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## THEOPHOSTIC PRAYER MINISTRY: CHRISTIAN PRAYER, OCCULT VISUALIZATION, OR SECULAR PSYCHOTHERAPY?

Part One in a Two-part Evaluation

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### SYNOPSIS

Theophostic Prayer Ministry (TPM), founded by Ed M. Smith in 1996, is an approach to “mind renewal,” or the healing of emotional pain. TPM is perhaps the fastest-growing method of inner healing or healing of memories in evangelical churches today. After an exhaustive evaluation, the Christian Research Institute (CRI) detects nothing unbiblical about the core theory and practice of TPM. The theory seems elegant in its profound simplicity, and the anecdotal reports of its effectiveness in practice justify further investigation; nonetheless, much more scientific research needs to be done before even the more modest claims of TPM can be validated, and some of the extravagant claims seem unlikely ever to be established.

CRI does have concerns about several peripheral issues regarding TPM, but we have been favorably impressed by Smith’s openness to constructive criticism and change. We caution Christians who practice or receive TPM to be discerning about Smith’s teachings on the sin nature, sanctification, and satanic ritual abuse, and to be aware that, despite major improvements, there are still several aspects of Smith’s teaching on spiritual warfare that CRI does not endorse.

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“Theophostic Ministry has totally changed my life over the past three years....The major depression, shame, co-dependent behaviour patterns, suicidal thinking, and agony is [sic] gone. I don’t even remember all the details of all the memories until I look into old journals. And then it’s: ‘Oh yes, I remember’ —but there’s no pain.”

—Karen Hayward, **Theophostic Prayer Ministry recipient**<sup>1</sup>

“Dr. Ed Smith claims ‘Theophostics’ [sic] was a direct revelation given from God, to him, in 1996....Did God allow hurting people to stay in their emotional pain, for thousands of years, waiting for Ed Smith’s breakthrough in psychotherapy? Surely not....Jesus appearing to the client is the same as the New Age practice of channeling.”

—Whitedove 7 (**Internet alias**), **former Theophostic Prayer Ministry recipient and facilitator**<sup>2</sup>

Across America and, indeed, the world, a 10-year-old inner healing ministry originating out of Campbellsville, Kentucky, is provoking passionate pro and con pronouncements such as those presented above. Theophostic Prayer Ministry (TPM) is perhaps the fastest-growing approach to inner healing or healing of memories<sup>3</sup> in evangelical churches today, and its use spans almost all denominational lines.

Founder Ed M. Smith says that Theophostic Prayer Ministries is “primarily a publishing company that produces training materials, books and video tapes for pastors, mental health professionals and lay ministers. We have distribution centers in several foreign countries and have trained people in over 120

countries worldwide.”<sup>4</sup> The ministry consistently has sent out about 1,000 training manuals each month for the past several years to people interested in facilitating TPM sessions.<sup>5</sup>

Smith holds a doctorate in pastoral ministry from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a master’s degree in education (with a focus in marriage and family counseling) from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. After serving for 17 years as a Southern Baptist pastor, he embarked on a full-time counseling practice.

TPM began in 1996 when Smith reached an impasse in his ability to help adult victims of childhood sexual abuse. He could help them realize intellectually that whatever they experienced in their past was no longer threatening them in their present, but he could not help them to feel that truth emotionally. One night he was driving home from a group session and he cried out to God, “I can’t do this anymore.”<sup>6</sup> Smith says that in answer to this desperate prayer the Lord opened the Scriptures to him so that he could see that the missing ingredient in his counseling ministry had been the Lord Himself. He had acknowledged God before and after each session, but the sessions themselves did not allow for the presence of the Holy Spirit. Once Smith began to invite Jesus into his sessions, Theophostic Prayer Ministry was born.<sup>7</sup> Theophostic is derived from two Greek words that together mean “the light of God.”

### THE CORE THEOPHOSTIC THEORY AND METHOD

One of the elements that make TPM a strikingly distinct approach to healing emotional pain is the central place facilitators seek to give the Spirit of Christ in the sessions. Even a skeptical observer would have to acknowledge that the sessions proceed as if three parties are involved: the facilitator, the recipient, and Jesus. The role that Jesus is believed to play is better understood in light of the core theory behind TPM.

TPM is based on the premise that one’s present emotional pain is usually rooted in the past—not in past experiences per se, but in the interpretations one assigns to them. Smith argues that when people are traumatized, Satan, other people, or their own minds often will supply them with a false interpretation of the event. For example, if a young girl is sexually molested by her father, the thought might register in her mind at some point afterward, “You didn’t cry out for help. You must have wanted it. You’re dirty.” Now, as an adult, the molestation survivor is unable to engage in healthy marital relations because of feeling sexually defiled.

