

STATEMENT DN068

**The Christian, Energetic Medicine, “New Age Paranoia”
by Elliot Miller**

According to a recent Time/CNN poll, about 30 percent of Americans have resorted to some form of “unconventional therapy,” “half of them within the past year.”¹

Perhaps more significantly, “holistic health” approaches have been steadily working their way from the New Age health care fringe into mainstream medical practice. Therapies such as acupuncture, biofeedback, and “Therapeutic Touch” (the laying on of hands to channel “Universal Life Energy” to the patient) are increasingly accepted and utilized by physicians, hospitals, and clinics across the country. The use of meditation and visualization are commonly prescribed to reduce stress. Chiropractic, long considered anathema by orthodox medicine, has recently acquired a new respectability.² And at the local chiropractors office, spinal adjustments are not infrequently combined with more exotic forms of “energy balancing.”³

In the view of many evangelical cult watchers — including John Weldon, Paul Reisser, M.D., and myself — this trend is providing the New Age movement with one of its most strategic opportunities to convert our culture.⁴ For many holistic health modalities pack pantheistic/occultic philosophy and spiritual experience that can beguile and win over the often unwary and vulnerable patient.

But not all evangelicals share this concern.

THE CHRISTIAN HOLISTIC HEALTH MOVEMENT

There is a growing movement of Christian practitioners of holistic (or “wholistic”) health, and of Christians who turn to such treatments for their physical maladies.⁵ Perhaps the most articulate and vigorous spokesperson for this movement is Monte Kline, Ph.D., a former staff member with Campus Crusade for Christ who became a nutritionist and “wholistic health practitioner” after a personal bout with cancer.

In his March/April 1988 *Christian Health Counselor* newsletter, for example, Kline devotes six pages to the subject of “New Age paranoia” in the church. He argues that Christians have often been more hysterical than rational in their approach to the New Age movement, with the result that many innocent people and legitimate ideas and practices have been tarnished with the label “New Age.” He acknowledges that “there is much, much spiritual error in the New Age movement,”⁶ and Christians need to be discerning about these elements. But the opposition of many Christian authors to certain holistic health therapies represents what he calls “flat earth Christianity.”

Flat Earth Christianity

Flat earth Christianity is the too-often-prevalent Christian mentality that considers heretical and even demonic any theory that does not fit in with its traditions and present knowledge (e.g., for many medieval Christians the idea that the earth is round and not the Center of the universe was Considered anti-Christian). Kline explains:

Their assumption is that anything outside their knowledge of the creation is supernatural in the demonic sense and therefore to be denied. Thus, the Ch'i energy of acupuncture, auras, and chakras could not possibly be just another part of God's creation, only unknown to them....Yet man is called to exercise dominion over His [God's] creation (Genesis 1:28), and how can man do that without exploration and discovery? True science is merely the processes of discovering, quantifying, and applying what God has built into His creation.⁷

Kline argues that the concept of holistic health is legitimate and much needed. While agreeing that New Agers have attached unchristian philosophy to its practice, he affirms that we should not “throw the baby out with the bath water” but rather provide a *biblical framework* for holistic health.

There are senses in which I could agree with everything in Kline's position as represented above. I am glad that he recognizes the unchristian nature of New Age philosophy. And I can agree with many of his criticisms of certain Christian critics of the New Age movement. A number of innocent people and legitimate ideas and practices *have* been unfairly labeled New Age.

I would further agree with Kline that the basic *concept* of a holistic approach to health care is legitimate and needed, and that in certain respects the contemporary holistic health movement has contributed toward meeting this need. (Not all of its approaches are occultic or medically unsound; some, such as the emphases on exercise and nutrition, can be truly beneficial.) And, I strongly concur that a "Christian holistic health movement" is needed, if only it will stay clear of New Age error and medically unsound practices.

Finally, I would agree with Kline's definition of true science and his characterization of many Christians (past and present) as having a "flat earth" mentality concerning things they do not understand.

WHAT IS BIOENERGY?

Despite these areas of agreement, I strongly disagree with Kline about certain holistic health theories and practices which he advocates and employs. At the heart of the difference is the practice of "energetic medicine." Energetic medicine encompasses dozens of diverse therapies and diagnostic approaches, including meridian therapy (e.g., acupuncture, acupressure), Applied Kinesiology (both practiced by Kline — he uses electroacupuncture as a diagnostic technique), homeopathy, reflexology, polarity therapy, Therapeutic Touch, and (at least in its original theory) chiropractic. All these approaches are concerned with balancing or releasing energy in the body for the advancement of health and the treatment of disease. The energy that is the concern of these therapies has been given many names, including bioenergy, vital force, the life force, universal life energy, cosmic energy, chi (acupuncture), and Innate Intelligence (chiropractic).

