

Psychic Surgery-Truth of Fakery?

Psychic surgery is found in parts of Africa, South America and Indonesia, but only in the Philippines is it practiced in such a massive scale that it attracts foreigners. Many thousands of sick seemed to have made the trip, driven by the desperate hope that by some magic or miracle performed by the Philippine “healer “ the cause of their decease can be removed.

What is psychic surgery? Jaime Licauco, a Philippino authority on the subject of psychic healing, describes it as: “a special process of healing performed by a spiritist group popularly known as faith healers. The process usually involves painless, barehanded intervention into the human body, the removal of diseased tissues, tumors or growths and the closing of the incision leaving hardly any trace of the operation.” Why are the sick from the secular and demythologized West so attracted to Southeast Asia for healing? I believe that one of the reasons is the spiritual and mysterious nature of such alleged healings.

How genuine is psychic surgery? There is ample evidence that this type of “healing” is dangerous. The promoters of psychic surgery prey upon and exploit the frustrations, the hopes and the longings of the seriously ill.

In a 1974 lawsuit, the Federal Trade Commission in Seattle, Washington, challenged the advertising ethics and practices of a number of US travel agencies promoting psychic surgery. The court prohibited four travel agencies and seven individuals from promoting and selling trips to the Philippines for “psychic surgery.” It was found to be pure “fakery” and “a fraud accomplished by the deception and trickery of the ‘psychic surgeons’ “. the respondent travel agencies were also required to send a warning to all people who had purchased trips from them for “psychic surgery.”

Will the demonstrated evidence convince anyone who is desperate enough to seek relief from suffering at all cost? I agree with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission's opinions. "Because we are dealing with desperate consumers with terminal illnesses, who want to believe that 'psychic surgery' will cure them, no amount of disclosure will suffice to drive home to all the point, that 'psychic surgery' is nothing but a total hoax." Why then this article? Because the Word of God teaches, that we must not cease to warn against false teachings and false prophets. (cf. Matth. 24:24 Acts 20:28 ff.)

The most famous of the psychic surgeons is Rev. Antonio C. Agpaoa of the Philippine Spiritual Church of Science and Revelation Inc., Baguio City, a beautiful tourist city 200 miles north of Manila. In Rev. Agpaoa's book *The Gifts of The Spirit*, a picture is shown of an eye operation on a foreigner. Rev. Agpaoa has no surgical mask, gloves or gown. The healer and his helper are dressed only with regular shirt and pants. One of the pictures shows Rev. Agpaoa standing in a field, fully concentrating on some plants in an effort to make them wither. A professed healer trying to make plants wither? How odd!

Travel agencies

Promoters have given the impression that simple Filipino mountain folk, possessed by divine-exotic powers, will do the best they can to help their suffering Western friends. Travel King, a U.S. agency, described in a brochure "psychic surgery", stating that it is not associated with any church but that "people of all faiths" are healed, and that "anyone" can be helped and that "upward of 70% are happy with the results".

Thousands are brought to Baguio through the work of sympathetic and cooperative travel agencies in North America and Western Europe. People on charter flights are taken from Manila to a Western style hotel. In Baguio City, they stay at the Ashramm hotel, an enterprise of Rev. Agpaoa and associates.

An Edmonton travel agency advertises tours to Baguio, Their ad even appeared in our local weekly. Their brochure doesn't say anything about psychic surgery or faith healing. However, it mentions seminars, including one by Rev. Sonny, and a donation to Rev. Agpaoa and Associates of \$200 USD per parson. Guests at the Ashramm hotel are expected to pay \$20.00 USD gratuities to the personnel.

Jean D. Zrien of Edmonton, Alta, pioneered the tours to Baguio. She started going to the Philippines in early '73, and since then has conducted about 80 tours. On July 16, 1980, Mayor Ernesto H. Bueno with his councilors made her, through the Ministry of Tourism, the First Adopted Daughter of Baguio for having brought over 400 guests to the city. She was also given the Symbolic Key of the City and the Shield of the City respectively.

The Philippine travel agency responsible for the tours is Diplomat Travel & Tours, Inc. (DTTI) The agency is managed by Rev. Agpaoa's wife. Rev. Agpaoa himself is its chairman. Appointments with the healer are exclusively handled by Diplomat Travel. Rev. Agpaoa is also the chairman of the International Spiritual Center & Resorts. (ISCR) Its promotional brochure describes the center as a "five (5) hectare resort complex, classified 'AA' by the Philippine Tourism Authority, offers among others: a fifty five (55) first class hotel rooms, four (4) fully furnished cottages, the main lodge with its lounge and reception area, a cosy restaurant with ample seating capacity for guests, a wall to wall carpeted conference room, a Japanese teahouse and pool, a natural fishpond, an interfaith chapel, a multi-purpose sports area, a swimming pool, a clinic, a beauty and souvenir shop and a well tendered promenade a: annually blessed with radiant sunflowers."

