

Lying Spirits:

A Christian
journalist's
report on
Theophostic[®]
Ministry

by Jan Fletcher

Lying Spirits:

A Christian journalist's report on Theophostic® Ministry

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This book was originally published in 2004. Updated material was added July 2005 as a result of significant revisions Ed Smith made to his training materials.

This book is dedicated to those who seek the truth.

“Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from what we believe; they will follow lying spirits and teachings that come from demons.” 1 Tim. 4:1 (NLT)

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Please note: If you are reading this book because you believe you have been hurt by recovered memory therapeutic techniques as a result of engaging in Theophostic ministry, and you are emotionally distraught as a result of this, please read [Chapter 7](#) now.

Foreword – Why I wrote this book

As a faith correspondent for the [Central Kentucky News Journal](#), I pitched a feature article to my editor about a Campbellsville, Ky. private corporation that promotes a Christian recovery ministry technique known as Theophostic Ministry. I sent the following proposal to my editor in June 2003:

“This is an international ministry started by Campbellsville’s Dr. Ed Smith. Theophostic [Ministry] is generating a lot of controversy in Christian circles around the world pro and con. Proponents credit Smith’s ministry with miracle cures of psychological problems; others claim the philosophy is ‘from the pit of hell.’ At any rate, it’s certainly newsworthy that the ministry began here in Campbellsville. I’d like to do a feature. I’ll probably need around 30 days to finish it. Let me know what you think.”

“Sounds like it’s a story we need to do. I’m looking forward to reading it. I had no idea such a ministry had started in C’ville,” she said. Her response launched me on a journey to investigate what I think encompasses one of the most potentially newsworthy developments in the Christian community today. I did a Web search June 12 for articles on Theophostic Ministry. It soon became obvious to me that, far from being a simple story about a small-town pastor with a new ministry idea, this story was going to be something bigger — much bigger.

My search on the web for information about Theophostic Ministry quickly revealed a [reference](#)¹ to an Associated Press article of May 13, 2002, about a church in Maine whose pastor, Wesley Harris, had attended a Theophostic training seminar in Campbellsville, Ky. in May 1998. Other news reports² said Harris encouraged congregants to participate in Theophostic ministry sessions and search their memories as a method for healing various psychological ailments. Several church members, believing they had recovered memories of child abuse, subsequently accused Tom Wright, 43, of sexual abuse. Wright, of Yarmouth, Maine, was a former Sunday school teacher at Faith Baptist Church, in N. Yarmouth, Maine. He was arrested April 19, 2002.

A few weeks later, Cumberland County, Maine District Attorney Stephanie Anderson dismissed the sexual-abuse allegations against Wright, who was exonerated. In one news article,³ the accusatory tables were turned and Anderson publicly accused Harris of spiritual abuse. All these events came in the aftermath of Pastor Harris’ trip to Campbellsville.

News of what later proved to be unsubstantiated allegations against Wright had turned my feature assignment on Theophostic Ministry from a “soft news feature” into a “hard news story.”

I completed the [story](#)⁴ in three weeks. During that time I compiled a thick folder chock full of interviews and research from sources all over the country. [The Central Kentucky News Journal](#) published the story July 3, 2003 (July 2 in the Web version). I did a subsequent [article](#)⁵ on two seminary professors' critique of Theophostic theology at the [American Association of Christian Counselor's](#) World Conference in Nashville in September 2003.

In a democracy, newspapers serve an important purpose to educate and inform the public about potential dangers. I believe Theophostic "ideas" are dangerous, as I will explain in more detail in this book. However, newspapers, by their nature, have limitations as to the depth of the information that can be presented in an article, or a series of articles. There are many nuances and aspects to the story about Theophostic Ministry that are beyond the scope of a secular, small-town newspaper, such as debates within Christendom concerning theology and beliefs about the spiritual realm.

In reporting about Theophostic Ministry in a local newspaper, I must stick to objective facts: the "who, what, why, where, when and how" aspects of a story. However, I am also a Christian, and during my reporting, I became fascinated by what I observed, heard, and learned about this fast-growing movement in Christendom. For those of you who want to read my Christian testimony, you will find it [here](#)⁶. Additionally, my statement of faith is [here](#)⁷.

As a journalist on assignment, I began my investigation into Theophostic Ministry knowing little about it. Although I have lived just a few miles from the ministry's world headquarters in Taylor County, Ky., since 1999, I had five recollections of personally hearing the name, Theophostic, prior to June 2003. I had been invited, once, in August 1999, to attend a Bible study at a Campbellsville church, which Ed Smith attends, but I did not go. The friend who invited me did not explain Theophostic Ministry in any detail that I can remember. I did visit the church, New Covenant, once for a Sunday morning service, after a second invitation, in early 2000, but I do not recall meeting Ed Smith or hearing anything about Theophostic. I did not return after that one visit. However a few weeks before, on New Year's Eve, 1999, the same friend invited my husband and me over to her home to await Y2K. Smith's sister and her husband were also guests at the same get together. Theophostic Ministry was briefly discussed, but I do not remember many details of the conversation.

In the summer of 2002, during participation in a private Christian e-mail list, I came across a message about Theophostic Ministry from someone in Australia. At the same time, another list contributor reported that a pastor had broken his or her arm during a Theophostic session. I remember being surprised that a "Bible study" from Campbellsville

(pop: 10,000) would be known in Australia. I was also puzzled that a Christian ministry technique I had heard only in the context of a “Bible study” in a local church in Campbellsville had caused a physical injury.

I now understand how this could be. Theophostic Ministry promotes the idea of helping the person have an “abreaction,” or [catharsis](#). The reaction comes after the Theophostic minister helps the recipient of the ministry “stir up the darkness,”⁸ and the person experiences an emotional release. I have since surmised that the pastor I heard about may have been trying to hold this person down, during an abreaction, in fear that the person might become injured or break something. Perhaps, he inadvertently applied too much pressure, thereby causing a broken arm. However, I really don’t know exactly how it happened, as I never asked for more information. I will discuss the issue of abreaction in chapters [One](#) and [Four](#).

At the time of these developments, in mid 2002, I was writing a monthly column, “Recovery Ministry Perspectives,” for the [Central Kentucky News Journal](#). My curiosity piqued by the two messages I had read on the Christian e-mail list, I considered doing a short article on Theophostic as a local recovery ministry. I put a call into Theophostic Ministry’s office, and left a message on voice mail. I didn’t hear anything back, and in the meantime, having found another topic for that month’s column, I did not follow up on the idea. I intended, at some point, to write an article about it. Had I realized the impact Theophostic Ministry was already having around the globe, I probably would have pursued it more vigorously at that time.

In October 2002, at a conference on rural recovery ministry in Campbellsville, a pastor from Russell Springs, Ky., mentioned Theophostic Ministry to me. He said it was an excellent resource for women recovering from childhood sexual abuse. In early 2003, I interviewed a Campbellsville counselor about post-abortion recovery for an article in the [Central Kentucky News Journal](#), and she also mentioned Theophostic in favorable terms.

In June 2003, a year after my original phone call to Theophostic Ministry, I decided to follow up on the idea for an article about Smith’s ministry. By now, in addition to the column, I was also writing monthly news features for the [Central Kentucky News Journal](#). I approached the story by doing an Internet search to see what people were saying about Theophostic Ministry. I soon found that opinions about the ministry spanned a wide spectrum of opinion: from miracle cure to a dangerous form of Christian ministry.

Following my 2,300-word article and sidebar on Theophostic Ministry, Smith wrote a 3,500-word [rebuttal](#).⁹ In his letter, he said I had “hidden behind the quote of another man to make her intent clear.” Smith was referring to one of the sources I quoted in my article, Mark Pend-

ergrast, an investigative journalist, who had written the book, [Victims of Memory](#).¹⁰ The book delves into the complex issues surrounding the accusations of sexual abuse based solely on the evidence of recovering repressed memories.

Smith's accusation that I had a hidden agenda was groundless. However, his letter did cause me to wonder why he responded to my article with a diatribe.

I have since discovered that the issue of recovered memory of childhood sexual abuse is one of the most divisive issues in psychotherapy today. In a 1997 [article](#) in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, reporter Mike Stanton said the issue of whether an adult can suddenly remember long-forgotten child abuse is at the center of one of the angriest debates in America.¹¹ "In 1991, more than 80 percent of the coverage was weighted toward stories of survivors, with recovered memory taken for granted and questionable therapy virtually ignored. By 1994, more than 80 percent of the coverage focused on false accusations, often involving supposedly false memory. Beckett credited the [False Memory Syndrome Foundation](#) with a major role in the change."¹² Stanton's advice to reporters: "The best a reporter can do in such circumstances is to be a reporter. Don't be seduced by people who cry or experts claiming to have all the answers. Resist the temptation to think you can solve the mystery of memory; embrace the virtues of subtlety and ambiguity."¹³

In such a polarized debate things do get nasty. Personal attacks are, apparently, considered fair game by both sides. At times, parties on both sides of this debate have tried to stifle free inquiry into the scientific analysis of recovered memory and to restrain the public's right to hear the opposing viewpoint.

Elizabeth Loftus, a memory researcher whose research has been used to support the side of the falsely accused, has been "[called](#) a whore by a prosecutor in a courthouse hallway, assaulted by a passenger on an airplane shouting, 'You're that woman!', and has occasionally required surveillance by plainclothes security guards at lectures. The war over memory is one of the great and perturbing stories of our time, and Elizabeth Loftus, an expert on memory's malleability, stands at the highly charged center of it."¹⁴

When Loftus and her colleague Mel Guyer, debunked David Corwin's case study of '[Jane Doe](#),'¹⁵ cited as proof of the existence of repressed and recovered memories, [they faced](#) academically ordered restrictions on free speech. "The irony is that if Loftus and Guyer were journalists, they would have done precisely the same investigation unhampered and fully supported by their employer. But because they are university professors, they were subjected to a secret, shadowy investigation of their legal right to do what good reporters do every day."¹⁶

"I faced the wrath of the repressed memory crowd —therapists and

patients — and they fight dirty,” said Loftus, in a recent [interview](#).¹⁷

On the other side of the debate, freelance reporter Katy Butler, on assignment with *Newsweek*, was accused of being “a zealot masquerading as a journalist” in a letter to *Newsweek* by a false memory syndrome advocate.¹⁸

Advocates for victims on both sides of this debate engage in personal attacks on those who promote the opposing viewpoint. Any journalist who wades into the ring, in such an atmosphere of polarization, better have thick skin.

It is understandable that Smith would dispute my choice to cover news of a person falsely accused in regards to Theophostic ministry, since Smith has identified himself as an advocate of those who believe they have been victims of childhood sexual abuse. However, Smith also disputed material facts about his business unrelated to divisive issues of memory.

One of Smith’s points of contention concerned my interview with him. I had asked him about the income generated by sales of Theophostic Ministry’s materials. (My notes for this interview are now on the [web](#).) This is one of the most basic questions to ask when reporting on a business in order to quantify the size of the enterprise. The legal corporation by which Smith sells Theophostic materials is Alathia, Inc., a private Kentucky corporation. In the corporation’s trademark registration of “Theophostic,” goods and services are listed as follows: “educational services, namely, conducting classes, seminars, conferences, and workshops in the field of emotional and spiritual counseling, and printed course materials distributed in connection therewith.” Despite the word, “ministry,” in the name, in legal terms, Theophostic Ministry is actually a registered trademark of goods and services sold by a private corporation, Alathia, Inc.