If these therapies necessarily involve the practitioner and patient (at least on the level of belief, and perhaps much more) with this energy, it is crucial for the Christian to carefully consider whether it is a scientifically explainable energy (i.e., a *physical* energy) or whether it is a psychic or occultic energy (i.e., a *spiritual*, supernatural, and demonic power). As will be explained in what follows, *it is my view that the latter explanation is best supported by the available evidence.*

Although the view I'm advocating is exactly what inspired Kline's term "flat earth Christianity," I do not believe the label applies in this case. For Kline has not brought all the relevant factors into the discussion. He argues that "to say that invisible energy forces are the common denominator of creation is not scripturally heretical; it's only offensive to our traditionally accepted world view; yet we're all involved everyday with invisible energy forces through television, radio, and household electricity."⁸

To be sure, some Christians have imprecisely objected to the idea of "invisible energies," but that is not really the issue. Energy is often invisible without being occultic. Obviously, the "invisible energies" of micro, radio, and television waves can be and have been scientifically explained. Though they are not "physical" in the sense of *visible* or *tangible*, they are physical in the sense that they are a part of the space-time-matter-energy continuum that composes this world. Therefore they operate according to natural laws that can be scientifically measured and demonstrated.

Devilish Energy — An Operative Reality

The issue Kline ignores, however, is this: If devilish (not to mention divine) supernatural energy is operative in the world (and Scriptures like 2 Thess. 2:7-9 compel us to affirm that it is), then it is not true that *all* energetic phenomena have a scientific explanation and are among those parts of God's creation that we are to "take dominion" over. We therefore cannot afford to *assume* that all phenomena are spiritually safe for us to explore — even if certain good effects are associated with them (2 Cor. 11:14).⁹

What if the practice is not condemned by name in the Scriptures (a point Kline makes in defense of acupuncture, Applied Kinesiology, and "most" holistic health practices¹⁰)? If it can be shown to be a part of or intrinsically related to something that *is* specifically condemned (in this case, *spiritism* — Deut. 18:11), or if it tends to involve or encourage unbiblical (in this case, *occultic*) concepts or behavior, it should still be avoided (1 Thess. 5:22).

I recognize that in matters of discernment such as these — where a practice is not specifically named in Scripture — a Christian's judgment cannot always be foolproof. It could be that a concept or practice we currently consider occultic will later be shown to be scientific. But if after careful, objective examination of the available evidence something *appears* to be occultic, we do well to avoid it. This is prudence, not closed-mindedness or paranoia.

A Mysterious Force

Kline laments that “the Church has a penchant for not accepting any valid scientific discovery until about a century after the world has.”¹¹ Even if we accepted this claim, it would be irrelevant to the issue at hand. For the “world” (as represented by the scientific establishment) has *not* accepted the bioenergy central to the above-named holistic health therapies as a valid scientific discovery.

Despite much effort to establish its scientific basis, this force remains enigmatic.¹² A few debatable claims to scientific verification for it have been made, but they have not been accepted by the scientific community at large.¹³ Even many proponents of energetic medicine admit that bioenergy still fails the tests of repeatability and explainability required of an authentic scientific theory).¹⁴

Pagan/Occult Connections

While bioenergy has resisted the scrutiny of hard science, it is not difficult to classify it in terms of the sociological setting in which it has historically appeared: it is a fundamental feature of *spiritistic paganism*. Parapsychologist Thelma Moss, who has extensively researched healing energies, provides a few examples: “Is there a common thread that can be discerned through these various phenomena of healing? I believe so. The Hindus call it ‘prana,’ the Hawaiians ‘mana,’ the Chinese ‘ch’i,’ and Hippocrates called it the ‘heat oozing out of my hand.’ Mesmer ‘animal magnetism,’ and Quimby ‘mind force.’ I believe they were all referring to the same invisible energy.”¹⁵

Wherever it has appeared — in ancient paganism, modern occultism, or parapsychological research — this “life force” has been accompanied by altered states of consciousness, psychic phenomena, and contact with spirits.¹⁶ Additionally, those who are capable of perceiving, and adept at manipulating, this force invariably are shamans (e.g., witch doctors), “sensitives,” or psychics, thoroughly immersed in the pagan/occult world.¹⁷

In the New Age movement today bioenergy theory operates within the context of pantheism: all reality is God, God is impersonal but conscious energy; therefore, all reality is a manifestation of spiritual energy. And if this energy can be released man will be *both* healed *and* mystically enlightened to his true divinity. The actual manifestations of this energy (e.g., healings) have convinced many that New Age pantheism must be true (which provides us with a motive for satanic forces to manifest such healings).