Finances don't seem to give any difficulties. The ISCR brochure states: "The corporation was registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission on May 16, 1980 with an authorized capital of One Hundred Million Pesos and a paid-up capital of Ten Million Pesos. The expansion program will cost approximately P154 million and once completed will offer the first cable-car system in the Philippines, a 100 room hotel, a commerce and trade building, and other support facilities,"

Patients, who visit Rev. Agpaoa's "Foundation of the International Spiritual Center, Inc." must sign a seven point "Statement of Release". The statement I have in my possession is dated August 16, 1981, and signed by one who has sought treatment. Points six and seven are of particular significance, It says: "THAT the sole purpose of my visit is to receive spiritual reawakening and enlightenment and physical assistance through their counsel. I have imposed therefore upon myself an obligation voluntarily, heartily, conscientiously, physically and religiously to avail myself of all scheduled spiritual/educational activities, conference prayers and/or meditation, lectures and dynamic seminars within the duration of my spiritual journey, and 7. THAT, I am very much aware of the Spiritual value and noble aims of Rev. Antonio C. Agpaoa's love and great endeavors in Christ's name as well as his staffs devotion in working unselfishly for the benefit of all pilgrims seeking spiritual assistance, including the projects evidently now being pushed through for the addition development of the ASHRAMM..."

Rev. Sonny

A well-known figure in Rev, Agpaoa's enterprise is Rev. Sonny or "Sunshine Sonny". He is a dynamic speaker. He is supposed to be an authority in the field of Psychicism and Spiritualism, which he says are a gift of the Lord. It is said that "he has the knack of helping everyone relax from their fears and apprehensions the moment he gives his orientation of the first evening of arrival. He sees beauty in all creation and does not look only on the surface, which means he's a big man with a big heart. Very approachable. People first can't help loving him."

Rev. Antonio C, Agpaoa

Rev, Agpaoa is the founder of the Philippine Spiritual Church of Science and Revelation, Inc. He calls himself no less than the church's "Pontifex Maximus", He is also active in numerous business enterprises. He has been billed as the Philippines' "Miraculous Spiritual Healer". What is not so well known today is Rev. Agpaoa's indictment in the U.S., in 1968, for fraud, involving "psychic surgery". He forfeited bail and fled the country. This action received extensive publicity. Leading metropolitan newspapers in both Seattle and San Francisco carried prominent articles questioning "psychic surgery". The Philippine Consulate in the U.S is reported to have said that Rev. Agpaoa had been "denounced by the Philippine Medical Association for his questionable activities and faces criminal prosecution." *The Seattle Times* in December 1973 reported: "Agpaoa, a self-styled leader of the healers, jumped bail in Detroit five years ago after a federal grand jury charged he had defrauded ailing Detroit residents of thousands of dollars by enticing them to fly to Manila for 'cures' ".

The Theology of Rev. Antonio C. Agpaoa and Associates

Mr. Tom Muchlinski claimed at public meetings in the U.S., which were attended by several hundred people on each occasion, that before he went to the Philippines he had a heart problem, which made it difficult for him to walk. He had to take many nitroglycerin pills. He testified that he was completely healed through psychic surgery.

He also showed what he claimed was a piece of cholesterol removed from his heart by the psychic surgeons with their bare hands.

Folk Catholicism

How can people be healed from heart ailment, blindness or whatever disease through psychic surgery? The healers claim to be Christian. But how Christian is their Christianity? Their beliefs are certainly not rooted in the Bible. Healers believe in Christianity rather than in the saving faith of Jesus Christ. Jaime Licauco says: "All the faith healers in the country are Christians in the sense that they are followers of Christ. This is understandable because 80% of the Philippine population are Christians."

He also states: "We must realize that these faith healers are not doctors but mediums or channels of the spirit."

The Christianity of the majority of Filipinos is folk-Catholicism. In this religion; magic, animism, ancient traditional beliefs and customs are intertwined with Christian beliefs. Pictures, statues, religious medals, rosary beads and even Bibles are used as fetishes or good luck charms to ward off evil spirits. Prayers are often incantations, or even Latin formulas that are intended to manipulate the various powers that control life.

God

The healers claim to have a mysterious link with the "divine power". This power can be manipulated. God is not the infinite personal God of the Scriptures, Whom we can know savingly and intimately through Jesus Christ. In one and the same sentence, Rev. Agpaoa's "Statement of Release" says that for "healing" the ministers and spiritual counselors "have completely relied on the Divine Power of God or The Holy Spirit, using themselves only as the instruments of the Divine Healing Energy."

Prayer

At Rev. Agpaoa's center, prayer is offered and the sacred mantra is repeated. Singing the mantra is supposed to bring you close to God, regardless what you may call God. Whatever your religion, you have God. The prayer offered before healing is "Oh, Almighty Lord, Here I am to witness and feel your Hands, the warmth of Your love and radiance of Your power. Shower me your love and mercy that this operation which I am to receive will be successful, that I may live longer and continue serving my loved ones and those who need me. Through Your precious Hands, I submit therefore, myself, with the hopes that I may find for myself a rejuvenation that would help me to carry on my existence in this cosmic world. I trust in. You, my Dear Lord.. .and so, Thy will be done," The sacred mantra for recitation is: BABA (God) NAM (Name) KEVALMA(Absolute) 3x) PARAM PITA BABA KII (Attribute everything to God and Victory is sure guarantee), The latter is of course taken from the Indian religious tradition and has no connection with Christian thought.