A privately held corporation’s financial records are not available to the public unless the corporation’s owners wish to share that information. I asked Smith, who confirmed he was the president of the corporation, one question about money in my interview with him: “What is the annual income of Theophostic Ministry?” He said, “I don’t think I want to tell you that,” and then he said the information was private. Before I could respond, he appeared to change his mind, and said the company was selling 1,000 basic seminar packages per month for \$165 each. He then said, “You can do the math on that. It’s a substantial amount of money.”

I did the math, and the figure came to \$1,980,000 annually. I actually considered that the sales of the company must be substantially higher. After all, I had seen e-mails from Theophostic Ministry advertising workshops in the \$800 range, and Smith also told me that the Alathia Equipping Center, located on 125 acres of land near Mannsville, Ky., in

Taylor County, hosts around 12 seminars a year and sleeps up to 45 people. However, to be conservative, I only estimated the company's sales based on what Smith himself had told me, and reported the company as selling \$2 million-plus a year in goods and services.

I was very surprised that in his rebuttal letter, Smith denied giving me the 1,000-a month-at-\$165 quote and, instead, called it a "fabricated falsehood" that I had "grossly overestimated." My editor had told me that Smith had called the newspaper on July 3, 2003, to express his dissatisfaction with the article I had written. She asked him if there was anything factually incorrect about the article, and he told her no. If the figure was factually incorrect, why did he wait so long to challenge it? ¹⁹

Furthermore, Smith asserts, in a recent book, "There are presently nearly one thousand people a month completing the Basic Training Video series."²⁰ This is virtually the same thing Smith denied telling me in my interview with him. When he was doing his on-the-moment calculations during our phone interview, he said that most everyone who buys the training manual also buys the video training package, thus the figure of \$165 for both. (The video training package alone was listed at \$149 on Theophostic Ministry's website in December 2003.) If this is a "fabricated falsehood," why is Smith promoting essentially this same figure in his corporation's published materials?

As both a journalist and a Christian, my curiosity was aroused by what I found in my research. As I looked further into the Wright case, which garnered statewide news coverage in Maine, I found there were a number of people who believed Theophostic Ministry techniques carry the risk of generating unreliable memories of child abuse, which could lead to false accusations against innocent people.

I decided to do more research and obtained and read a copy of Smith's 400-page basic manual for Theophostic Ministry, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*. I also read, *Keeping Your Ministry Out of Court*, by Dr. E. James Wilder and Dr. Ed M. Smith, and *Healing Life's Deepest Hurts*, by Smith.

While working on the [article](#) about two seminary professors' critique of Theophostic theology in Nashville, I became aware that Theophostic Ministry had most certainly appeared on the radar screen of some of America's theologians. People were beginning to ask a lot of questions about Smith's educational and publishing enterprise. Throughout the Christian community, Christians wanted to know how his methods fit into a theological framework, and not just whether or not the methods "worked" for those using Theophostic healing techniques.

So, in the interest of sharing information freely, without seeking any monetary or personal gain, and solely for the purpose of promoting a well-informed public discourse, as well as contributing information that may answer some of these questions, I offer this book.

In it, I share additional material I gathered in my research that I was

not able to include in the two articles I have written for the Campbells-ville newspaper because of space limitations. All the material in which people are quoted was gathered in the process of doing these two articles for the [*Central Kentucky News Journal*](#) unless otherwise noted.

It is not possible to give an answer to the recovered memory debate that will satisfy both proponents and opponents. Undoubtedly, there are both guilty and innocent people who claim they are falsely accused. No study on earth can determine, statistically, how many people accused of sexual abuse, based on recovered memory alone, fall into either camp. However, many Christians would agree that not all therapy is sound, not all ministry practices are righteous and biblical, and not everything done in the name of Jesus truly carries his authority.

After what I have learned about Theophostic Ministry's methodologies and ideas, I believe there are dangers to Christians and to the general public. The recovered memory debate is a part of the story of Theophostic Ministry, but not the only part of this report.

This report also includes information about the danger of spiritual deception, and dangers to the cohesion of Christian congregations that may be split over divergent opinions regarding the spiritual validity of Theophostic Ministry. For a Christian, these are very important issues.

This work is not an attempt to offer a balanced report where both proponents and opponents to the ideas promoted by Theophostic Ministry are given equal coverage. This book offers the author's critical view of Theophostic Ministry's ideas and the effects those ideas may have upon the public. I have drawn conclusions from sources quoted or referenced in this work. For those who seek to hear from both sides of the debate, Smith's own views may be found at Theophostic Ministry's website at <http://www.theophostic.com/>.

Who am I? I have been a journalist and writer since 1987. In the early 1990s, I covered a general news beat for the North Oregon Coast as a correspondent for Oregon's statewide newspaper, [*The Oregonian*](#). My husband and I launched the North Oregon Coast's first business journal in 1991, *Lower Columbia Business*, which we have since sold, and, in the ensuing years, while raising five children, I have contributed regularly to national business trade publications. I have had hundreds of articles published in dozens of publications prior to my articles on Theophostic Ministry. I can, with complete honesty, say that in writing all those articles my journalistic integrity was never once questioned. I have not been accused of seriously misquoting someone with the one exception, early in my writing career, when I confused the words, troller and trawler — two different types of fishing. Fishermen in Oregon quickly educated me as to which was correct!

I became a Christian in 1996, at the age of 40, after being a professing atheist for almost 20 years. I have lived within 18 miles of Campbellsville

since December 1994, with the exception of the time from November 1997 to July 1999, when our family lived in Memphis. I have been a contributor to the [Central Kentucky News Journal](#), the twice-weekly newspaper for the Campbellsville area, since July 2001. I also write a weekly column, "Reflections on the Scriptures," for the *Columbia News*, a weekly newspaper in Columbia, Ky. [Email me](#) with your questions and comments.

Jan Fletcher
January 2004

[Jump to Chapter One](#)

(Footnotes)

¹ <http://www.religioustolerance.org/theophostic3.htm>

² Tom Bell, "Pastor's methods set off concerns," *Portland Press Herald*, 13 May 2002, 1A, and "Abuse Charges Dropped in Church Memory Case," *Portland Press Herald*, 28 June 2002, 1A.

³ Bell, Abuse Charges Dropped.

⁴ Jan Fletcher, "Controversial International Ministry Operates from Campbellsville," *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 3 July 2003, 1A.

⁵ Jan Fletcher, "Theophostic Ministry the focus of world counselor's conference in Nashville," *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 5 Oct. 2003, 1A.

⁶ Jan Fletcher, *Counted Worthy to Suffer Dishonor: A former atheist testifies to the power of God*, 2002. www.undergroundbride.com/ebook.html.

⁷ Statement of Faith, Kadesh Barnea Messianic Fellowship, Campbellsville, Ky. On the web: <http://www.undergroundbride.com/kadesh>.

⁸ Ed M. Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed., Alathia Publishing, 2000 p. 133-135.

⁹ Ed M. Smith, letter, "Article was intentional attempt to discredit good ministry," *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 14 Aug. 2003, 4A.

¹⁰ Mark Pendergrast, *Victims of Memory*, Upper Access Books, 1995.

¹¹ Mike Stanton, "U-Turn on Memory Lane," *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August 1997.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Jill Neimark, "The diva of disclosure, memory researcher Elizabeth Loftus," *Psychology Today*, January 1996, Vol. 29 No. 1, p. 48.

¹⁵ Elizabeth F. Loftus and Melvin J. Guyer, "Who Abused Jane Doe? The Hazards of the Single Case History," *Skeptical Inquirer Magazine*, May/June 2002.

¹⁶ Carol Tavris, "The High Cost of Skepticism," *Skeptical Inquirer Magazine*, July/August 2002.

¹⁷ Elizabeth F. Loftus, interview by Wendy M. Grossman,

NewScientist.com (UK), 3 Sept. 2003.

¹⁸ Stanton

¹⁹ In *Theophostic Ministries Update*, pg. 7, 2001, Smith says, “millions of people” have been helped through Theophostic Ministry. Furthermore, in *Keeping Your Ministry Out of Court* (Dr. E. James Wilder and Dr. Ed M. Smith, Alathia Publishing, 2002, p. 172), a page on Theophostic Ministry training materials, addressing those who offer Theophostic ministry, says, *Genuine Recovery*— Theophostic Ministry Orientation Manual — “should be provided for each person who receives ministry through the Theophostic process.” The book is listed on the Theophostic website at \$10 per copy. Even if copies were sold at half price for bulk shipments, if one copy of *Genuine Recovery* was made available to each of the “millions” who are receiving Theophostic ministry, this would entail multiple millions in gross sales alone, unless, of course, this figure of “millions of people” was inflated.

²⁰ Dr. E. James Wilder and Dr. Ed M. Smith, *Keeping Your Ministry Out of Court*, Alathia Publishing, 2002, p. ii.

Chapter One: What is Theophostic Ministry and where did it come from?

"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." Col. 2:8 (NIV)

Theophostic Ministries, founded by Ed Smith, of Campbellsville, Ky., promotes the concept that contained inside memories of past traumatic events are lies embedded by Satan that create emotional distress in a person's life. A Theophostic facilitator encourages the person to go back to the memory, and then allows God to reveal the lie. Proponents claim immediate relief from a variety of emotional problems.¹ Smith believes the lies within these memories may also give demons a place from which to oppress the person, and until the lie is removed, the demonic presence may persist in the person's life.²

Theophostic, the term coined and trademarked by Smith, consists of two Greek words: *theos* (God) and *phos* (light).

In a June 27, 2003 interview with Smith for my July 3, 2003 article, he said the ministry had its official kick-off February 1996, when he held the first training session and sent invitations to people in three Kentucky counties, including Taylor County. In the same interview, Smith described the events leading up to the kick-off: "Years before that, I was in a private counseling practice — Family Care Christian Counseling. The primary clientele were female survivors of sexual abuse. I pretty well burned out locally on trying to help these ladies."

Smith describes the experience of first discovering the principle of Theophostic in the 1996 edition of *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*:

"As I drove home that night I asked God to show me a way to quicken this process of shifting from 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."³

"Suddenly I got incredible results," said Smith, in the June interview. "I documented things for a year."

Theophostic Ministry has grown quickly since February 1996. Smith estimated that, as of June 2003, close to 100,000 people had been trained in Theophostic Ministry.

The Campbellsville community, where Theophostic had its birth, had not been receptive to his ideas, said Smith. When I asked him how the local community had responded to Theophostic Ministry, he said it was with "no interest, zero, nada." He described the situation as his be-

ing “kind of a prophet in his hometown. Five or six years ago, I quit trying. The only church that uses it is the one I attend.” When I asked him why, he said: “Most pastors are aware we do this. I honestly don’t know.”

However, worldwide, Theophostic Ministry is growing at a rapid rate. It is “sweeping the globe,” said Smith. “It’s phenomenal.” Smith credits the efficacy of Theophostic for that growth. “It’s doing things conventional counselors do not see.”

Bill Renn, director of ministry operations for Theophostic Ministry, described the explosive growth of Theophostic worldwide in an interview with me in June 2003.