Furthermore, the energy system models used to explain these therapies — which Kline himself defends (the meridians of acupuncture, the seven chakras [psychic centers] of yoga, the auras of occultism) — are all *imbedded* in world views that are intrinsically pagan and antagonistic to Christianity.¹⁸ Their intricate structures, and laws are directly related to *religious* concepts and are not even remotely related to physical science. It simply will not do to say (as many Christians besides Kline have) that these systems are true aspects of God’s creation that were discovered and accurately described or diagrammed, but not accurately interpreted, by pagans.¹⁹

A Vital Mistake

To my knowledge, Christians working with meridians and other religious/occultic energy systems have not seriously attempted to reconcile these systems to their faith. But they have at least grappled with the underlying concept of bioenergy. Attempting to demystify this force, Kline identifies it with electromagnetism. Citing the holistic health doctrine that an energy-based model is better for understanding health and disease than one based on matter, Kline comments: “It’s not hard, based upon quantum physics to come to this conclusion. Indeed, various frequencies of electromagnetic energy are the common denominator of all things. I acknowledge that as a fact of God’s creation. The New Age pantheist, however, sees that energy as the ‘all is One’ that is a non-personal God.”²⁰ Endorsing Dr. Harold Saxton Burr’s *Electrodynamic Theory of Life*, Kline concludes that “there is a deeper level of life beneath the physical and chemical levels we normally measure — an electrical level that is ultimately responsible for producing our physical and chemical bodies.”²¹

At the same time, Kline correctly identifies the bioenergy concept with the metaphysical (i.e., philosophical) theory of life known as *vitalism*. Portraying this philosophy as a scientifically valid alternative to the dominant view of mechanism, he states that “the concept of Vitalism acknowledges that difference, that something extra that distinguishes a living from a non-living being.”²² Scripturally, he explains, that “something more” or “vital force” of vitalism is the “breath of life” that God breathed into the dust to make man (Gen. 2:7). He concludes: “I believe that Scripture clearly shows the truth of the vitalistic concept of life over the mere mechanistic concept. The scriptural concept of Vitalism is the key to understanding the body’s ‘invisible energies’ and bioenergetic testing methods.”²³

Although Kline has succeeded at describing bioenergy in nonoccultic terms (in some respects scientific, in other respects biblical), he has done so at the expense of a coherent position. Misunderstanding the meaning of vitalism, he has confused several distinct concepts. First of all, the difference between the philosophies of mechanism and vitalism is not the difference between a view of life based on matter and a view of life based on electromagnetic energy. The “vital energy” of vitalism is classically a nonscientific force. It cannot be reduced to the laws of physics (including electrodynamics) any more than it can the laws of chemistry. Thus, ironically, in holding that life can be explained in terms of scientific (i.e., physical) energy Kline is actually arguing for a mechanistic view.

Second, and related to the above, while it could be said that the Bible supports a form of vitalism, this does not provide a “key to understanding the body’s ‘invisible energies’ and bioenergetic testing methods.” Genesis 2:7 relates that the Lord “formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a *living being* [Hebrew: *hay nephesh*].” The Hebrew Scriptures use the term *haya* to denote the experience and quality of life; its usage provides no insight into the nature of that life (i.e., pertaining to the vitalism debate). The word *nephesh*, which in its original usage meant “breath,” is used in the Old Testament to cover a range of related concepts including “life,” “soul,” and “person.” In the light of all usages of the word (and the New Testament usages of the parallel Greek word *psuché*), we must conclude that what God breathed into man was his soul: the nonphysical (and thus nonscientifically testable) part of his nature.²⁴ Because all of man’s parts are interrelated, his physical body is animated. But his life is *seated* within his soul; it is distinct from the electromagnetic forces at work in his physical being and cannot be manipulated in any therapeutic approach.

Third, the form of vitalism that is at the base of all energetic healing models is not the biblical view. Rather, it is rooted in an “emanational” philosophy that is closely related to pantheism.²⁵ According to this view, the “life force” is the very essence of God, radiating outward from the Divine Center as the inner reality and vitalizing principle of creation. Thus the universe becomes intrinsically alive (its essence being “spirit” or “intelligence”).