In Smith’s view, emotional pain need not be rooted in severe trauma; it may stem from lesser events such as the harsh or incessant criticism of a parent or teacher, the cruelty of classmates, or the humiliation of a public failure. In other words, not only do the grievously abused possess memories that are based on lies or false impressions (i.e., lie-based), but all of us do, and these are at the root of much of our present pain and irrational, undesirable behavior. Such memories typically recall childhood experiences, but there are exceptions. Whenever a present situation is similar enough to a past traumatic experience, it can trigger that lie-based thinking and our reaction may be out of proportion to the present circumstance. If, for example, a man’s father was constantly critical of decisions he attempted to make on his own, he may lose his temper when his wife innocently asks him what he’s doing because he thinks she’s questioning his judgment.

Drawing on current brain theory,<sup>8</sup> Smith argues that such primal traumatic experiences and their false interpretations are registered in the right side of our brains, while our ability to understand data intellectually and objectively is the function of the left side of our brains.<sup>9</sup> He believes this explains why he was having no success convincing adult survivors of sexual abuse that they were no longer in danger: in order to be delivered from the emotional power of those lies, the survivors would need to learn the truth experientially, in a manner similar to how the lies were implanted in their minds.

Theophostic Prayer Ministry therefore unfolds along the following lines: after receiving the recipient’s permission to do so, the facilitator invites Jesus into the session and asks Him to reveal His truth about the memories that will be brought to mind. The recipient is then asked to try to identify the memory where she (or he) first felt the emotions that are troubling her in the present (e.g., feeling unloved). She does this by closing her eyes and mentally drifting back through time, following the “smoke trail” or “emotional echo” of the pain until she reaches a significant memory that matches the pain (e.g., her single mother turned over custody of her to a resentful aunt in order to pursue a relationship with a man who

didn't want the child). The facilitator encourages the recipient to describe the memory and then to describe how that remembered experience makes her feel (e.g., "I am all alone"). This is where the lie is manifest.

The facilitator asks the recipient to rate how true the interpretation of the experience she has just described feels to her. If it feels very true, he suspects he may have found the original lie and encourages the recipient to feel and "embrace" that emotional pain. He then asks Jesus what He wants the recipient to know about the memory content she has just surfaced. The recipient waits on Jesus for an answer, and, predictably, a vision, words, or realization will be impressed on her mind. This answer may be biblical truth (e.g., "I will never leave you nor forsake you") or factual truth (e.g., she might have been deserted as a child, but she now has a loving husband and many caring people in her family and church who are there for her). The facilitator then again asks the recipient whether the previous interpretation of the experience feels true, and, again predictably, it no longer feels true at all. The facilitator keeps the session focused on that memory until the recipient can remember it with "perfect peace" (i.e., with no hint of the emotional pain and conflict previously associated with it).

If such peace is not achieved, then the facilitator assumes that the original memory or further lies are yet to be uncovered, and the process is repeated through as many memories and lies as necessary for the pain to be completely healed. Smith says that with an experienced facilitator, resolution of lie-based pain in a specific area of memory can usually be achieved in one session, although other lies may need to be dealt with before overall improvement is noted.<sup>10</sup>

Smith's interpretation of what is happening in such sessions is that in the same experiential manner in which the lie was first believed, Jesus now replaces it with His truth. He enters into the recipient's memory so that she can reexperience the event with Him in the midst of it, giving her a true perspective of what happened: "Jesus brings present-tense experience into a past-tense experience creating a new experience. As a ministry facilitator I cannot do this. I can bring information into a past-tense experience but new data rarely has transforming power in such cases. However, new experience can override old experience."<sup>11</sup> Smith understands this divine action to be the progressive "mind renewal" mentioned in Romans 12:2 and related passages, and he believes it plays a central role in the sanctification process (a view I will critique in part two).

Smith says that people who go through this process are healed in the area of their emotional lives that Jesus touched. If a situation similar to the original one now comes up, it no longer triggers the same irrational and harmful emotional reactions. He further maintains that this healing is both lasting and maintenance free for a wide variety of emotional and behavioral problems, including depression, general anxiety, anger issues, phobias, panic attacks, sexual addiction, and eating disorders. Recipient and facilitator testimonials in support of these claims abound in TPM literature, on the Internet, and during TPM events.