“Based on our database, people that we know of, 38,000 to date have bought materials in the U.S. But Joe Brown [a hypothetical customer] might have trained 100 people. That’s very common,” said Renn. He said at least 25,000 sets of basic training materials have been sold in two years. “We are currently in 100 countries. It’s actually like a runaway train,” said Renn. “We currently have distributorships in South Africa, Australia, and are working on Canada. Domestically, it’s in all 50 states. Probably, in the next three to five years, we will be focused very heavily on the international market. Also, there is a very strong grass roots movement among Theophostic people. We recently created an International Association of Theophostic Ministry. As of yesterday, (late June 2003) we have 1,000 members, and it’s only been in existence for three months.”

Smith uses the term “tolerable recovery,” to describe recovery that is tolerable, but not complete. He said the clients he treated prior to developing Theophostic would admit to “residual emotional discomfort.” Although their emotional pain was “not as crippling,” they still experienced pain, following conventional treatment.⁴

In the June interview, Smith explained the role of memory in how Theophostic Ministry works: “Theophostic doesn’t put a lot of emphasis on validating memory, but rather the belief in that memory. Where sexually abused people think about that memory, the memory itself is not the problem. Why do you feel dirty and shameful? Because grandpa molested you. We identify the lie, and then the spirit of Christ brings healing. The memory is the container of information. Whether it’s true or not, we can’t prove that. We don’t camp there. Once they find the truth, the pain immediately leaves. The memory is important because it’s a container. But whether it’s true, the interpretation of that is causing the pain.”

Philip Monroe, assistant professor of counseling and psychology, Biblical Theological Seminary, of Hatfield, Pa., and Bryan Maier, assistant professor of pastoral counseling and psychology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, of Deerfield, Ill., described Smith’s view of Theophostic Ministry in their seminar, “Trauma and Embedded Lies: A Theological Appraisal of Theophostic Ministry.” The seminar took place at the 2003

world conference of the American Association of Christian Counselors in Nashville, Tenn., in September. Monroe and Maier have read all of Smith's writings on Theophostic Ministry published prior to preparing their workshop.

"Smith is particularly concerned about incest survivors, why they suffer so much. That was the impetus [for Theophostic]. The suffering seemed incongruous to him of what the Christian life should be like," said Monroe, in a presentation both men had prepared. "These folks seemed to be able to survive but nothing else."

In the presentation, Monroe described Smith's view of Theophostic as a "prayer of receptivity: speaking to God and having an experience that would destroy the lie." He said Smith believes "traditional therapy uses human effort to get truth but is not effective. The goal is genuine recovery. If God communicates a truth, that destroys the lie. There is no need to battle sin continually." Monroe and Maier described the Theophostic process as embracing a feeling, following it back in memory, praying, asking God to speak, then experiencing God's healing truth.

In *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, Smith expounds his belief that, if God communicates a truth that destroys the lie, there is no need to battle sin continually. He says genuine recovery is maintenance-free. Smith also makes a differentiation between sin, which is "self-inflicted," and wounds, which are "others-inflicted." The heart of a wound contains a lie, which creates feelings of shame and condemnation. Smith believes this differentiation is key to understanding the need for Theophostic ministry. He says: "A wound requires a touch from a resurrected living Lord while sin requires the blood from a crucified and dead sacrificial lamb."⁵ Theophostic ministers offer the opportunity for that touch through a Theophostic ministry session.

Steve Freitag, a full-time missionary with CrossCounsel, in Middleton, Wis., has over 4,000 hours of experience with Theophostic Ministry, in sessions with 200 people. In a June 2003 interview he describes how Theophostic Ministry works:

"Let me just run through the basic principles. The present situation isn't the primary source of the problem or pain. Things in the present trigger them, but it comes from their past history. It's pointless/fruitless to resolve present conflicts we have without finding healing in our past. I explain this [to the client]. Since it's word of mouth, a lot of people come in with a little idea of this," he said.

Freitag helps people with everything from marriage issues and anxiety, to anger and depression. "The way I explain it, I tell them first it's not my job to make them feel better. My job is to make them feel worse – to hold onto their pain.

"They have three jobs: hold onto pain as we pray, disconnect from the present situation and hold onto pain, and allow the Lord to take

them back to the past. They report to me what is happening, what they are feeling. It's a three-way conversation. They report to me, I speak to the Lord, and the Lord speaks to them. We get to the lie, and what feels true. They either hear God's voice or it shows up as a word picture. God doesn't change the memory. He changes the interpretation of the memory."

Freitag described a key component of Theophostic ministry: the abreaction.

"They have to have a strong emotional reaction to this process. That's where we want to get everybody. It's right after that that we ask the Lord to bring his truth." Freitag said people may remember a lot of things they hadn't remembered in a long time. "Sometimes they remember things they haven't remembered before – that they've forgotten for 40 years.

"I've been doing this for three and a half years. It's a process for me. It was unbelievable at the beginning. I couldn't believe it was that real. The Lord continues to prove it over and over. I believe in it 100 percent. I don't believe everyone has to have a Theophostic session. But Theophostic is the best way I've seen to get there."

One of Freitag's clients is Kim Clough,⁶ of Sun Prairie, Wis. Clough also agreed to an interview June 2003. I found Clough as a source through a website she and her husband have on the Internet advocating their enthusiasm for Theophostic Ministry.

"Some people go for three or four sessions and then don't go anymore. I don't understand that. Once you start getting all of this healing, why don't you continue? Now I go five weeks apart," said Clough.

"The basic concept of Theophostic is to find out what you're feeling now that's negative. Then the facilitator prays and asks Jesus to take you back to the first time you felt that way; another memory when you feel the same feeling. You talk about it, get stirred up and go back to three or four memories. The facilitator helps you discover the lie. Then you ask Jesus, 'What's the truth?' When Jesus brings the truth, the pain is gone. It's like a miracle," she said.

"There's horrible pain in these memories. Some of the memories are some things I remember. Some are things I haven't remembered before. It's usually pretty intense. Before I leave for a session, sometimes I feel like I'm walking to the guillotine. Then I walk out really a different person," said Clough.

When Clough refers to getting "stirred up," and "walking to the guillotine," she is relating the experience of seeking to reach the point of having an abreaction, a point that her Theophostic facilitator says he wants everybody to reach during Theophostic ministry. Smith says "stirring up the darkness," is "probably the most radical shift in my counseling approach."⁷ The abreaction comes when the person is encouraged to

immerse “deeply into the painful memory and focus on the lies which are causing so much pain.”⁸ Smith says this is the moment when God’s healing touch and revelation of truth regarding the lie contained within the memory can occur, and the person will have release from the pain.

“What Jesus does through Theophostic really takes you back to what happened,” said Clough. “The facilitator asks Jesus: ‘Will you take her to the place where she felt this way?’ I often have pictures. Jesus comes, and I see us walking through a field together.”

Clough said Theophostic sessions have affected her relationship with God in a positive way. “It’s like a totally different relationship. In my Christian walk, there are times when I’ve felt the presence of God. Now I know he’s always there.”

In considering the Freitag and Clough interviews, it’s important to note several things, at this point.

First, Smith has no control over individuals who take his basic training course and then begin to offer their services as Theophostic prayer ministers, or Theophostic facilitators, or with whatever nomenclature they choose to designate their service. The “Certificate of Completion in the Basic Principles of Theophostic Ministry,” which accompanied the copy of *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* I received in 2003, had the following disclaimer at the bottom:

“This certificate does not certify, qualify or credential its holder with any level of expertise in administering Theophostic Ministry but rather signifies their completion of training.”

Monroe and Maier, who critiqued Theophostic’s theological underpinnings, acknowledged this in their seminar in Nashville: “I don’t think Mr. Smith is responsible for what others have done in the name of Theophostic Ministry,” said Monroe. However, in an interview following his presentation in Nashville, Monroe admitted that one of the concerns with Theophostic Ministry is its divisiveness within congregations. This can occur when some members of the church advocate strongly for Theophostic ministry and others within the same congregation, are reluctant to embrace its controversial⁹ teachings.

“It has been divisive. That’s not Ed Smith’s fault that it’s divisive. I think model makers are not responsible for what people do in the name of the model. But they are responsible for the general tenor,” said Monroe. “We need to ask ourselves why are our disciples doing something? Not on an individual basis, but in general, he needs to ask, where are people running with this?”

Recognition of the lack of direct responsibility Smith has over those who’ve received Theophostic training can lead to conclusions that cut both ways. On the one hand, Smith is probably all too ready to attempt to divorce himself from those who have taken his training and put it into operation in ways Smith never intended — an understandable response.

Smith is not promoting a therapeutic process that operates under a state-licensing authority where people who use it are accountable to state oversight for possible adverse effects on clients. Neither does Smith have any position of authority, as an elder would within a local church, to police the use of his methodology by Christians under his direct discipleship. Smith's methods are religious in nature, and if money is exchanged for Theophostic sessions, it is a non-professional service that is being purchased.¹⁰

On the other hand, there are unavoidable consequences to teaching a method that uses a name that has been trademarked and upon which sales are generated. If someone is teaching an interpretation of a Bible verse, that individual can be held responsible for a poor interpretation of that verse, but, because it's simply a discussion of ideas, the blame generally stops there. However, Smith's teachings are trademarked and copyrighted, for the purpose, he says, of "the need to protect the integrity and purity of the process."¹¹ Yet, Smith has claimed the Theophostic process is a gift from God.¹² An individual who interprets and implements Smith's Theophostic Ministry unavoidably becomes known, in the public eye, as a disciple of Smith's teachings. This is one of the real pitfalls of taking biblical ministry out of the domain of the local church, under a board of elders, and putting it under the operation of para-church or private organization. In Smith's case, his company does not even have the common safeguard of many other recovery ministries, which place the ministry's operation under the board of direction of a non-profit corporation. Alathia, Inc., is a for-profit, privately-held corporation accountable only to its principals, of which Smith is president. Some could see this situation as a therapeutic/ministry/private enterprise hybrid that is hard to position in the public's mind. As a result, Smith, like it or not, has an unavoidable connection, in the public eye, with others who use his trademarked name, Theophostic, to describe their personal ministry in a given locale.

I think that Smith's belief in the necessity of searching memories for lies, and exposing those lies to a spiritual presence through a mystical encounter, causes people who attempt to follow his teachings to run in all kinds of directions, some of which can be quite disastrous. I believe this is much more of a problem than what is seen with models for Christian discipleship based on sober-minded Bible study and discipleship with other Christians.

The mystical, experiential nature of Theophostic Ministry opens a wide umbrella under which a lot of spiritual activities and conclusions can occur. These conclusions can motivate followers to suspend rational logic and believe the unbelievable, as I will explain in subsequent chapters.

Jonathan Edwards, the famous American revivalist of the mid-1700s,

warned against placing too much weight upon mystical experiences, which are at the heart of Theophostic's "touch from God:"

"I would therefore entreat the people of God to be very cautious how they give heed to such things. I have seen them fail in very many instances, and know by experience that impressions being made with great power, and upon the minds of true, yea eminent saints — even in the midst of extraordinary exercises of grace, and sweet communion with God, and attended with texts of Scripture strongly impressed on the mind — are no sure signs of their being revelations from heaven. Those who leave the sure word of prophecy [Scripture] — which God has given us as a light shining in a dark place — to follow such impressions and impulses, leave the guidance of a polar star to follow a Jack with a lantern. No wonder therefore that sometimes they are led into woeful extravagances."¹³

Since each Theophostic experience is really just a product of how two individuals interpret Smith's teachings, it may be difficult to determine how closely any reported experience fits the Theophostic model. Even if you are right there, observing the entire session, the subjective nature of an individual's conformity to Theophostic exercises would be impossible to measure. Nevertheless, I do believe that Freitag and Clough are fairly representative of how Smith would see the way he envisions Theophostic Ministry to work. In Chapter [Two](#), I will discuss this further. I mention it here because I want to make it clear that, among those who are using Theophostic ministry around the world, some are deviating from Smith's teachings. For an in-depth description of how Theophostic works, the reader can go to the source and order *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* directly from Theophostic Ministry. I have made a good-faith effort to provide the reader with a quick overview of Theophostic ideas, so that the information critical of Theophostic will be placed in the proper context.