Many New Agers would *agree* with Kline that bioenergy is electromagnetism, but in their view it is much more than that. All “physical” energies are manifestations of divine energy. Since pantheists believe that *nothing* is ultimately physical, they easily blur the distinctions between physical and spiritual entities — distinctions that are critical to the Christian who wishes to avoid demonic involvement. Thus, for them, bioenergy takes on properties beyond anything science has found in electromagnetism: it has a mind of its own and a will to be well (the Innate Intelligence of original chiropractic theory); it is better manipulated and channeled by therapists who have highly developed psychic or intuitive abilities.²⁶ Ultimately, vitalism is considered scientific by New Agers only because the spiritual realm itself is considered scientific in their pantheistic world view.

It would appear that Christians are doomed to failure when they attempt to fit the vital energy of energetic medicine into a Christian context. Yes, there are energies which radiate throughout the universe and permeate and surround our physical bodies, and there are respects in which these energies are significant to health and health care.²⁷ But they are *physical*, not *vital*, forces. Yes, there is a “vital force” which animates our bodies, but this is localized within our souls. It is not a cosmic energy that flows into our bodies, passes through various channels (e.g., meridians, chakras), and then flows back out into the universe. Thus, it cannot be obstructed; nor is there a need to “release” or “balance” it.

The idea that the universe is energy, that this energy is alive, and that this vital energy needs to be manipulated in our bodies to promote health is the *basis* of energetic medicine; it is essentially a pantheistic view and can not be conformed to biblical theology. Pantheistic vitalism — since it makes no radical distinctions between spirit and matter — can have applications to health care. A *biblical* vitalism (if we may use the term) cannot.

Clearly, Kline has missed the differences between scientific and nonscientific energies and lumped them all together under the misleading heading of “invisible energies.” Once these various concepts are sorted out we find no solid reason to believe that the energy of energetic medicine is physical and scientific, but several good reasons to strongly suspect that if it exists at all (and I believe it does), it is supernatural and demonic. The risk is great, therefore, that it cannot be utilized without the user *becoming* the utilized (i.e., a pawn and victim of satanic forces and deception). In fact, my wide-ranging research of occultism emboldens me to suggest that this energy is *part and parcel* of the occult — where the occult appears, it can be found; where it is found, the occult will inevitably appear.

ARE THEY THEIR OWN BEST ARGUMENT?

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We might expect Kline and other Christian practitioners of these arts to reply that they themselves are the best argument against what has been presented above: they are Bible-believing Christians, not New Ager. Thus this energy does not always appear in the context of paganism, and it does not always lead to occult involvement and New Age beliefs.

All that has really been proven so far, however, is that Bible-believing Christians can *attempt* to utilize this energy within a nonoccultic context. If this energy is inherently occultic (and thus demonic) then all their good intentions will not prevent Christians involved with it from becoming confused and compromised. Continued involvement could gradually lead to *further* involvement with the occult, and the deterioration of Christian faith and life. I am aware of cases where this scenario has indeed been lived out, and I find no assurance that the same will not ultimately hold true for all who become deeply involved with this energy. If the *practice* is occultic, then Kline's advice to "seek committed Christian practitioners"²⁸ will not suffice.

In summary, Kline's "flat earth" analogy fails because it overlooks one all-important factor. While he rightly notes that Christians have opposed legitimate science in the past because its theories contradicted their traditions, this is not the case here. The concern of evangelicals like myself is rather the clear-cut historic connection between this unvalidated "science" and spiritistic paganism.

Christians who believe in the supreme authority of Scripture must also believe in the biblical doctrine of Satan and his pervasive influence in this present world system. If "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19), how much more the kingdom of the occult, his unique domain! Thus Christians have every reason to be cautious concerning phenomena that has had a long and strong connection to the realm of occultism and paganism.

NOTES

¹Claudia Wallis, "Why New Age Medicine Is Catching On," *Time*, 4 November 1991, 68.

²See, e.g., Elisabeth Rosenthal, "Hands-On Back Therapy Is Winning Respectability," *New York Times*, 3 July 1991, sect. A.

³Many chiropractors disavow such energy balancing, however. For example, see the Christian Chiropractors Association's "Policy Statement on New Age Healing" (CCA, 3200 S. Lemay Av., Fort Collins, CO 80525-3605).

⁴See, e.g., John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Can You Trust Your Doctor?* (Chattanooga, TN: Global Publishers, 1991); Paul C. Reisser, Teri K. Reisser, and John Weldon, *New Age Medicine* (Chattanooga, TN: Global Publishers, 1988); and chapters 2 and 5 of Elliot Miller, *A Crash Course on the New Age Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989). A European evaluation along the same lines is found in Samuel Pfeifer, M.D., *Healing at Any Price? The Hidden Dangers of Alternative Medicine* (Milton Keynes, England: Word Publishing, 1988).