## EVALUATION OF THE CORE THEOPHOSTIC THEORY AND METHOD

Christian Research Institute (CRI) finds nothing in TPM's core theory and practice that is inconsistent with Scripture. It certainly fits the biblical worldview to hold that believing lies oppresses or injures people and replacing those lies with truth frees or heals them. The theory that the emotional pain that haunts many people's lives (including Christians) is rooted in false beliefs associated with past experiences rather than the experiences themselves seems elegant in its profound simplicity, and the proposal that Satan is often the source of those lies while Jesus is the source of the truth that dispels them is again consistent with Scripture (e.g., John 8:44; 14:6; 18:37). This emphasis on conforming one's beliefs to truth is entirely biblical (Ps. 43:3; 51:6; Prov. 23:23; 1 Cor. 3:6; Eph. 4:14-15, 25; 5:8; 6:14), and the complete dependence on Christ in ministry to the hurting that TPM advocates, to the point of giving Him the central place in that ministry, is commendable at least in concept and warrants consideration.

We also find the numerous public testimonies of facilitators and recipients for TPM's lasting efficacy to be intriguing enough to encourage and justify further investigation, but such anecdotal support is entirely insufficient to establish TPM's claims. Rigorous scientific testing is needed to demonstrate that TPM gets results superior to all or most other varieties of inner healing/therapy and is not simply reaping the common benefits of counseling (e.g., the placebo effect and the therapeutic value of catharsis in a caring

environment). Researchers have conducted some initial surveys and case studies that provide favorable results for TPM,<sup>12</sup> but much more extensive and rigorous testing (e.g., randomized control group studies) will be required to establish its claims. CRI thus finds no biblical or spiritual problem with Christians engaging in the TPM core process (but please read part two where several concerns about Smith's overall teaching will be identified), but at this early stage of the research we can endorse neither TPM's theory of emotional pain nor its specific claims of efficacy.

### **ADDRESSING BASIC CONCERNS ABOUT TPM**

There are, however, specific concerns that Christians could raise regarding TPM's core theory and practice that should not be ignored. These include:

#### **1. Does TPM Engage in "Psychoheresy"?**

When Ed Smith first founded this ministry he called it TheoPhostic Counseling, but "prayer ministry" is much more descriptive of what goes on in a Theophostic session than is "counseling," which often connotes giving advice or offering "directive" psychotherapy. The first principle in the Theophostic Prayer Ministry Guidelines, which are available on the TPM Web site, affirms, "Theophostic Ministry is prayer not counseling. Therefore I will not be offering you counsel but rather interceding with you to God. I will be ministering with you in prayer seeking to help you discover with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the root sources of the emotional pain in your life."<sup>13</sup>

Counseling does have a broader range of meaning than simply "giving advice," and in some of these senses TPM sessions could be called counseling. There is a significant difference, however, between TPM on the one hand, and Freudian, Rogerian, and other "nondirective" psychotherapies on the other hand: the sole function of the Theophostic facilitator is to facilitate the recipient's encounter with Jesus, and it is believed to be Jesus who does the actual therapeutic work. That hardly sounds like any known model of psychology.

It is true, however, that TPM incorporates in its theory and approach concepts found in some schools of the wide field of psychology. These include the idea of a subconscious, the belief that psychological and emotional problems can be rooted in the past and that revisiting such past experiences may be necessary to resolve those problems, and the describing of such problems as wounds that need to be healed. TPM also uses psychological terms to describe phenomena believed to be encountered in the sessions, such as repression, dissociation, and abreaction (the acting out of repressed emotional conflict in sometimes extreme words or behavior).

Some Christians will reject TPM simply for its use of elements of psychotherapy, since such Christians reject all forms of psychotherapy. Still other Christians who accept some forms of psychotherapy will reject TPM because they do not believe in revisiting past experiences to deal with present problems, or they disagree with some other aspect of its theory and practice. These positions are certainly legitimate options within the broader field of orthodox Christianity.

We must, however, advise against the position of Martin and Deidre Bobgan of Psychoheresy Awareness Ministries, which holds that any attempt to integrate any of the vast and often disparate elements of psychotherapy with theology constitutes "psychoheresy" and a distortion of the Christian faith.<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, the Bobgans have published a book accusing TPM of heresy.<sup>15</sup>

The Bobgans' use of the word heresy for teachings and ideas that do not actually constitute denials of essential doctrines of the Christian faith is unfortunate. As I have argued previously in this magazine,<sup>16</sup> there are different degrees of possible error in the Christian church. If presumed errors are treated as heresies that do not actually rise to that level, it will unnecessarily polarize Christians and generate more heat than light on important topics that deserve dispassionate discussion and debate for the good of the body of Christ.