Secondly, Smith strongly refutes the idea that Theophostic Ministry, properly done, includes guided visualization. This issue will be discussed in more detail in Chapter [Four](#). Smith agrees with Freitag and Clough that sometimes God speaks to the person in a Theophostic session in pictures.¹⁴ That visualization sometimes occurs during the Theophostic session is not disputed. However, Smith refutes his critics' contention that Theophostic ministers, doing Theophostic ministry as Smith envisions it, guide that visualization.¹⁵

Lastly, I point out one thing about Clough's account that may be, or may not be, typical of Theophostic ministry, but is interesting nonetheless. In the process of obtaining permission to interview Clough, I had several e-mail conversations with her husband, Dwight Clough, who later responded with a letter to the editor concerning my July 3 article in the [Central Kentucky News Journal](#).¹⁶ He said in an e-mail to me June 25, 2003:

"The timing on your interview request was quite interesting for us. Kim has lived virtually panic free for almost two years. She credits that change to a miraculous intervention by Jesus Christ through the Theophostic process. In recent weeks, however, she has experienced a new onslaught of panic. It came to a head several days ago, just before your e-mail arrived. While we are excited about telling the world what Jesus is doing, we also want to be honest about what is really going on. As a result, we've posted an addendum to Kim's story. You may read it at http://www.husbandsforhealing.com/kim_story.html."

In November 2003, I revisited this web page and did not find the addendum, but I noted two changes in Kim Clough's testimony from June 2003. I have a printout in my files, of the web page as it appeared in June 2003. I did not save a copy of the addendum, but, as I recall, Kim Clough admitted that the panic attacks had returned.

In the following paragraph the material added to the web page about Kim Clough's Theophostic experience in the time period between June 2003 and November 2003 is italicized:

*"Although Jesus has brought healing to many of these traumas, I am still in this process. You could compare it to cleaning out a house. We get one room clean and move on to the next. You can't clean a house without touching dirt, and sometimes I do experience panic while I'm waiting for Jesus to bring healing to a set of traumas that I haven't dealt with yet. We are all in this journey until we die, but I will never be the same again."*¹⁷

In another section, material that was in the June 2003 web-page version had been deleted in the November 2003 version. The deleted material is italicized:

*"This is what the Lord has done for me: I have experienced 99% deliverance from panic attacks. Once in a great while, I may still experience momentary feelings of anxiety – but I'm not concerned about it. Jesus knows where these feelings are coming from. He will take me there and deliver me at the root-cause level. Things that used to bother me just don't any more."*¹⁸

Smith admitted one of his greatest fears was whether the dramatic changes seen in Theophostic ministry would last.¹⁹ He came to the conclusion that people who report, "they are having some of the 'old' feelings," are not having "a 'return' but rather another lie ready to be expelled."²⁰

To me, the term "maintenance-free recovery" is far more limited than it may appear. If Clough's case is any indication, people engaging in Theophostic may find the process lasting longer than the 20 or 30 sessions Smith says victims of lifelong abuse may need.²¹ Indeed, her original complaint — panic attacks — proved more resistant to Theophostic ministry than she first envisioned, based on the changes she herself made to her own testimony between June 2003 and November 2003. Her testimony certainly does not conform to the rapid miracle cure scenario,

which Smith touts throughout his written materials, as a primary benefit of Theophostic Ministry.

The cultural backdrop for the development of Theophostic

Smith developed his ministry as a result of ministering to adult female survivors of alleged sexual abuse who were living near Campbells-ville, Ky., in the early to mid-1990s. Very little demographic information is available on rural Kentucky women who say they are survivors of sexual abuse. Taylor County is part of Kentucky's Appalachian region, albeit on its far western edge, in an area known as South Central Kentucky. It is also listed as part of the federally designated Appalachian High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Area. Though the county is not mountainous, there are many cultural similarities to other Kentucky Appalachian communities.

People who have studied Kentucky Appalachian culture would agree that it has many cultural distinctions that set it apart from mainstream American life. Many books have been written on the pernicious dysfunctionality in Appalachian families that appears to be stubbornly resistant to change despite massive infusions of federal money over the last half-century. Some attribute the problem to poverty; others to the relative isolation of the region until the second half of the 20th century; still others to the traditionally high rates of illiteracy; and some even cite the effects of the Scottish "Diaspora" following the Duke of Cumberland's defeat of the Scottish clans in the British Isles in the mid-1700s. Many of the vanquished came through the Cumberland Gap and settled throughout Kentucky's Appalachian region. Modern-day descendants of some who settled in the poorer areas of Kentucky seem to hold on to family patterns of behavior that reinforce less than desirable social behaviors, like moonshining, clan fighting, spousal and child abuse, and a lack of commitment to education.

A federally-funded study of the clients of a women's substance abuse treatment facility in Taylor County may represent one of the first attempts to demographically understand rural women with a history of substance abuse who live in the greater Campbellsville area. The Preliminary Report on Baseline Data, Taylor County Rural Women's Recovery Project, January 2002 collected data on 72 women involved in the project. Part of that data collection involved responses to the "Brief Multidimensional Inventory of Spirituality and Religiousness."

Fifty-eight percent of the women reported a history of physical abuse and 54 percent reported a history of alleged sexual abuse. A majority of the women reported serious anxiety (87.5 percent), serious depression (83.3 percent), and serious problems concentrating, understanding, and remembering (76.4 percent). The average age was 33.36 years. Sixty-eight

percent of these women were high-school dropouts. Amazingly, half reported being disabled. This was their perception, and did not represent a physical disability, reported researcher Theodore Godlaski, project evaluator. This would seem to indicate a passive attitude toward life's circumstances, which can also be seen in other areas of Appalachia. In other words, these women "believed" they were not able to work, when they actually were.

In terms of the spiritual inventory, the women in the Taylor County program were compared with national female mean scores.

The Taylor County women entering treatment felt more confident that God forgave them than women in a national sample, but responses also indicated that such confidence does not preclude feelings of being punished or abandoned. "This could be an indication that rural women substance abusers entering treatment have a conceptual foundation for a sense of forgiveness and acceptance but are struggling with feelings of guilt, unworthiness, and fear of abandonment," the report stated. The women also rated congregational support (from churches) as being higher than the national mean, but were more likely to say people in churches were more often critical of them than the national mean. (This is a pattern I have personally observed in the local area. People native to this area will prove quite loyal in providing housing, food and other staples to substance abusers, or "black sheep." At the same time, however, they will chastise them and demonstrate their disapproval.)

The cultural context in which Theophostic Ministry was developed is important in terms of evaluating Smith's statements of belief concerning the numbers of people who suffer from childhood sexual abuse. Smith asserts, in *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, that "no less than 40-60 percent of all the females who come to me for ministry have at the root of their pain some degree of childhood sexual molestation."²² In fact, Smith's definition of sexual abuse is broad indeed. Sexual abuse includes, "sexual words, looks, and/or touch."²³ (Emphasis added.) With that definition, one could surmise that virtually every female has experienced a leering look before the age of 18. It's a broad stretch to presume that such an all-inclusive definition of "abuse" is at the root of a Christian's current struggles with stress, anxiety, etc.

It seems reasonable to venture that the population of women Smith treated, which caused him to feel "pretty well burned-out locally on helping these women," have rates of sexual abuse higher than the national average. This is not surprising since many were, presumably, seeking counseling because they knew they had suffered sexual abuse. Though the actual cases of sexual abuse of children may be higher because some cases still go undetected, the federal government reported the rate of sexual abuse among the nation's children at one-tenth of one percent, in 2001.²⁴ The rate of sexual abuse in the first national telephone

survey, regarding childhood sexual abuse, of men and women in 1990, found 27 percent of women said they had been sexually abused. Of those, 42 percent of the women had not previously acknowledged disclosure of the abuse.²⁵ By comparison, Smith says his guess is that 50 percent of all women have been sexually wounded.²⁶

What point am I making? In a ["Biblical Evaluation of Theophostic Ministry,"](#) the staff of the Community Evangelical Free Church, in Elverston, Pa., expresses their concern that Smith has developed an apologetic that relies on illustrations consistently used from victims of alleged childhood sexual abuse. "If Theophostic proposed a methodology solely for helping sexually abused people, the objections raised in this paper, while serious, would at least be open to greater discussion. But arguing for general ministry principles based upon a special category of problem is ill advised."²⁷

I would venture to say, based upon my personal experience living on the edge of Kentucky's Appalachian region, the incidence of sexual abuse is probably higher in this area than in the nation at large. I also have observed, through reading many news reports, analyses, and books about Appalachian culture, that there are enough cultural and religious distinctions to this region to warrant caution at making sweeping generalizations regarding undiscovered sexual abuse as a causative agent for a Christian's struggle with issues of shame and guilt. However, that is exactly the lens through which Smith viewed the problem of a Christian's struggle with emotional issues when he wrote Theophostic training materials.²⁸ To apply the insights Smith gained through that narrow lens and thereby claim to have a one-method solution for Christians throughout the entire world for every emotional ailment seems a stretch at best, and poses a peculiar danger at worst.

Granted, the small-scale study on Taylor County female substance abusers still in progress by the federal government may be demographically different from the sexual abuse recovery clients Smith ministered to in a small-group setting in the early to mid 1990s. However, I still personally believe there are significant similarities in terms of the spirituality inventory, and I base this upon my personal interactions with people in local churches since 1996. For example, the cultural tendency toward passivity in women who suffer emotional problems in Appalachian areas most definitely affects their view of God and their view of themselves as Christians. Such people may not have the commitment to struggle through tough spiritual lessons required in overcoming serious behavioral problems, and therefore, may show a proclivity toward Smith's methodology of putting themselves into state of mystical receptivity. Such a state, with the high suggestibility that may also occur, could indeed account for the miracle cures Smith first saw in these women. I cannot know for sure. It's a hypothesis based on very inadequate

information. But, even if I am wrong, the potential for error in applying a limited demographic sampling experience to a universal application still remains.

Basing a Christian ministry model on such a small and unique group of people, and then attempting to apply their experiences of shame, guilt, memories of abuse, etc., to Christians in general is unwise. I will discuss this issue more in Chapter [Three](#). For now, I bring this up in order to expose a significant risk I see in Theophostic beliefs and practices.

The risk is that a “worldview” based upon working with a certain, culturally distinct group of people — Kentucky rural female survivors of alleged sexual abuse — has contributed to Smith’s beliefs that large numbers of people have hidden memories of horrible abuse in their backgrounds.

He claims to have dealt with thousands of demonic manifestations and says, “In 95 percent of the cases the demon was there because of what someone else did to the person and not because of some sin committed by the person himself or herself.”²⁹ He speaks of a conspiracy of satanic ritual abuse where perpetrators are “careful to strategically fill the trauma moment with false identities, images, and fabricated locations,” so that the victim will not remember the assault.³⁰ Smith claims evidence exists that shows “much money is involved,” in the families who perpetuate satanic ritual abuse.³¹ These statements present a picture of a person who believes that there is a vast level of unknown, abuse-created traumas within the general population of the church, which need to be explored through memory work. I believe he came to these viewpoints, in part, as a direct result of the type of client-pastor interactions he had with this distinct demographic group. These interactions, by his own admission, led to development of Theophostic Ministry.

