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TheoPhostic Counseling: Latter-Day Revelation from God?

Over the past two years people have been asking us, “Do you know anything about TheoPhostic counseling?” Initially we had not heard of TheoPhostic counseling. After all, there are so many names of different combinations of counseling techniques that one can hardly keep track of them. However, as these questions began coming more frequently and even from other countries, our curiosity was aroused. In a brief article in the *PsychoHeresy Awareness Letter* we asked for information from our readers and wrote, “We would appreciate learning more about TheoPhostic counseling.”¹ Because of information received from readers, we were able to obtain both written and audio cassette information from Dr. Ed M. Smith, the originator of the TheoPhostic system. After reading Smith’s written information and listening to his tapes, we decided to evaluate his counseling system and make the information available to others.

We begin our evaluation by directly quoting from the manual used at Smith’s conferences:

The word *TheoPhostic* is a term I created from two Greek words. It comes from the combination of the Greek words *Theos* (God) and *Phos* (light). These two terms describe God bringing forth illumination into a previously darkened area of one's mind. *TheoPhostic* counseling offers a new and revolutionary means of accomplishing what traditional approaches to therapy I only saw produce in facsimile.

Does this mean we have to throw away all we have gained as therapists? Absolutely not! But it will require a major shift in our thinking and normal procedures. It will require us to move from believing *about* the miraculous to believing *in* miracles.

TheoPhostic counseling is a process of divinely accomplished miracles. In its simplest description, it is merely exposing darkness with light. It is the revealing of truth, freeing the individual of the lies which dominate their thinking, emotions and behavior. It sets people free from lifelong fears, shame, false guilt, and anxiety, lifting the dark clouds of depression *in an instant*.² (Italics his.)*

Smith describes how TheoPhostic counseling came to him after a session with “a group of ladies who were all members of our ‘Adult survivors of Sexual Abuse support group’” (p. 30). He says:

As I drove home that night I asked God to show me a way to quicken this process of shifting from

* From this point on, all page references in the text refer to the manual titled *Beyond Tolerable Recovery: Moving beyond tolerable existence, into genuine restoration and emotional inner healing. TheoPhostic Counseling* by Ed M. Smith. Throughout the remainder of our critique, all italics and other forms of emphasis in material quoted from Smith are his unless otherwise indicated.

embracing the lie to knowing the truth. I did not receive an answer that evening in the car but over the course of the next few weeks a simple yet profound principle began to emerge. It was as though a spigot had been turned on and the insight of this process began to flow through my mind (p. 30).

Smith claims God gave TheoPhostic counseling to him. He says, "After I had searched long and hard for that 'better' method, He [God] gave me *TheoPhostic* so I would have no room to boast" (p. 31). Smith tells in detail and with the use of metaphors how "God was revealing this method to me" (p. 32). Elsewhere in the manual Smith refers to "God's gift of *TheoPhostic* therapy" (p. 17).

A common experience of authors and publishers is listening to someone who has written a poem, article or book say, "God gave me," "God revealed to me," "God showed me," or some similar phrase and then ask, "What do you think?" What can the response be? If God truly revealed to the person what he is presenting, what can the respondee say? If the response to the piece is critical, it comes across as criticizing God, because, after all, the person claims God gave or revealed it.

One is placed in a similar position with TheoPhostic counseling. If God did reveal it to Smith, there is nothing more to say. God is perfect and what He reveals is perfectly true. If the supporter of TheoPhostic counseling believes this method came directly from God, that ends the discussion. Why would he read this or any other critique about it? For him, it would be tantamount to questioning God's revelation. However, Scripture says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). This means that Christians are to discern the source of teaching, whether it is from God or from the influence of deceiving spirits.

When a person claims to have received teachings, principles or methods from God, Christians have a duty to be like the Bereans, who were commended because they “searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). Believers are to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thes. 5:21). Moreover, believers are to confront error and expose it (Galatians 2:11-14). It is actually biblically irresponsible not to examine the teachings of those who claim to have a direct revelation from God.

Our purpose in writing this critique is to “try the spirits.” We hope and pray that others will also critique TheoPhostic counseling, because there are some facets of it we are not covering. Our critique is for those who need proof regarding whether what Smith says is divine revelation. Smith makes certain biblical, psychological, personal and scientific-sounding statements that need to be put to the test. Is Smith’s system, and that’s what we believe it is, true to Scripture, and is the information he gives accurate and supported in the scientific literature?

Smith says, “I have been doing therapy in many different forms and settings for over twenty years” (p. 31). During this period of time Smith confesses, “I believe He [God] wanted me to try every available method of therapy being offered in our country” (p. 31). Note the “every available method of therapy” and note the length of time, “for over twenty years,” and then think about the many people Smith subjected to ungodly forms of psychotherapy. Does that sound like something God would have someone do?

Smith refers to TheoPhostic counseling as given by God: “He gave me *TheoPhostic* so I would have no room to boast” (p. 31), and he says he has been using TheoPhostic counseling since February, 1996 (p. 142). He also refers to it as “therapy” when he says, “I believe this gift of therapy will become just another part of the total healing God is accomplishing throughout” (p. 31).