#### **2. Does TPM Involve Recovered Memories and Visualization?**

These concerns have been raised by the Bobgans, Christian journalist Jan Fletcher in her book *Lying Spirits*,<sup>17</sup> and several others. CRI is certainly sympathetic with such concerns in general. We have

published articles warning about the dangers of recovered memory therapy as a form of illicit directive counseling that can implant suggestions in clients' minds, leading to false memories and false accusations against innocent people.<sup>18</sup> We have also published articles that warn against the dangers of visualization and guided imagery as activities that potentially can lead to altered states of consciousness, demonic delusion, false views of reality, and occult attempts to manipulate God, Jesus, and reality according to one's own desires or understanding.<sup>19</sup>

Such concerns certainly are relevant when evaluating TPM, since forgotten memories are sometimes recovered and visions are one way that recipients allegedly receive truth from Jesus. To accuse TPM of practicing recovered memory therapy and visualization, however, is to betray either ignorance or a bias against TPM that refuses to be corrected by clear and consistent facts. The official Theophostic Prayer Ministry Guidelines (see n. 13), which are given out to all facilitators as well as to recipients, repeatedly affirm that the TPM facilitator will avoid:

1. using all forms of guided imagery and directed visualization;
2. providing any informational input to the recipient;
3. making any suggestions as to what his (or her) memory content or lie-based thinking may contain;
4. asking any questions that are directive, suggestive, or that in any way reflect the facilitator's assumptions rather than the information that the recipient is surfacing;
5. interpreting or explaining any information, visions, dreams, or other "inner mind realities" that the recipient describes;
6. supplying the recipient with what the facilitator thinks he needs to know, including the facilitator's opinions and insight as well as any visions, prophecies, or words of knowledge the facilitator may believe she has received for the benefit of the recipient.

I spent a week in May 2003 at TPM's Campbellsville headquarters observing an entire Theophostic basic training seminar and witnessing numerous actual TPM sessions. Never once did Smith veer from these principles,<sup>20</sup> which also are emphasized repeatedly and consistently throughout TPM materials. (It should be clarified at this point that TPM uses the term *directive* in a limited sense and does provide structure and direction to its sessions, such as putting supposed truth from Jesus to biblical and other tests. These factors will be discussed in more detail under concern no. 4 and also in part two.)

Most of the memories revisited in TPM sessions were known to the recipients prior to the sessions, but occasionally memories do surface that can be called "recovered." This fact raises a valid concern that will be addressed thoroughly in part two, but nonetheless there are several significant differences between TPM and recovered memory therapy per se, which Smith demonstrated in an article in the Theophostic journal that is also available on the TPM Web site.<sup>21</sup>

Fletcher adds to the charge that TPM involves visualization a laundry list of occult practices, including mysticism, hypnosis, divination, and Gnosticism.<sup>22</sup> She specifically worries that the recipients' drifting back through past memories opens them up to altered states of consciousness (ASCs) and lying spirits (hence the title of her book).

As CRI's specialist in research of ASCs, mysticism, and the occult for the past 29 years, I find no foundation for Fletcher's concerns. She stretches the meaning of the word Gnosticism (which is the quest for Self-knowledge; i.e., the knowledge of one's own supposed divinity) beyond recognition in order to apply it to TPM (which is simply seeking the "knowledge" of the harmful lies that the individual believes). Mysticism likewise involves the quest for experiential union with the Divine and presupposes that experience is the ultimate test of truth; but neither of these features applies to Theophostic.<sup>23</sup> Fletcher uses the term divination<sup>24</sup> with reference to a practice that more properly should be called spiritism.<sup>25</sup> To charge TPM with spiritism, in turn, begs the question of whether the "spirit" they seek to "open themselves up to" is a lying spirit or is, in fact, Jesus. If the Jesus sought in TPM is the Jesus of orthodoxy (and everything I have seen indicates that He is<sup>26</sup>), then what TPM does should rather be called what Smith calls it: prayer.

Visualization is an active use of the imagination to harness creative energy that can be used as a stepping stone to make contact with spirits (whether “Jesus” or some other entity). Such an approach to encountering Jesus is fatally flawed because the subject is the one who determines what Jesus says or does. This critical flaw can be found in many varieties of inner healing, but not in TPM.