Reviewing Smith’s public statements in the months just preceding and including the launch of Theophostic Ministry in 1996 reveals his beliefs that virtually everyone needs therapy, and most problems are the result of wounds inflicted by our families. “Everyone, to some extent, is co-dependent,” he wrote in November 1995. “Co-dependency is one of the most common concerns that we see weekly in our counseling practice here in Campbellsville. We have an on-going co-dependency group that meets weekly,” he said in the same newspaper column. “The trouble with this behavior is that at its roots are several lies.”³² In February 1996, he advised engaged couples to “find a really good therapist after one year of marriage whether they think they need it or not, for five or six counseling sessions.” He further recommended that they see a therapist at least every two years for five or six sessions.³³

In another column he said wounds inflicted by family members “are often overlooked and are rarely given attention, thus they are slow

to heal (if they ever do).” He makes reference to the “wounded state in which so many of us live.” He reveals his beliefs in repressed memories as the cause of current unhappy feelings, in answering a woman who asked why her Christmas reunion with her family was so unpleasant. He said, “You probably noticed a change in feelings within yourself...[while she was visiting her family]. Was there a strange sense of being ‘back there’ in a time and place that for the most part you had buried over the last many years? It’s almost as if time has stood still or the moments of our family wounds frozen in place where the infliction occurred.” He goes on to describe his view toward a person’s relatives as “not her family, but rather her original biological group.”³⁴

These statements portray a person who believes all or most of us are suffering from repressed wounds received at the hands of our original biological group.

Perhaps it is these viewpoints that explain why Smith has perceived a problem where no problem may indeed exist in some cases. The problem of “tolerable recovery” is the problem I am referring to. This was, in Smith’s account, the problem that inspired him to ask God to reveal a solution,³⁵ and what he referred to in an early edition of *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, as “God’s gift of TheoPhostic therapy.”³⁶

In some cases, perhaps the root problem is unbelief in the gospel message that is already clearly presented in millions of Bibles around the world. The unbelief in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ, as that power is demonstrated through the Holy Spirit’s work of sanctification, is not a problem that requires the kind of theological “tinkering” that Smith has done in creating a “lie-based theology versus sin theology,” which he admits is a stretch for people. Perhaps the real challenge in these cases is the difficult task of overcoming unbelief in the simple gospel message, sans TheoPhostic coinage.

This task can be more difficult in the cultural context of Appalachia, whose people have been described as “over churchd and undereducated.” Missionaries will agree that some of the people most resistant to understanding the life-changing message of the Good News are those who have been overexposed to the rituals of Christianity, while underexposed to true Christian discipleship and dedicated study of the scriptures within the proper context of the entire Bible.

A recent example, albeit extreme in nature, does confirm the fact that some in South Central Kentucky define themselves as Christians even in the midst of plotting a murder. Danny Shelley, a drug addict convicted of a murder for hire in the April 2002 killing of Pulaski County, Ky. Sheriff Sam Catron, [described the conversation](#) leading to Catron’s death. Shelley met with Jeff Morris, who was running against Catron for sheriff, and who, with Kenneth White, another drug dealer, plotted to kill the sheriff. During the meeting, Shelley discussed the reasons for killing

Catron. Shelley told Morris “he was not interested in the money, only in whether killing Catron was the right thing to do.” Morris told Shelley, “I’m a Christian and you’re a Christian, and there ain’t nothing wrong with killing Satan.”³⁷

I do not have room to list all the news reports coming out of Appalachia in the past two years in which people are self-described Christians and yet commit a long list of evil deeds as reported in the press. Suffice it to say that it is culturally acceptable here to use the label Christian without any outward commitment to a Christ-like life.

On the other hand, genuine belief in the gospel doesn’t guarantee, for devout Christians, relief from all biological, relational, or emotional problems. However, Smith’s conclusions about the source of these problems and his methodology for dealing with them are dubious.

Contrary to Smith’s assertion, embracing the life-transforming power of the cross does not require, and has never required, that we seek out a mystical experience not initiated by God. In fact, such mystical experiences in no way guarantee the acquisition of truth.

“You have a choice. A lie is a temptation to believe something not true. It’s a daily choice. Jesus was dealing with injurious unbelief,” said Monroe, in Nashville, speaking for Maier, as well.

Injurious unbelief is the issue that strikes at the heart of the problems in rural Kentucky. People throughout the world have a choice to believe. We are not helpless victims needing a special modality to receive truth from God, through Smith’s corporation, which he named, “truth.”³⁸ Instead, Smith’s assumption that many people have hidden memories of abuse, as yet to be discovered, sets the stage for the biggest danger I think Theophostic Ministry poses to the public: false accusations against innocent family members. The resulting fishing expedition for a lie in every memory, many times, also leads to the discovery of a perpetrator in every memory. This, in turn, launches a dangerous blame game with high-stakes consequences.

[Jump to Chapter Two](#)

(Footnotes)

¹ Jan Fletcher, “Controversial International Ministry Operates from Campbellsville,” *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 3 July 2003, 1A. Also, Ed. M. Smith, in *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed., Alathia Publishing, p. 33, describes Satan as influencing adults to “drop a seed of untruth” into the child’s heart during episodes of child abuse.

² Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* 296.

³ Ed M. Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery: Moving beyond tolerable existence into genuine restoration and emotional inner healing*. 1996 ed., Family Care Publishing, p. 30. A similarly worded section, somewhat revised, is in

the 4th ed., p. 38.

⁴ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed. 21.

⁵ Ibid., p. 58-59.

⁶ Kim Clough, webpage, "From Panic to Praise," http://www.husbandsforhealing.com/kim_story.html

⁷ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed., p. 133.

⁸ Ibid., p. 134.

⁹ Ibid., pg. 3-4. (Smith calls his "Lie-Based Theology Versus Sin-Based Theology" "a stretch for some of you.")

¹⁰ The ethical concerns of professional therapists billing patients and insurance companies for ministry services is covered in more detail in Chapter [Six](#).

¹¹ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed., p. 252.

¹² Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 1996 ed. p. 17.

¹³ Jonathan Edwards, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, 1741.

¹⁴ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed., p. 19.

¹⁵ In Chapter Two, I quote Smith describing a Theophostic encounter in which he says: "visualize your husband touching you sexually." Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed., p. 370.

¹⁶ Dwight Clough, letter, "Theophostic Isn't About Witch Hunts," *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 10 Aug. 2003.

¹⁷ Kim Clough, From Panic to Praise.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed., p. 176.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. p. 179

²² Ibid. p. 25.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ According to the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, a service of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, approximately 903,000 children were victims of abuse and neglect during 2001. (The latest year for which statistics are available.) This national estimate is based on data from 50 states and Puerto Rico. Nationally, 12.4 children for every 1,000 children in the population were victims of abuse or neglect. During 2001, 59.2 percent of victims suffered neglect (including medical neglect); 18.6 percent were physically abused; 9.6 percent were sexually abused; and 6.8 percent were emotionally or psychologically maltreated."

²⁵ Finkelhor, et al, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 14, p. 19-28.

²⁶ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed., p. 25.

²⁷ Staff of Community Evangelical Free Church, Elverson, Pa. *A Biblical Evaluation of Theophostic Ministry*, 28 Sept. 2001, p. 17. PDF version.

²⁸ Dr. E. James Wilder and Dr. Ed M. Smith, *Keeping Your Ministry Out of*

Court, Alathia Publishing, 2002. p.ii.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 79.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 70

³¹ Ibid., p. 86

³² Ed Smith, column, *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 22 Nov. 1995.

³³ Bethney Jo Foster, "Getting Married," *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 22 Feb. 1996.

³⁴ Ed Smith, column, "Redeem the Family Unit if Possible; But Heal Whatever the Cost," *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 9 Feb. 1996.

³⁵ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 1996 ed., p. 30.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

³⁷ Bill Estep, "The Descent of Danny Shelley," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 23 Nov. 2003, 1A.

³⁸ Alathia means "truth" in Greek. It is the same word Jesus used when he said, I am the way and the *truth* and the life (John 14:6 NIV).

Chapter Two: Dangerous ideas: Theophostic Ministry's search for memories

(Smith's newly revised training manual, released in April 2005, now has numerous warnings concerning the dangers of therapy-induced false memories. However, due to 100,000-plus people who were trained using training material that did not carry sufficient warnings, there are still concerns. For more information on continuing ethical concerns with Theophostic, please read the [Update](#) added to *Lying Spirits* in July 2005.)

"One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of a crime, the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the Lord before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among you." Deut. 19:15-19 (NIV)

In 1998, Tom Wright began to notice changes in his church after his pastor returned from Campbellsville, Ky. Wesley Harris, pastor of Faith Baptist Church in N. Yarmouth, Maine, attended Theophostic training at the Alathia Equipping Center in Campbellsville in May 1998. "We were presented with a whole new perspective on reality. I don't mean to sound overly dramatic, but that's really what it came down to. We were told horrific, graphic tales of child abuse that were now regularly coming out in repressed memories of members of the church," said Wright in a July 2002 interview with *The Forecaster*.¹ Wright was a Sunday school teacher, deacon, and 14-year member of Faith Baptist Church.

Police arrested Wright, in April 2002, on suspicion of sexual abuse, after a church member's memory surfaced, during Theophostic sessions, of Wright allegedly abusing a child. In June 2002, Cumberland County, Maine District Attorney Stephanie Anderson refused to prosecute the sexual-abuse charges against Wright, who was exonerated.

Before I go into more detail about Wright's story, I will answer a question that might arise from Theophostic supporters who may claim that Wright's case is an anomaly. Some may assert that what happened at Faith Baptist Church was not true Theophostic ministry. If that's the case, then what can be gained from looking at what Theophostic supporters would consider an extreme example of what should not happen in a Theophostic ministry session? There are several reasons to take a very close look at the Wright case.

Wright's experience illustrates just how serious it can be when

someone mistakenly remembers an event that did not actually occur. Theophostic ministry sessions, even when done “by the book,” can lead to someone remembering an event that may not be true, as Ed Smith himself admits.

“What Jesus does through Theophostic really takes you back to what happened,” said Kim Clough. She also said she remembers things “I haven’t remembered before.” Put these two statements together, and what you have is the person’s belief in the authority of God behind a new revelation the person has never remembered before. That can carry a lot of weight in the person’s mind. The belief that God himself has “shown” you the new memory picture can create an all-too-ready willingness to accept whatever picture pops into your mind as truth. Clough’s experience, like many of the examples of clients’ experiences quoted in Smith’s writings, is that she believes she is the victim of childhood sexual abuse. For every such memory of abuse “retrieved” there usually also comes the face of a perpetrator.

“Theophostic ministry is not about accusation or prosecution of abusers but rather mercy, forgiveness and grace. One of the evidences of genuine healing in a Theophostic ministry session is the evidence of compassion for one’s offender,” Smith [said](#).²

This sounds very scriptural, but apparently discounts the possibility that a recovered memory may not be accurate. How would it be if someone has accused you of raping her when she was three years old, yet you haven’t done what she has accused you of? What’s the point of her telling you what compassion she has for you as an offender, as she asks you to repent of something you did not do? How does that person’s new belief about you change your life? Who else has she shared her new revelation with? What if she shared it with your wife, daughter or son? How does that affect your relationship with those people? Do they back away when you give them the familiar warm greeting? What if she is your daughter and she now decides you can no longer visit your grandchild because, even though she has compassion for you, you’re just not safe enough now for that? What if? There are a million what ifs. How do you convince someone who believes Jesus showed her a picture of you as her rapist and, yet, you’re completely innocent?