⁵See, e.g., the preface of Reisser, Reisser, and Weldon.

⁶Monte Kline, Ph.D., "New Age Paranoia," *Christian Health Counselor*, March/April 1988, 1-2.

⁷*Ibid.*, 4.

⁸*Ibid.*, 3.

⁹Although Kline acknowledges the need to test potentially occultic activity (*Ibid.*, 5-6), the tests he recommends are insufficient. While "direct scriptural reference" is invaluable, practices unnamed in Scripture can still be unbiblical. Testing the fruit of an activity in someone's life is also an important criteria, but requiring subjective judgments as it does, this test can never be conclusive on its own.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 3.

¹²See, e.g., John Taylor, *Science and the Supernatural* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1950), 42-43: *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, 2d ed., s.v. "Psychical Research."

¹³For example, Kirlian photography is constantly cited as providing the long-awaited proof of an aura of life energy surrounding the human body. Yet in scientific literature the phenomenon has long been sufficiently explained in terms of the moisture content of animate and inanimate objects — without reference to any vital energy. See, e.g., Taylor, 43-44.

¹⁴See, e.g., Bernard Grad, "Healing by the Laying on of Hands: A Review of Experiments," in *Ways of Health: Holistic Approaches in Ancient and Contemporary Medicine*, ed. David S. Sobel (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 283-85; and *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, s.v. "Emanations."

¹⁵Dr. Thelma Moss, *The Probability of the Impossible: Scientific Discoveries and Explorations of the Psychic World* (New York: New American Library, 1974), 84.

¹⁶See e.g., *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, s.v. "Vitality."

¹⁷See, e.g., the discussion of Baron von Reichenbach's experiments in *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, s.v. "Emanations."

¹⁸In a longer version of this article I devote over 700 words to expounding and demonstrating this position, using meridian therapy as a case in point. The interested reader may obtain a copy by writing me at Christian Research Institute.

¹⁹This is not to say that all forms of energetic medicine are unscientific and unbiblical in *every* respect. Acupuncture and chiropractic both appeal to a life force as the basis for their practice. Through manipulating this energy they supposedly can heal all manner of disease. They have not lived up to this claim. Nonetheless they are popular forms of alternative medicine. Why? They *have* proven effective at relieving certain kinds of pain. But this success can be explained in *orthodox* medical terms, without reference to any life force.

²⁰Kline, 3.

²¹Monte Kline, "Bioenergetic Testing," *Christian Health Counselor*, May/June 1988, 3.

²²*Ibid.*, 2.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴Scripture also informs us that other animals have souls (*nephesh* — see Gen. 1:20, 21, 24), the difference being that only man's soul is created in the image of God and thus survives death. While the word soul is not used for the lower life forms, we may legitimately infer that their life too is not reducible to the laws of physical science.

²⁵See, e.g., the *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, s.v. "Emanations."

²⁶For example, acupressurist Diane Black explains that while theoretical knowledge and technique are important, "the chi dance is the thing." That is, one must intuitively tap into "energies from the core of our beings and from the universe around us....it is the primordial skill of exchanging life's energies, of opening to the universe's energies that we can't possess, but *can* use, channel and build with as a tool for life." ("Chi — The Life Force," *Handtools: Acupressure Quarterly*, Winter 1984, 6.)

²⁷See, e.g., Harold M. Schmeck, Jr., "Magnetism: Promising New Tool in Diagnostic Medical Research," *The Orange County Register*, 7 February 1981.

²⁸Kline, *New Age Paranoia*, 6.

Glossary

Applied Kinesiology: A diagnostic method based on the premise that various muscles are related to various organs and glands, and that by testing for weakness in these muscles dysfunctions in the related organs and glands can be detected.

energetic medicine: Any of several therapeutic approaches which are based on the view that good health consists of proper energy flow in the body, and a blockage or imbalance of this flow constitutes disease.

meridian therapy: Any health care method which, on the assumption that health consists in the balanced flow of chi (vital energy) through twelve bilateral channels (meridians) in the human body, seeks to balance this chi by stimulating — via puncture (acupuncture) or pressure (acupressure) — various acu-points along the meridians' courses.

spiritism: The voluntary possession of a human being by an invisible entity (usually thought of as a spirit) to obtain information, healing power, and so forth.

vitalism: A metaphysical doctrine of the nature of life which states that life is a substance that is not exhaustively composed of nonliving substance (i.e., physical matter/energy). The term is often associated with a vitalistic concept of the universe itself in which evolution is guided upward by a vital impetus.