Unlike visualization, in TPM the subject is in a state of passive trust in the Spirit of God and there is no active effort to shape the spiritual experience. This passivity, on the other hand, is not the dangerous passivity of hypnosis or other ASCs, where a trance state is cultivated that can lead to a loss of ego boundaries (i.e., blurring of the subject/object distinction), a feeling of oneness with the universe, and the intrusion of spirit entities into the thought void that has been deliberately created. The TPM process by contrast is a simple drifting back from memory to memory with the goal of locating the original lie, in faith that at that point Christ will replace the lie with His truth. This activity neither empties the mind of content (as in meditation) nor uses the imagination as a springboard to the spiritual realm (as in visualization). It would seem the only legitimate concern that can be raised about this process is whether such faith is presumptuous. If it were, then what the subject experienced would be the product of his own mind rather than a true work of the Spirit of Christ.

### **3. Does TPM Illegitimately Presume That Christ Is Willing to Cooperate with the Process?**

As far as CRI is concerned, a major question regarding the legitimacy of the TPM approach is whether the participants’ trust that Jesus will answer their prayers for emotional healing is warranted. Unlike the Word of Faith movement and some other teachings that presumptuously “claim” the presence and power of Jesus for various purposes, it seems that a case can be made that TPM’s trust that Jesus responds to participants’ in-session prayers is biblically warranted.

Theophostic prayer is predicated on the assumptions that (1) if we ask our Father for a loaf of bread, He will respond with bread and not a serpent (i.e., we will receive what we need through the agency of His Spirit rather than what would harm us through the agency of a demon: Luke 11:9-13); (2) if we ask for wisdom, we will receive what we request as long as we don’t doubt that God will answer us (James 1:5-6); (3) likewise, if we ask for anything according to His will, we can be assured that we will receive it, as long as we ask with confident expectation (1 John 5:14-15; Mark 11:23-24); and (4) whereas God may have a positive purpose for leaving us in physical or circumstantial afflictions, He has no positive reason to leave us languishing in Satan’s lies, and so if we are willing to face the truth about such beliefs, He is willing to reveal it to us. This seems to be a fact that is intuitively true, based on the character of God revealed in Scripture, and that can be inferred from the combined teaching of the following Scriptures: Psalm 25:5, 8-14; 84:11; Hebrews 6:18; 1 Timothy 2:3-4; John 3:19-21; 7:17; 1 John 1:5-7; 3:8 (cf. John 8:43-47, etc.).

As Smith put it when I raised this question to him, we know God wants us to walk in truth and light, not in deception and darkness. When we meet His criteria—when we’re willing to face the truth and do His will—He will “show up.” Theophostic prayer for healing of emotional pain caused by believing lies therefore may be a legitimate exercise of stepping out on faith in God’s promises and Fatherly love rather than an act of presumption.

### **4. Does TPM Function as Extrabiblical Revelation?**

Some Christians understandably would have difficulty accepting the notion that Jesus so directly, explicitly, and regularly answers specific requests for truth about issues in our lives. A very legitimate concern would be that these extrabiblical visions of, and words or realizations from, Jesus would begin to rival the Bible as a source of authoritative revelation in the believer’s life.

The Bobgans maintain exactly this in their book on TPM. In the first chapter, which they titled “TheoPhostic Counseling: Latter-Day Revelation from God?” they assert that Smith claims he received TPM as a revelation from God. Smith, however, emphatically denies this: “I am not saying I had a divine revelation, because I did not. I simply began to understand Scripture where I had not before.”<sup>27</sup>

The fact that Smith denies any claim to new revelation does not resolve all concerns in this regard. A natural question to ask Smith is, "How did the church survive and grow for two millennia without TPM?" His reply is that God "has always used the events of our lives to trigger and expose our lie-based thinking and surface our inner pain" as part of His overall work of sanctifying and renewing the minds of His people.<sup>28</sup> Smith clarifies that he "merely took what God does on a regular basis with His children and put it into a systematic format."<sup>29</sup> He further admits, "The truth is, Christian growth and maturity occur in the lives of Christians who are faithful and seek the face of God, whether or not they know about Theophostic Prayer Ministry."<sup>30</sup>

Smith also clarifies that no new truth is being revealed to TPM recipients. God is instead personalizing for them the truth already revealed in Scripture. "We do not need new truth," he writes, "because the written Word contains all the truth we need."<sup>31</sup>