“Whether it’s true or not, we don’t camp there,” said [Smith](#).³ But what if your accuser is camping there, and you, as the accused, would rather have the truth of your innocence revealed? But, it’s just her word against yours.

To ask these questions does not discount the legitimacy of actual cases of people who have suffered abuse. However, Wright’s story does demonstrate that there are people who suffer on both sides of this issue. An accusation of child abuse can stick to a person’s reputation for life. Furthermore, such an accusation, which can apparently come into a

person's mind from 30 or 40 years before (as Freitag reports), while they focus on a feeling, is impossible to prove one way or the other. As scripture confirms, *"A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."* (Deut 19: 15b NIV)

"Scientific method includes putting up a proposition couched in the negative, a null hypothesis, and testing it to see if it can be knocked down. Examples of the null hypothesis are that the prisoner is not guilty and that the unicorn does not exist," says [Dr. Yolande Lucire](#), who is a forensic psychiatrist with expertise in epidemic hysteria, and moral panics. "In junk science, the null hypothesis is replaced by a positive assertion, one which cannot be proved to be untrue even if it is untrue. One can never prove that a unicorn does not exist, as it might always be just out of sight, so a proposition asserting that a unicorn exists is not a suitable one for a scientific investigation. The presumption of innocence is a null hypothesis, a hallmark of good law as well as good science."⁴

The presumption of innocence is the standard for our legal system, but, in the public's mind, an accusation is usually followed by the presumption of guilt.

Following my [article](#) ⁵, in which I described Wright's arrest and subsequent exoneration, Dwight Clough wrote a [letter](#) to the editor of the *Central Kentucky News Journal*. In the letter he raises questions about Wright's case. "Question: Was Thomas Wright 'falsely accused?' Answer: We don't know. All we know is that he was accused of a crime and the case was dismissed because the prosecuting attorney did not think she could get a conviction with the evidence she had. I will join in the justice system and presume his innocence unless he is proven guilty. But I also know from my four years of experience working as a parole and probation officer, that even convicted child molesters are almost universally in denial about their crimes."⁶

On his [web page](#) ⁷ Clough said: "This article also featured a sidebar entitled, 'Falsely accused,' which describes the experience of a Thomas Wright in Maine who was charged with child abuse and the charges were later dismissed. The article appears to contend that the dismissal of the charges demonstrate that the abuse never took place, and that Theophostic was responsible for these 'false charges.'"

Clough's comments are an indication of the tendency to resist accepting a person's innocence despite the fact that the legal process has not found evidence of guilt. If a person is falsely accused, and the legal system works as intended with the result that the person is acquitted of any wrong doing, and, after that, he continues to deny his guilt, he is "in denial." It's a catch-22 forever in the public's mind. When is the person's reputation ever restored?

That catch-22 can take on Orwellian proportions in Smith's illogical constructs. "I have always questioned the possible hidden agenda of

those out there who feel obsessed with making other peoples traumatic memory false. If I were seeking to hide my evil deeds I might want to discredit there liability of what others remember.”(sic)⁸ Smith insinuates that anyone who questions the scientific validity of recovered memories has a “hidden agenda,” and is just trying to hide his own evil deeds. Therefore, anyone who questions Smith’s theories falls under suspicion of being a sex abuser, too.

Dwight Clough’s and Smith’s statements demonstrate the high degree of polarization that exists around this issue. Trying to determine the moral ramifications of whom to believe in such a climate is difficult. On the one side, when a victim’s story is disbelieved, yet genuine, the accused may go on to harm innocent children. On the other side, when a victim’s story is believed, but really is not true, the accused may suffer terribly.

Scripture does give guidance to Christians. The burden of proof is on the accuser, not the accused, and the proof of the accusation requires two or three witnesses. In the United States, other corroborating evidence is sometimes used to confirm the testimony when only one witness, or even no surviving witnesses to the crime, are available to testify. The admissibility of DNA evidence, which was not available, as a technology, in the days of Moses, is one case in point. However, the scriptural principle is still clearly a wise basis for a precaution against imprisoning innocent people. It is dangerous to decide a person’s fate based solely on one person’s word against another. The quandary between allowing the guilty to go free versus a crackdown that pulls in both innocent and guilty is, ultimately, a moral question. Under non-repressive governments, this question has been decided in favor of allowing the guilty to sometimes go free in order to protect people from false accusations. Scripture advocates this same viewpoint.

One side of this issue is seen in Genesis, when Joseph is falsely accused and imprisoned. The other side is seen in the rape of Tamar, in 2 Samuel. In both cases, each side had only one witness. It was one person’s word against another. In Joseph’s case, only one person’s testimony was needed to send him to prison. In Tamar’s case, King David rightly knew, that without any corroboration, he could not pursue legal action against his son under the Mosaic Law. At any rate, as a father, David may not have been objective in deciding the case. Both stories are tragic. In both cases, God allowed suffering. However, under the Mosaic Law, Joseph would have been spared.

To disregard the level of proof God intended to prove the truth is highly dangerous. In America, we have historically attempted to use the principle of corroborating testimony. In places and times where this has not occurred, unfounded, vindictive charges, of the type used against Joseph, have led to innocent people languishing in prison.

Polarization on this issue, particularly when victim advocates have aggressively lobbied for the crackdown approach, has led to moral panics. As a discriminating reader will see, when he reads the following account of Wright's case, this is more than likely what caused the events at Faith Baptist Church. A [moral panic](#)² is collective behavior where a certain group of people are considered dangerous for reasons ranging from fake rumors to real, but exaggerated facts. Stanley Cohen, professor of sociology at the London School of Economics, first coined the term, moral panic, in the 1960s. "A condition, episode, person or group emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnosis and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes visible," [said Cohen](#).¹⁰ A well-known example of a moral panic is the Salem Witch Trials, in which people, suffering under a mass delusion driven by a moral panic, robbed their neighbors of their property and their lives.

Lucire, an expert on moral panics [said](#), "Hysterical beliefs, shared or singular, are spread by group contagion. When it seems more likely than not that an accuser would be believed, an allegation of child abuse becomes a powerful weapon in the hands of the malicious, angry, vengeful, spiteful or greedy."¹¹

Dr. Paul Simpson, of Tucson, Ariz., an accredited Christian family counselor, and author of *Second Thoughts: Understanding the False Memory Crisis and How It Could Affect You* (1996), calls Theophostic Ministry "pretty dangerous stuff," precisely for this reason.

"While recovered memory therapy has been completely debunked in the professional community, you've got this springing up from Ed Smith. And that's what it is: a dressed up version of recovered memory therapy," said Simpson.¹² Secular therapists have been gradually backing away from repressed memory therapy, as I discuss in Chapter [Five](#), specifically because of the risks of false accusation.

Advocates of the benefits of searching for repressed memories say problems of false allegations only come from unethical or bad therapists, said Lucire. Smith accused me of making Harris a "poster child" for Theophostic Ministry, and said, in his [letter](#) to the *Central Kentucky News Journal*, it "would be like blaming the medical university for an individual doctor's malpractice of bad medicine."¹³ In this chapter, I will state my case that even though Theophostic ministry, as it played out at Faith Baptist Church, is a worst-case scenario, the underlying principles Smith teaches can and do lead to serious allegations. The truth of these allegations can be highly suspect because of the methodology of Theophostic,

as I will explain in Chapter [Four](#).

Being arrested, or sued, as a result of allegations of sexual abuse based solely on recovered memories is not the only thing that can drastically change a person's life. The implications of an accusation are significant, even when no legal remedies are sought, or, in cases where the person who remembers being victimized is ready to offer Christian forgiveness. One possible result of recovered memory therapy is varying levels of estrangement within the family. If a memory of abuse is fabricated through the person's imagination, then estrangement has occurred for no valid reason. This means a genuine loss of familial love and devotion for both accused and accuser — a serious side effect, to say the least.

Certainly, it's commendable to encourage forgiveness on the part of the abused toward the abuser, but what if a memory is mistaken, as Smith admits is possible? What sense is there in encouraging people to forgive others for abuse that may never have happened? What if the shame of those unfounded allegations, kept within the confines of private conversations, families and church families, is so humiliating that those falsely accused are too embarrassed to even admit the suffering they've endured?

In my research as a reporter, I received an e-mail from a missionary whose father and brother have been accused by another brother of sexual abuse. Before Theophostic, this grown man, who now believes he was abused, had a positive relationship with his family. Although no formal charges have been made, that has all changed. After a Theophostic session in which Jesus appeared and supposedly led him to a recovered memory of being abused as a toddler by his father and brother, this man now is estranged from his family. His family members deny abusing this person and were shocked and saddened by the sudden turn of events. The missionary said his brother first undertook Theophostic ministry at the advice of a friend. This friend told him how Theophostic ministry had helped her discover she had been raped at an early age. This woman's parents denied it, too.

In Theophostic Ministry beliefs, these two accounts prove Dwight Clough's contention that abusers are almost universally in denial. Witch hunts and moral panics seem justified to those caught up in the fervor of contagious paranoia. But what if these two families have been torn apart based on a mistaken idea? Although a faulty idea in the hands of a devious person may cause tremendous damage, the same idea in the hands of a well-meaning person can still cause damage. If the allegations in these two cases are unfounded, then these two families, who now have estranged children following Theophostic ministry, have suffered an unnecessary loss.

According to this missionary's account, there was nothing broken about the relationships in his family before his brother underwent

Theophostic ministry. In an attempt to fish around in vague childhood memories so they can heal their wounds, there may be a growing number of post-Theophostic-therapy people with estranged families. It's inevitable, whether the memory is true or not, that adult children will have a changed view of their families after believing in an idea that came to mind during a Theophostic ministry session. It's simply human nature to perpetually wonder, in the face of your family's denial, if they really are guilty. Even if you are not sure, how can you have the same relationship you did before? A certain degree of estrangement seems inevitable, even though the idea may be completely untrue.

There are moral issues at stake as well. False testimony is a very serious matter in the Bible. The prohibition against false testimony is one of the Ten Commandments. Even if someone falsely accuses another person to just one other person, he has robbed a person of his reputation.

Let's look at a hypothetical case. I enter a Theophostic ministry session, and I have no memory prior to this session of having been molested or abused, but I'm having some problems in life. Maybe I'm eating too much, or feeling anxious a lot. I've heard about Theophostic Ministry and I wonder, if perhaps, some hidden memory in my life exists that needs to be uncovered so that the lie attached to it can be revealed. An hour later, I leave this session. During that hour, while I drifted back trying to identify just when I first felt anxious, I see myself "sitting on the porch when I was 14 remembering what it felt like to have sex — but I had never had sex before."¹⁴ Umm. Nice summer day. Bees buzzing. I'm drifting along. Then, I have a flash, "of someone with his hand over my mouth raping me."¹⁵ Wow. Where did that come from? My facilitator asks me for more information about my "memory picture." He's not guiding me, but my imagination is going along all by itself. I search through my mind's eye. Was there really a hand over my mouth? Whose hand? Uncle Ben's? Dad's? "I saw his ring — my grandfather had a ring like that."¹⁶ No. Yes. Maybe. I'm not sure. Yes, wait a minute; I really did see grandfather's face. Am I sure? Is this for real? How could I have never remembered this before?