Healing in the Atonement

Rev. Agpaoa has the "healing in the atonement" doctrine in common with North American faith healers; although his interpretation is novel. He writes: "The connection between the healing and the cross is seen in the covenant the Lord gave the children of Israel in the wilderness. Moses was to cast a 'tree' into the waters, As the Scofield Bible says, 'The tree' is the cross'. When this was done, the bitter waters of Marah were made sweet, and God gave the children of Israel, His great healing covenant," Sickness is denied. God's best for His people is not constant healings, but divine health. If we truly believe, healings shouldn't be necessary. A Christian should never get sick. He should have dominion over his sickness. Rev. Agpaoa says: "We should build faith in the believers heart to take dominion over sickness rather than having a constant war with it all our life. God intended man to have dominion over the earth and to subdue it, and sickness and diseases are included in this."

Healing requires faith of course. This faith comes from three sources say Rev. Agpaoa; the one who prays for the sick, those who have brought the patient to the healer, and the patient himself. He also adds that the people who visit him must have faith in him. He writes about his own faith and gifts as: "The one for whom it is most natural to have great faith receives the gift of healing, and such as have a combination of a strong will power, great faith and fiery nature, become endued with power to the working of miracles or the casting out of demons."

Psychic surgery - truth or fakery?

Is Rev. Agpaoa really able to perform surgery with his bare hands? Some say that what he does is genuine. They are convinced that through his methods they have been restored to health. However, there is ample witness by people who stood close enough to observe Rev. Agpaoa's procedures and saw that his alleged surgery was a hoax.

Campus Crusade for Christ brought a Christian sleight-of-hand expert to the Philippines to observe secretly Rev. Agpaoa's procedures. Later, in public lectures to large audiences, testimony was given that Rev. Agpaoa's methods were sleight-of-hand techniques. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission reports "'Psychic surgery', that is, the opening of the body with the bare hands, removal of diseased tissue or disease-causing material, closing the opening with a scar. etc. is pure and unmitigated fakery. " More bluntly, the 'surgical operation' of 'psychic surgeons,' 'psychic healers,' 'faith healers,' 'spiritual' or 'spirit healers,' 'magnetic healers,' etc., with the bare hands are simply phony."

A professional magician and sleight-of and artist, Mr. Robert Gurtler, was contacted by *Time magazine* and was asked to investigate the phenomenon of "psychic surgery". He viewed at close range the activities of seven psychic surgeons. They all used "loads" or capsules filled with blood and tissue to simulate "surgical operations" with bare hands. Mr. Gurtler said that the techniques were "better than the vast majority of the magicians he had witnessed throughout the world". However, he also said that their techniques

were not new in the world of magic and could be duplicated by a sleight-of-hand expert or professional magician.

Erna Hansen was Rev. Agpaoa's patient. She saved garments stained with blood during "psychic surgery". She brought them back to the U.S. where they were examined by a criminologist. The analysis showed that "...the blood supported by the garments was of swine origin or hog blood." In 1973 Mrs. Phyllis Douglass from the State of Washington went to the Philippines to seek healing for cancer in her shoulder and neck. Upon her return to the U.S. she was examined by her surgeon who testified",. if anything the mass in her left superclavicular area was slightly large(r), if anything, but overall there had been little change, if any, with an increase in the size of her mass, rather than any loss of size removal of any tissue that was evident. There was no evidence of any new scars or other signs of surgery procedure." The piece of tissue, which was removed by Rev. Agpaoa was not from Mrs. Douglass's body. At the request of the surgeon, a pathologist examined the "removed" tissue and reported that the "specimen consists of two pieces of tissue, one 15cm in length a segment of what appears to be a small bowel from an non-human source." These testimonies and findings are in full accord with Dr. John VanderKooy's letter to Calvinist Contact, October 23, 1981, wherein he reported that animal tissue was removed from his patient and not diseased human tissue.

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission ordered the travel agencies that had promoted tours to the Philippines to issue this warning to their customers: "The following factual information is of vital importance to anyone who has undergone or contemplates undergoing 'psychic surgery' by any 'psychic surgeon' in the Philippines, or elsewhere. Please read this warning carefully. 'Psychic surgery' has been shown to be fraud and fakery. The *psychic surgeons' in the Philippines used sleight-of-hand and other tricks and deceptions, including the employment of animal parts, tissue and blood to create the appearance of surgery."

"...There are known instances of people who have died or have been seriously injured as a result of the careless manipulation of the 'psychic surgeons'. These manipulations are particularly dangerous for persons with cancer, tumors, varicose veins, and certain heart conditions. If you have stopped taking medication or seeing your doctor because you believe you have been cured by 'psychic surgery, you may be in serious danger. There is no way to diagnose many diseases yourself. The feeling of improvement, if any, may only be short-lived and if you wait too long to consult a doctor, it may be too late for him or her to help you. You should check with a doctor to ensure your own safety..."

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