There are built-in constraints in the Theophostic process (when followed correctly<sup>32</sup>) that should prevent TPM from leading its adherents away from the Bible. Smith stresses that TPM is meant to complement and not replace Bible study and the other means of Christian discipleship. He repeatedly emphasizes that TPM experiences are not infallible and need to be put to the test. He identifies four possible sources for the "truth" one receives during TPM: (1) oneself, (2) the facilitator, (3) an evil spirit, or (4) the Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup> The criteria for testing the received "truth" include conformity to Scripture and the fruit or results of the experience in the believer's life.<sup>34</sup> One of the Theophostic Prayer Ministry Guidelines reads: "I will be careful to discern and call attention to any aspect of 'truth' or visual you might receive during a ministry session that does not appear to be authentic and or Biblically consistent. Should this happen, I will encourage you to determine what is true or not and where the false information originated."<sup>35</sup>

Ed Smith is a Southern Baptist with no direct connections to the charismatic movement or charismatic theology, and yet it seems that charismatics would more likely feel at home with TPM than would noncharismatics. If one can reconcile charismatic visions and prophecies from Jesus with biblical authority, one should also be able to reconcile TPM experiences with biblical authority. If one views any contemporary words that are supposedly from Jesus as a threat to biblical authority, one will likely have difficulties accepting the legitimacy of TPM experiences.

### **5. Does TPM Place Experience and Feelings over Scripture and Reason?**

To the question of whether TPM functions as extrabiblical revelation can be added the related question of whether TPM values experience and feelings above Scripture and reason. This is how seemingly all of Smith's critics understand TPM. For example, in "Theophostics [sic]: Unbiblical Teaching Wedded to Mystical Experience," Bob DeWaay writes: "He teaches that feelings are the ultimate test of reality and that they trump any of our beliefs that are based on the objective teachings of Scripture."<sup>36</sup> This is far from true, and yet to an extent Smith invites this reaction because he has not been careful in his choice of terms to describe TPM. In past editions of his basic training manual he has spoken of "logical thinking" as an obstacle that can keep a person from moving forward, of moving from logic to experience, and of how people need to experience Jesus, not hear more information.<sup>37</sup> I raised this concern with Smith and he removed the most egregious examples in the 2005 revision of his manual, but further changes are needed to eliminate the problem.

Thorough exposure to TPM materials should make it clear that Smith places the Bible over all other sources of knowledge and does not promote irrationalism. Many of Smith's statements that to critics seem to promote experience or feelings over reason are actually promoting one apprehension of logic over another in the context of what works in emotional healing. This can best be explained by citing the common Christian distinction between "head knowledge" and "heart knowledge." Head knowledge is a merely conceptual understanding of biblical truth that makes no difference in a person's life because its profound spiritual relevance is not grasped. Heart knowledge is when the relevance of the same truth impacts the Christian's entire being, including on the experiential and emotional levels. In this sense, truth can be in the head without being in the heart, but it can't be in the heart without being in the head. What is understood by the heart is just as logical as what is understood by the head, only its spiritual relevance is appreciated more fully.

This translation of truth from mere conception to deeply felt conviction occurs when the Holy Spirit illuminates the believer's heart to understand the spiritual significance of Scripture (see, e.g., Eph. 1:17-18). It also occurs when the believer puts his or her faith in the Word into practice (see, e.g., James 1:22-25). According to Smith, it further occurs when the Holy Spirit shines the light of truth into the darkness of deception that had been holding a Christian in emotional pain (what Smith calls a "Theophostic moment"). It could be that in all three of these cases the Spirit of God is affecting that part of the human brain that registers experiences (the Holy Spirit's illumination of the Word itself being an experience), and that this helps explain the vast difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge.

In the Theophostic sessions I observed, logic was always employed and never put on the shelf as the recipient became convinced of the truth that put his or her past experience in a new light. It is true that the recipients sometimes were stuck in their own finite and fallible conception of logical truth and needed to be moved on to a place where they could see their situation from a more divine and truly logical perspective. This, I am convinced both from the context of his teachings and from directly discussing it with him, is what Smith meant when he unwisely spoke of moving people from logic to experience.

This does not mean that Smith is innocent on all counts of placing undue emphasis on experience. He has inappropriately interpreted several biblical passages in light of his TPM experience (e.g., finding too many examples of Theophostic principles in Scripture<sup>38</sup>). He has stressed the value of receiving experiential truth from the Holy Spirit in a Theophostic moment to such an extent that he has (unintentionally, I am convinced) devalued perceiving inspired truth from the Holy Spirit in Scripture.<sup>39</sup> He appears to have been excessively influenced by experience and phenomena in the formation of certain TPM positions that CRI finds problematic (e.g., his views on sanctification, satanic ritual abuse, and spiritual warfare).