I walked into my Theophostic session with some anxiety I wanted to get rid of. I left feeling free of the lie attached to the memory, but when I walk out that door my life has forever changed in another way, too. Now my view of my grandfather, and my relationship with him, has changed. If I ever tell another person about this revelation, then that person's mind will be tainted with a new view of my grandfather, whether *my memory is true or not*. Even if my grandfather is dead, and I tell anyone, I have damaged his reputation among those who loved him. If I tell no one, I may still find it impossible to allow my children to hug him. All these changes, and the surfaced memory that started it all, may never have actually happened. It really is like Pandora's Box. Once it is opened,

closing it is impossible. All the miseries of the loss of family relationships fly out to torment those who may always wonder but never be able to prove allegations of sexual abuse.

Some have unwarily set off on just such a course, which later devastated their lives. That's what happened to [Deborah David](#) when she experienced recovered memories as a result of treatment by a Christian therapist. Her story is recounted in [Recovering From a Horror That Never Was](#)¹⁷, by JoAnne Jacobs, an editorial writer with *San Jose Mercury News*.

David said the memories didn't feel real, but the therapist told her that recovered memories are different from other memories. "But I think I'm making it up," she said. "Why would you make up something so horrible?" he replied.

As David suspended her suspicions that the memories of satanic ritual abuse were not real, based on her therapist's assurances, her life, as she knew it, began to unravel. She thought she had a baby, at 13. But none of her former classmates remembered her being pregnant. They were in denial, her therapist said. Where were the scars from her tortures? Why did no one else remember her pregnancy?

After four years, during which she was estranged from her family, David¹⁸ figured it out. "I spent two days walking around and thinking: 'Oh my God. This never happened.'" She reconciled with her family. David says a bomb went off in her life, and she'll be picking up the pieces of devastation for the rest of her life. A similar bomb went off in Tom Wright's family in August 2001.

Tom Wright's nightmare

Wright was not the first person to be accused of sexual abuse in the aftermath of Harris' training in Theophostic ministry. James Miner, of Cumberland, Maine, was also accused. Wright said Miner met with Harris in 1996, while Miner was a member of Faith Baptist. According to a report in the *Portland Press Herald*,¹⁹ in that meeting, Miner told Harris that the church seemed like a cult that Harris was controlling. "He refused to continue the meeting. As I left, he told me horrible things would happen to me because I refused to submit to his control as spiritual adviser," Miner told reporter Tom Bell. Two years later, Miner said, Harris and Miner's wife and adult daughter accused him of molesting his daughter when she was a small girl. Miner told Bell he and his wife have divorced. "If you don't bow to him," Miner said of Harris, "you will get his wrath."²⁰

Former members of the church told Bell "two families have broken up because, in the women's recovered memories, the alleged abuse was inflicted by husbands or fathers of the victims, and at least a half dozen

family relationships have been severed.”²¹

Wright recounts his experience:

“In 1998 the results of Wesley Harris’ Theophostic training dramatically emerged when there was an accusation of satanic ritual abuse made against a former deacon [Miner] by his adult daughter. Then the whole thing took off. It was truly a paradigm shift in our fundamental understanding of reality. The whole process played out over the next year with repeated outrageous and inconceivable accusations of abuse, although none were taken to the police,” said Wright.

“Harris had previously done at least some counseling in the area of repressed memories of sexual abuse before going to the training in Campbellsville. However, after the training he had a new and very dangerous belief: that it was actually God Himself who was uncovering the memories. Since these ‘memories’ were believed to have been divinely revealed during the session, it was almost impossible to challenge their validity.”

The result, said Wright, was ordinary, church-going people were “suddenly becoming convinced they were ‘demonized,’ often resulting from, they now believed, having been sexually abused as children.”

Wright also participated in Theophostic ministry counseling sessions with Harris, and describes his own Theophostic experience at Faith Baptist.

“I would begin by sitting quietly and envisioning Jesus being literally in the office. Whether this was Harris’s own technique or what he was taught in Campbellsville, I can’t say.²² I really tried to go with this whole thing. But I sensed an expectation that I should follow a certain script. I didn’t want to just play along and end up ‘self-inducing’ a certain result.

“I found perhaps the most curious, and sometimes amusing, aspect of the counseling — which I assume he (Harris) learned in Campbellsville — was the supposed direct communication from God during the session. You were taught to speak whatever words or describe whatever impressions came into your mind without editing them. You would often speak in the voice of God (if you thought God was speaking inwardly to you) or sometimes it would be the voice of Satan. It was Christian channeling. The most interesting, and nonsensical part, was that Harris would frequently, in response to a channeled answer, ask, ‘Is that really you speaking, Lord?’ You would then have to respond ‘yes’ or ‘no’ but, of course, the clarifying answer would be no more legitimate than the original answer,” said Wright. “It’s perplexing to me more people don’t see the inconsistencies in this.”

Wright began having concerns about Harris’ decisions, as a pastor, in the mid-1990s. Wright continued as a Sunday school teacher up until the very week he left in January 2000. “I’ve always loved children, and I have four children of my own. There were very few years, in the

roughly 13 years that I taught, that one of my own children wasn't in the class," he said.²³ His wife stayed with Faith Baptist, and in June 2001, Wright encouraged his wife to leave the church, too. "Her continued involvement was creating tremendous strain in our marriage, and I told her she needed to leave."²⁴ Just two months later, on Aug. 10, 2001, the first bombshell hit as Wright returned home after dropping off his son at a nearby college. Harris and Wright's wife, along with several other church members, confronted him with an accusation, arising from recovered memories in a Theophostic session with Harris, that he had abused a young woman at Faith Baptist 10 years earlier. His wife filed for divorce and Wright's life changed forever.

On April 19, 2002, Wright was arrested after five more church members, following Theophostic sessions, claimed Wright also abused them. Cumberland County, Maine, District Attorney Stephanie Anderson refused to prosecute the case in June 2002. One of the accusers was an 11-year-old boy, who attended church services where, according to former members, Harris told the congregation about the uncovered memories of sexual abuse in graphic detail. Former church members said most of the women who attended the church, had stood at Harris' side during services, while he offered vivid descriptions of the abuse they had allegedly suffered. Anderson told reporters the boy remembered going to visit Wright's house and feeling uncomfortable. The memories of sexual abuse came after Theophostic sessions with Harris.²⁵ Anderson dismissed charges against Wright and, instead, publicly accused Harris of "spiritual abuse," in a press conference covered by local and state media. At a press conference before television cameras, she called Harris' brand of therapy, "trance-therapy."²⁶

Anderson and Jim Martemucci, Wright's attorney, were interviewed on WMTW News Radio in Portland, Maine, June 28, 2002.

Anderson said the allegations "developed only after one woman had come forward and disclosed these allegations to the church. The little boy was about fourth down on the list, following so-called counseling sessions with Pastor Harris." The first of the five women who made allegations took a polygraph test and did not pass, said Anderson.

Even before the allegations were dismissed, a statewide newspaper's editorial board understood the nature of the risk to the public in such cases. "If memory provided a perfect record of one's life, there would be no need for strings tied around fingers, Franklin calendars or Palm Pilots. Recollections are imperfect, however, and so their introduction as evidence in years-old sexual abuse cases ought to be carefully limited. This is an important issue now, as the Roman Catholic Church confronts repeated accusations of child-sexual-abuse by members of the clergy. Some of the cases are decades old. A few of those allegations rest on 'recovered memories': memories that victims say have been long repressed

because of the trauma involved.”²⁷

When Wright was arrested, Martemucci was handling the divorce case for Wright, in which the custody of the couple’s two minor children was in dispute. He said the allegations were brought to the police “at a time when I was very close to trying to schedule a deposition with Pastor Harris and I felt that we, as counsel for Tom, had turned up the heat a little in the divorce case, and all of a sudden they reacted by turning up the heat with these wild allegations.” Martemucci characterized the situation as “a type of retribution that were made against him [Wright] because of his stance with the church.”

When asked if she would pursue charges against the accusers for making false accusations, Anderson said, “There is a charge of filing a false report but one of the things you have to prove is that when the person made the report the person knew it was not true.” She recognized the phenomenon of self-deception when she said, “It’s quite possible that these people, after these counseling sessions, really did believe it happened.” The pastor made no direct allegations to authorities. As a result, said Anderson, she wasn’t aware of any criminal conduct on the part of the pastor. She admitted, however, that, “certainly his behavior was unorthodox if not unethical.”

Another attorney, Ken Altshuler, who interviewed Anderson and Martemucci, wrapped up the news segment by saying that “this is a civil lawsuit just waiting to be brought.” He characterized Wright’s situation as one of unfounded allegations that stemmed from retribution because Wright challenged the pastor’s practices within the church.

“It’s still very difficult to put something like that into words,” said Wright about his arrest. “It’s every bit the nightmare that most people would imagine it to be. I was arrested late on a Friday night, held in maximum security over the weekend, and released on bail (which had been lowered from the initial \$100,000) Monday afternoon.”²⁸ It was a major news story, here in Maine. Simply being arrested for sexual abuse, regardless of actual guilt or innocence, is enough to destroy someone’s reputation, career, and life. It has been well described as ‘guilt by accusation.’ Thankfully, after I was arrested, many, many people came forward to the police and to the press and vigorously defended me. I had tremendous support from my new church [First Baptist, of Freeport, Maine] and from the community in general, for which I am eternally grateful,” said Wright.

“I think the impact of my arrest was much more traumatic for my family than it was for me, since they felt so helpless. I have four children, who were 21, 19, 14, and 9 at the time I was arrested. Imagine them seeing Dad all over TV in handcuffs and leg shackles, surrounded by prison guards. My parents in particular had real difficulty. My Mom and Dad both cried uncontrollably all day when the charges were eventually

dropped. I really wish Ed Smith had been there to see with his own eyes what this can do to people.”

Wright has no doubt that some of the religious beliefs promoted by Theophostic Ministry’s founder encouraged people to suspend critical judgment about the nature of memories, and led to the breakup of his family, as well as Miner’s family.

“The Theophostic belief that Jesus shines divine light only on the supposed false interpretation of a memory, and not on the accuracy, or inaccuracy, of the memory itself is ridiculous. As the one who is ‘The Truth,’ surely Jesus would be concerned about the great harm that a false memory, not just a false interpretation, could cause,” Wright said.

“My biggest problem with Ed Smith and the Theophostic movement is the refusal to acknowledge the huge public discussion about how memory works and about how malleable, and often unreliable, it truly is. They are so invested in their position that to honestly acknowledge the enormous body of serious, contradictory evidence that exists would have very serious ramifications. All of the studies and scientific research are dismissed as if they have no bearing on Theophostic counseling since they are 100 percent sure that God is behind what they are doing. Given the potential for innocent individuals and families to have their lives destroyed, this kind dismissive attitude is unconscionable, especially for a Christian ministry,” he said.

“After leaving Faith Baptist and trying to make sense of what had happened there, Martin Luther’s words were a great help,” said Wright. In Luther’s famous defense of his beliefs, he said, ‘Unless I am convinced by sacred Scripture or evident reason ...’²⁹ It became obvious that Theophostic counseling failed both tests, despite whatever positive experiences people were claiming.

