile Cady, who said that 'our affirming backed by faith is the link that connects our conscious human need with His power and supply.' The power in our word of faith brings all good things into our everyday life. The parallel seems clear between the mind in metaphysics and 'faith' 'in 'the word of faith' or 'force of faith'.

This practice of the Faith Movement to obtain health shows parallels with the metaphysical concept of the 'power of the mind', in as much as that it can be viewed as the same thing with a different name, namely 'word of faith'. The affirmations are the different passages from the Scriptures that must be confessed over and over again.

The practice of obtaining healing by the Faith Movement seems to be nothing more than a human invention that borrowed

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TABLE 1
Comparison of biblical and modern-day divine healing

BIBLICAL DIVINE HEALING	MODERN-DAY DIVINE HEALING
The healings that Jesus performed were arbitrary. He did not heal everyone (Jn 5:3–5), neither did he perform signs or healings on request (Mt 12:39–40).	Modern-day healers claim that healing is for everyone. They advertise healing campaigns/services, claiming that they can heal everyone.
With the exception of three healings, those that Jesus performed took immediate effect.	The healings performed by modern-day healers are also claimed to take place immediately, although some are progressive.
Healings were abundant and for different diseases and illnesses. Jesus cured the dumb, the crippled, the lame, the blind and those suffering from leprosy.	Modern-day healers claim that all illnesses can be healed, but little medical confirmation of these healings exists.
The healing ministry of Jesus formed part of his everyday life. He never set up special times or places for these healings. As he travelled through Palestine, he healed the people. He never selected attendants from the masses – only those few who would see him; rather he healed all who came.	Definite healing conferences or services are set up for healings to take place.
Healings took place even if Jesus was absent. His presence was not necessary to ensure healing.	The focus is on the modern-day faith healer as the bearer of God's healing powers; the person who is administering the healing.
The healing methods of Jesus varied.	Different healing methods are used by modern-day faith healers, such as the laying on of hands, blowing over the affected person, throwing a cloak over the affected person, making the person perform an action that he/she cannot carry out as a result of the illness, to mention but a few. The premise for receiving the healing, however, constitutes faith, resistance of illness, followed by a repeated confession.
Jesus' healing was undeniable and authentic and had no comebacks. Even his enemies were amazed and astounded by the miracles he performed and did not deny or discredit them.	Modern-day healings, when followed up, tend to indicate that some people report divine healing that lasted, while many others are still complaining of suffering the illness or report only a small improvement in the condition (Lewis 1989:24–26). Some even died at a later stage of the disease they had been cured of.
Jesus' healing ministry was not founded on repetition of affirmations, but on instructions or commands. No case of any person who was not healed in Jesus' ministry had ever been recorded.	Healing administered by faith healers is founded on human effort, namely faith, as promised in God's Word, followed by repetitions of affirmations In modern-day healings, many cases of believers who were not healed have been recorded.

from the principles of 'New Thought' teaching, clothed it in a Christian coat and presented it to the believer.

Little reference is made to the sovereignty of God and his intervention by performing miracles at his will. Neither is there a submission to the will of God, seeing that the proponents claim to understand and know the will of God. The danger in believing that you know God's will is that the believer can 'control' the actions of God and demand specific action from him, based on a twisted understanding and interpretation of his Word.

The proof is in the pudding

The question remains: Does the theology of healing propagated by the Faith Movement bear fruit? Denial of the symptoms of sickness and repeated confession are no guarantee for healing. Instead, it could lead to deterioration in health, and even death. The low success rate of the proponents of the Faith Movement is definitely no testimony to, nor a confirmation of, their teachings.

- John Osteen, the pastor of 'Word of Faith Ministries', developed a number of medical conditions, including heart disease, and died of a heart attack in 1999, at the age of 73. This happened despite declaring himself healed to his congregation and stating that God had told him that he would be preaching into his nineties. His wife developed breast cancer, which later spread to the liver. However, she underwent traditional treatment and survived.
- Kathryn Kuhlman, a faith healer of stature, was diagnosed with an enlarged heart in 1955. Many faith healing attempts were made, and she got the best medical treatment available at the time, yet she died of heart failure 20 years later.
- Renowned faith healer, TL Osborn's wife, Peggy, died of lung cancer in 1995, despite her declaration to the congregation in 1994 that she had received supernatural healing. Doctors, however, later determined that her 'healing' was in fact a short-lived remission as a result of traditional treatment.
- The wife of Charles Capps, another faith healer, underwent traditional treatment for unspecified cancer and survived.
- Joyce Meyer developed breast cancer in 1989. Although she claims that she stood on the Word, she still received traditional treatment.
- Oral Roberts received angioplasty to treat a heart attack that he suffered (Wikipedia Word of Faith 2009d:3).

From the above examples it is clear that it is foolish to ignore symptoms such as those of cancer and to denounce them as decoys of the devil. Early diagnosis is crucial for effective treatment.

CONCLUSION

Compared to the healing ministry of Jesus in the Bible, discussed earlier, the faith healers deviate substantially.

Furthermore, the Faith Movement and its teachings on healing seem to portray a strong parallel with New Thought teaching. Although the Bible and scriptures are presented as the basis for healing, strong emphasis is placed on the human being's capacity for shaping his/her own destiny, even if it means that scripture must be bent into shape to serve this purpose. Believers are advised to steadfastly endure and confess until the healing takes place. The Word of God seems to be applied to serve the human desire without consideration for the sovereignty of God. The roles of Creator and creation are exchanged. Man demands and God provides!

Healing in the Faith Movement is not so much a result of God who intervenes, but rather a result of human potential to overcome through the power of the mind. Faith, which is propagated as the spiritual hands, so to speak, through which a person obtains healing from God, also seems to have taken on another character. Indeed, this 'faith' does not rely on the ability of God, but on the power of the repeated confession of the person

in need of healing. Divine healing is a reality, but a fundamental aspect of this healing is that God is the healer and he acts in sovereignty at will. No man can claim that he knows the full will of God and therefore no man can dictate to God. The healings that Jesus performed served the purpose of authenticating Jesus as the Messiah. It seems that the majority of faith healers attempt to identify with Jesus in a position of authority, which enables them, as gifted persons of God, to summon divine healing.

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