To answer the question posed by this article's title, Theophostic Prayer Ministry essentially is Christian prayer. It bears no essential relationship to occult visualization, and it has some similarities to secular psychotherapy but also major differences. In part two we will look at those problematic aspects of TPM that are peripheral to its core theory and practice but nonetheless are well represented in TPM literature and are important in their own right. With part one largely positive and part two largely negative, an adequate understanding of CRI's position on TPM will not be possible without reading both parts.

## NOTES

1. Karen Hayward, "Life Is 'Totally Changed' in South Africa," Positive Reviews and Testimonies, Theophostic.com, <http://www.theophostic.com/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=40>.
2. Whitedove 7, e-mail message to Christian Forums message board, ChristianForums.com, <http://www.christianforums.com/t2007723-theophostic-ministry.html>.
3. Inner healing or healing of memories is "usually referred to as a counseling movement within the Christian church which involves various counseling methods that are basically used for the calling up of suppressed or hurtful memories in order to deal with them." (<http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Healing+of+Memories>.)
4. <http://www.theophostic.com/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=29> (page now discontinued).
5. TPM is used by professionally qualified counselors and lay ministers alike. The professionals use it because they believe it is an effective form of therapy and they will likely bring their additional resources to bear in helping the client apart from the TPM session; lay people can use it because the training Smith offers is sufficient to facilitate a TPM session, and he advises them not to use psychological terms or make diagnoses, and to refer the clients to professionals if they present problems that go beyond the scope of TPM. Mental health professionals who use TPM and lay ministers (e.g., in a local church that provides TPM as one of its ministries) are encouraged to establish relationships in which the professionals can provide supervision and consultation for the lay ministers.
6. Edward M. Smith, *Healing Life's Deepest Hurts* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 2002), 17.
7. This is not to suggest that the entire system was received in one flash of illumination. Through practice, research, theorizing, application, and learning from mistakes, Smith continues to revise and refine his approach.
8. See E. James Wilder, "Current Brain Theory and Basic Theophostic Ministry," *Journal of the International Association for Theophostic Ministry* 1 (2003): 15-19.
9. Wilder's development of this hypothesis (in *ibid.*) is far more complex than my use of the common right brain/left brain distinction might suggest. It is speculative and may not be accurate in fine detail, but the basic premise is plausible: a different part of the human brain registers knowledge learned through experience than that which registers knowledge learned through education.
10. Ed Smith, e-mail message to author, November 24, 2004.