The following is a brief description of TheoPhostic theory and practice: Present problems are due to past (usually early-life) events, early interpretations of those events (“lies”), and their accompanying emotions. The “lies,” which drive present thinking, feeling, and behaving, are embedded in early-life memories, located in the “dark room,” which must be accessed through “drifting” into the past in search of early “memory pictures” that feel the same as the negative feeling accompanying the present problematic situation. During this search, the client is encouraged to find Jesus and describe what he is doing and saying. Once the memory holding the “original lie” has been located, the therapist must identify the “lie” (e.g., “I’m bad,” “It’s my fault,” “I’m worthless”). Then comes “stirring the darkness,” which involves having the client repeat the “lie” over and over again to intensify his emotions and prepare him to hear God speak “truth” directly to him, thereby replacing the darkness with “light.”

Is TheoPhostic a divine, latter-day revelation from God as Smith claims, or is it a Smith-devised variation of one or more of the many psychotherapies he learned and used, to which he added inner healing concepts and techniques?

During the past twenty-five years we have investigated and evaluated the therapies of some of the most popular psychologizers of the faith. Some of their approaches are, by their own admission, taken directly from secular psychological sources. However, very often the true secular sources of their therapies are disguised. The secular originators, their techniques and theories, and their most important ideas, while used, are not identified by many who claim to be Christian therapists.

Most psychotherapists who profess Christianity are as eclectic as their secular counterparts. Eclecticism, which involves blending two or more psychological approaches, is so widely used by therapists to describe what they do that the *Handbook of Psychotherapy and Behavior Change*

reports, “Therapists identify themselves as eclectics more frequently than any other orientation.”³ Likewise, Smith has borrowed ideas and techniques from several psychotherapeutic systems. However, he might deny being eclectic and does claim that TheoPhostic counseling “is *not* a spin-off of any other traditional approach to counseling.”⁴ Smith names several psychotherapy approaches and claims that TheoPhostic is **not** like any of them.

Even though Smith claims TheoPhostic counseling was the result of direct, divine revelation from God, we will demonstrate that TheoPhostic is more likely a Smith-contrived, eclectic therapy that came from his “over twenty year” practice as a psychotherapist using “every available method of therapy.” While TheoPhostic is not totally like any one psychotherapy, it is the sum of a variety of therapies and techniques, kaleidoscopically assembled together with known inner healing ideas and practices along with imaginative additions, which include redescribing techniques and redefining terms. TheoPhostic is unique, but primarily in its patchwork approach, which is different from any other eclectic mixture we have seen. However, TheoPhostic’s major elements originated from known psychotherapies and inner healing practices and these sources can easily be identified.

Smith says he wondered why God would give him such a revelation as TheoPhostic and reports:

My wife Sharon believes the reason was a simple one. She said to me, “The reason He gave this process to you was because you asked.” Could it be that simple? Did I “have not” simply because I “ask not”?

The bottom line is, I asked and He gave, and I am grateful and willing to share it with those who will listen.⁵

In describing this revelation, Smith says:

Before God blessed me with *TheoPhostic* counseling, much of what is in this book had never passed through my mind. As I was open to learning a new approach God began to pour this information into my mind. . . . **I could not write down the new information fast enough to keep up with what God was saying to me** (pp. 164, 165). (Bold added.)

These words are reminiscent of such books as *God Calling* and *A Course in Miracles*, in which the writers claim to have received revelation directly from God or Jesus.

Please note that Smith refers to what he believes God gave him as “new information” and says, “much of what is in this book had never passed through my mind.” We will demonstrate that TheoPhostic counseling is NOT “new information” to Smith and that much of what he does reflects the various psychotherapies he admittedly knew and practiced for “over twenty years.”

TheoPhostic counseling is the result of many existent therapies, including psychoanalytic, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), and cognitive-behavioral therapies. In addition, TheoPhostic includes elements from the inner healing movement, which includes guided imagery, visualization, and hypnosis. **As a result of our analysis we conclude that TheoPhostic counseling came out of the evil cauldron of the perverted wisdom of men rather than from the mind of God.** We present our reasons for this, our comparisons with what appear to be Smith’s sources, and a concern about how he misuses Scripture to support TheoPhostic counseling.

Notes:

¹ *PsychoHeresy Awareness Letter*, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 8.

² Ed M. Smith. *Beyond Tolerable Recovery: Moving beyond tolerable existence, into genuine restoration and emotional inner healing. TheoPhostic Counseling*. Campbellsville, KY: Family Care Publishing, 1996, p. 11. **From this point on all page references in the text refer to this manual.**

³ Allen E. Bergin and Sol L. Garfield, eds. *Handbook of Psychotherapy and Behavior Change*, Fourth Edition. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1994, p. 7.

⁴ Ed M. Smith. "Breakthroughs in Biblical Counseling and Genuine Inner Healing." FAX regarding TheoPhostic Training Seminars, Campbellsville, KY, p. 4.

⁵ Edward M. Smith. *Genuine Recovery: Recoverer's guide to true inner healing and renewal of the mind*. Campbellsville, KY: Alathia Inc., 1996, p. 4.