11. Ed M. Smith, *Theophostic Prayer Ministry Basic Seminar Manual* (Campbellsville, KY: New Creation Publishing, 2005), 136–37.
12. For detailed descriptions of the surveys see Fernando Garzon, Psy.D., “How Is the Research Stacking Up?” *Journal of the International Association for Theophostic Ministry* 1 (2003): 4, 15, and Fernando Garzon, Psy.D., “Research Corner,” *Journal of the International Association for Theophostic Ministry*, (Spring 2004): 10–11.
13. Theophostic Prayer Ministries, “Theophostic Prayer Ministry Guidelines,” Theophostic.com, <http://www.theophostic.com/displaycommon.cfm?an=9>.
14. See, e.g., Martin Bobgan, *The Psychological Way/The Spiritual Way* (Minneapolis: Bethany Press, 1979), and Martin Bobgan and Deidre Bobgan, *Psychoheresy: The Psychological Seduction of Christianity* (Santa Barbara, CA: EastGate Publishers, 1987).
15. See Martin Bobgan and Deidre Bobgan, *TheoPhostic Counseling: Divine Revelation? or PsychoHeresy?* (Santa Barbara, CA: EastGate Publishers, 1999).
16. Elliot Miller, “The Proper Basis and Spirit for Discernment Ministry,” *Christian Research Journal* 28, 5 (2005): 3–4 (<http://www.equip.org/free/JAD006.htm>).
17. Jan Fletcher, *Lying Spirits: A Christian Journalist’s Report on Theophostic Ministry* (self-published, 2004), available online at <http://www.lyingspirits.com/lyingspirits.pdf>.
18. See, e.g., Bob Passantino and Gretchen Passantino, “The Bondage Maker: Examining the Message and Method of Neil T. Anderson (Part Four: Spiritual Warfare and the Myth of Satanic Conspiracies and Ritual Abuse),” *Christian Research Journal* 21, 4 (1999) (<http://www.equip.org/free/DA084.htm>).
19. See, e.g., John Ankerberg and John Weldon, “Visualization: God-Given Power or New Age Danger?” (Parts One and Two), *Christian Research Journal* 19, 1 and 2 (1996) (<http://www.equip.org/free/DN388-1.htm> and <http://www.equip.org/free/DN388-2.htm>).
20. It is unlikely that this was for my benefit, since Smith freely advocated other positions during the seminar with which he knew from our previous conversations that I would strongly disagree.
21. Ed Smith, “A Comparison of Theophostic Ministry and Recovered Memory Therapy,” *Journal of the International Association for Theophostic Ministry* (Spring 2004): 44–48 (<http://www.theophostic.com/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=3>).
22. See chapter four of Fletcher, *Lying Spirits*.
23. Fletcher cites a letter from Smith to theologians Philip Monroe and Bryan Maier and concludes that Smith thinks that TPM should be evaluated by practical experience rather than by dogma or theology. (Fletcher, 67, 85.) In context, Smith was rather arguing that TPM should be evaluated on its own terms, apart from his controversial views on the sin nature, sanctification, and so forth.
24. Divination involves using various tools of symbolic interpretation for the purpose of reading the fates and gaining hidden knowledge.
25. Spiritism involves voluntary possession by spirits for the purpose of gaining special knowledge or power.
26. See, e.g., the “Author’s Statement of Faith” in Smith, *Healing*, 7–9.
27. Smith, *Healing*, 17. In a rebuttal to an earlier version of this evaluation, Martin Bobgan provides “proof” that Smith made this claim by quoting three instances where Smith affirmed that God “gave” him Theophostic, and one where Smith says that God “blessed” him with it and “began to pour this information into [his] mind.” (Martin Bobgan, *A Response to the Christian Research Institute’s Evaluation of Theophostic Prayer Ministry*, <http://www.psychoheresy-aware.org/images/Bobgan-Miller.pdf>, 6.) Does Bobgan also think that the pastor who claims God “gave” him his latest sermon, the musician who claims that God “gave” her a new song, or the student who claims that God “gave” him the answers for a hostile atheist teacher are all claiming to have received revelation? It is essential in discernment ministry to understand what a claim to revelation necessarily involves: infallibly receiving previously undisclosed doctrinal truth from God that carries authority on a level with Scripture. This is categorically different than claiming illumination from the Holy Spirit to understand biblical truth. The latter is (1) a gift offered to all Christians (e.g., James 1:5; Luke 11:9–13), (2) all that needs to be inferred from Smith’s words, and (3) what Smith himself has clarified that he meant by those words.
28. Smith, *Basic Seminar Manual*, 261.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, 260.
31. *Ibid.*, 274.
32. Prospective TPM recipients need to be aware that many practitioners of TPM mix it with other, often biblically unsound, approaches. It is important to insist on a fully trained facilitator who strictly follows the Guidelines.
33. Smith, *Basic Seminar Manual*, 136–39.
34. *Ibid.*, 160–63. Fruit include the following changes in the recipient: experiencing perfect peace in the area where there was once pain and conflict; having genuine compassion and forgiveness for the ones who hurt him; and undergoing a permanent transformation in the area of his mind that received ministry.
35. Theophostic Prayer Ministries, *Theophostic Prayer Ministry Guidelines*.
36. Bob DeWaay, “Theophostics: Unbiblical Teaching Wedded to Mystical Experience,” *Critical Issues Commentary* 79 (November/December 2003), 4 (<http://www.twincityfellowship.com/cic/articles/issue79.htm>).
37. See, e.g., Ed M. Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed. (Campbellsville, KY: Alathia Publishing, 2000), chap. 13.
38. Passages where Smith dubiously has seen Theophostic healing, principles, or analogies include John 9:25; 1 Cor. 8:1; Heb. 11:1; James 1:2–4; 2:26; and 1 Pet. 4:1. See *Basic Seminar Manual*, 262, 310, 313–14, and *Healing*, 43.
39. See, e.g., Smith, *Basic Seminar Manual*, 305, where Smith writes that “in order for people to appropriate the biblical truth (logical cognitive knowledge) they receive from instruction and personal study, they need to renew their minds with the experiential truth (experiential knowledge) that they receive from God” (emphases added). Does truth from God only come to us through experience and not also (and more fundamentally, authoritatively, and reliably) through Bible study? The answer is an emphatic *no*.