“The notion that someone can choose not to act on information they supposedly uncover during a Theophostic session is ludicrous. If the counselee concludes they were abused, usually by a relative, that relationship is now forever altered. How can it not be? When you see Uncle Jack at the next family picnic how can you act as if nothing happened, if you really believe the ‘memory’ is true? And the ripple effects are felt throughout the family.”

Wright is still picking up the pieces of his life, post-Theophostic, and raising his children as a single custodial parent.

Tom Rutherford’s story

Tom Rutherford, a pastor, faced unbelievable accusations from his daughter, Beth Rutherford. She came to believe, as a result of Christian counseling and recovered memory therapy, that her father had raped her between the ages of 7 and 14, impregnated her, then forced her to

abort the fetus herself with a coat hanger. A medical exam, however, revealed the daughter, then age 22, was still a virgin and had never been pregnant. Rutherford filed a \$12-million lawsuit against the therapist. According to the Associated Press, in an article published Nov. 18, 1996, Park Crest Village Assembly of God church counselor Donna Strand and her husband, church pastor Robert Strand, agreed without litigation to surrender the maximum benefit, \$1 million, under their insurance policy. They admitted no wrongdoing.

[Rutherford believes](#) Theophostic Ministry is another form of the same age regression therapy that led his daughter to believe things that never happened. "It [Theophostic Ministry] has been embraced by many in the church counseling community and is very strongly defended as having a great benefit for helping people. Yet, in reality — is so very wrong."³⁰

As an Assembly of God pastor, Rutherford moved to Springfield, Mo., in 1990. "I worked at the General Counsel [Assemblies of God]. When the catastrophe occurred, I lost all of the above. Now, I'm on the other side of it. My name has been cleared. I returned to my former job. All has been restored. My family has been restored," said Rutherford, in a phone interview with me in August 2003. In Rutherford's case, physical evidence quickly disproved his daughter's recovered memories. For others, whose adult children were led down the same deceptive path, there was no way to prove or disprove accusations because there was no physical evidence that would be conclusive. Instead, some families have spent many painful months, even years, before the accusers finally realized they had placed too much trust in unreliable therapeutic methods, like age regression and repressed memory therapy.

Frank Kane's story

Frank Kane, of Acton, Mass., was "devastated beyond words," when his 25-year-old daughter accused him in 1991 of sexually abusing her when she was aged 2. His daughter's experience with Christian counseling did not involve Theophostic Ministry and occurred prior to the founding of Theophostic Ministry. However, Kane's experience will shed some light on how devastating accusations can be, even if the police are not involved.

Kane's daughter, Mary,³¹ went to a Christian therapist and recovered memories of her father abusing her. In 1993, Mary retracted her accusations. Kane recalls a very difficult two years between 1991 and 1993.

"It was sleepless days and nights for me, with a lot of crying and anger and despair. How does one combat something like this? How does one prove a negative, that something didn't happen?" he said.

Eventually, Kane's daughter, with the help of a pastor's wife, recog-

nized the memories as false. Kane has researched Theophostic Ministry, and listened to the free introductory tape offered by Smith's corporation. "Smith doesn't seem to recommend confrontation of the perpetrator in order to heal. But, how does this new-found knowledge of having been abused by Dad or Uncle Joe, some 20 years before, time and time again, work into a comfortable home-life, and family reunions and holiday cookouts, on the part of the accusing daughter and Dad or Uncle Joe? Such an accusation is no small thing," he said.

"Smith, first of all, somehow determines that his clients' emotional problems were caused by some long-lost trauma in their past," said Kane. "He then professes to heal his clients by somehow getting them to return to the source of their problems, even though they may not be aware of the source's existence and influence upon them, if there ever was any such influence. From a strictly therapeutic point of view, how can Smith, though he does converse directly with Jesus apparently, or anyone else for that matter, be so sure of what he is doing, playing around with vulnerable folks' emotions and minds?

"The long and short of Mary's and my wife's general conclusion as to the source of their beliefs was that they had been deceived, by Satan presumably. They had been newly born-again in 1989-1990, and, as in the case of so many new converts to any religion, they went overboard, going heavily into 'Spiritual Warfare,' which prejudged Satan's influence over every unfortunate event, and Satan's presence behind every bush. They purged the house, even tossing out rather innocuous objects which would have to represent an extreme stretch to qualify as being unholy or unworthy according to their new sense of their wonderful righteousness. I discovered later they even threw out stuff of mine, without my knowledge.

"When this befell Mary, she was 25, and she conjured up memories of a faceless specter coming into her room when she was a baby, 2 years old, and doing what? It was never clear, I'd guess. My wife, fearing for Mary's life, went along with Mary's accusations. It was probably an easy call, my being an unbeliever in their view of their new born-again life, and bolstered by the Christian therapist's reassurances," said Kane, who is a Catholic.

"Mary was still living at home, unemployed, depressed, and dependent on us as a family. When she wrote her letter, on September 11, 1991, I was on a four-month research study in Boston and was coming home three out of every four weekends. Her letter arrived at 10:30 a.m. on Sept. 12, 1991, [on a Thursday] in my room at the center. Crying, I brought it down to the social worker who worked with the volunteers. I started to read it but couldn't. She read it and said, 'Your daughter is really sick. You better call your wife right away.' When I did and told my wife about the letter, there was silence on the other end for several seconds, and

it dawned on me. I said, 'You know all about this, don't you?' She said, 'Yes,' and that Mary needed our help. I demanded she and Mary come in immediately to discuss this, and she said they would. Of course, they didn't. Instead, they called the therapist who told them to hold off a few days."

"I hate the old clichés but they were true; my life as it existed came to an end. Mary's therapist told her and my wife I'd be happy to have the secret out of the closet, finally, and all of us could come to her, and through Jesus-centered family counseling, with her of course, we'd all heal. She did say that I would at first deny everything — all perpetrators do — that I would try to keep the deep dark terrible monstrosity of a family secret, at least at first, still a secret — all perpetrators do out of a sense of denial and abject shame.

"Well, of course, I told everybody, much to their chagrin, including our two sons, who, thank God, stuck by me 100 percent. Naturally, the denial part fit the profile the therapist had detailed."

"What kind of impact did Mary's accusation have on your family?" I asked Kane.

"It was strange, to say the least: all of us save our oldest son, Gary, who was off at college, were living under the same roof. All of them were in that same church, so they tried to stick together somewhat, at least for appearances' sake. I stayed off by myself, wouldn't eat with them, for instance, and slept downstairs on the couch, or wherever. My wife would make me up a plate, and I'd eat after everybody else went upstairs, or out to church, or up to bed. In essence, I rejected them, just as I perceived they had rejected me. But leave? Hell, no. I wasn't about to leave and perhaps cause someone to think I was leaving out of a sense of guilt. My son, Greg, being home with me kept me sane, I think, until he couldn't take it any more and left in early 1993 to live with friends."

The accusation, however, strengthened Kane's faith.

"Having grown up as a Catholic all my life, but fallen away for several years from the official church and its political and hypocritical stands on issues, the accusation, surprisingly, brought out all the strength and toughness I had always envisioned in my patron saint, St. Francis Xavier, one of the original Order of the Society of Jesus, along with St. Ignatius Loyola, its founder. I always considered the Jesuits the Marine Corps of the Catholic Church: tough but fair.

"When my wife and Mary, a few days later, came into the center as I had demanded, after my having received Mary's scripture-laced tome of incest-accusation and horror, I faced them and said, 'I stand here, with Jesus on my right side and his Mother, Mary (the Catholic epitome of purity, said Kane) on my left. I know who I am. I am an innocent man. I know these things you are saying do not come from Jesus, and since they don't, you have to tell me where they do come from. I don't know

who you people are, anymore.' Mary had nothing to explain her letter. I think the therapist had convinced her I would 'know' what I had done, so it wasn't necessary for her to be too specific. Through it all, Mary had the look of someone who'd been brainwashed. Her eyes saw, but nothing went beyond the steel-trap door of her mind. I could have been talking to the Stepford Wives, from the movie."

Mary's pastor's wife, Mona Johnian, wrote Kane, after Mary realized her memories had been false.

Dear Frank:

This letter is in response to your inquiry, "What can be said to a Pastor who believes God reveals sexual abuse (heretofore buried to memory) to his people?"

For a moment, let us assume the abuse is true. Where in Scripture is there a precedent for recalling infant and toddler experiences in order to find healing? Where, either in fact or in principle? If it is God, then it can be substantiated clearly in Scripture, using good exegesis. That is, not taking truth out of context.

There is, on the other hand, great precedent for "forgetting" the past. "Forgetting those things which are behind, I press toward the mark," is the famous prescription recommended by the Apostle Paul: (Philippians, 3:13,14).

The Jews were repeatedly warned to forget "Egypt" and all its experiences. And, because they did not, they spent forty miserable years wandering in the desert (Exodus 11-19). Of all the cases I have seen of suspected "infant and childhood sexual abuse," the desert is exactly where the victim lives. Filled with hurts, wounds, and a disrupted life, such cases make it extremely hard on almost every, single, family member around them.

The mind grows on what nourishment it receives. Years of probing into a period of life that is highly questionable for accuracy, is ludicrous. Who can be sure the right face is over the right pain? Who has such a precise recall?

My second point is, "For what purpose would the Holy Spirit lead a girl back into a painful experience that she can do absolutely nothing about today?" We have at present a case where the girl's father died when she was pre-school. Until she "remembered" with the help of a counselor, her whole family had loving memories of her father. Now that is shattered for everyone and the girl is no better off emotionally than before. She is, in fact, worse.

Are we prepared to say that Jesus cannot remove the power and pain of sin? Isaiah 53 says He has "borne our griefs (pains) and carried our sorrows." Jesus Himself encouraged us to "cast our burdens on Him." Why then should He take us backward into the pains of sin in order to heal and deliver us? Scripture does not support "looking back" in order to move forward.

Beyond this, of course, is that much of the sexual abuse and "rape" reported today is not that at all. It is outright demonic lies whispered into the ears of emotionally distressed young women.

What we need are ministers with the courage to press past the tears of

young captives and expose the rampant lie for what it is.

I cared for Mary the day she sat in my office crying uncontrollably, but in that moment I hated that lie that was destroying so many lives even more so. I refused to lend any sympathy to a memory that was more certain than is humanly possible. When a memory recall is unbelievably 'accurate,' it deserves to be challenged. In less than 120 minutes, the lie gave way to truth and Mary's tears of pain turned to tears of laughter. She was like a beautiful bird set free from its cage. It was one of the great moments in my own life. I had struggled gently with Mary over this for some time, never really addressing the issue. What a great day when the lie fell.

God bless you and your work.

Sincerely,

Mona Johnian

Kane finds it ironic that Johnian agonized over the lies that bedeviled his daughter, while Smith promotes a "lie-based theology."

"Ed Smith delves into the murky meanderings of the mind to search out the 'lies' which supposedly plague his clients into believing what happened to them was their fault. His clearing out those beliefs are intended to clear out the guilt associated with whatever symptoms and quasi-symptoms he claims the repressed memories of abuse have left in his clients' minds. It appears to me that Theophostics, like the other bogus evangelical therapy [his daughter received], has no basis either in science or in scripture. It utilizes, for its authority and its credibility, a reliance on Jesus' word as expressed through and interpreted by the pastoral counselor/entrepreneur/author. Also, the always-favorite, 'The truth will set you free.' Only it isn't the truth that's being found in these recovered memory therapy cases.

"One thing my daughter's Christian therapist told her was, 'you are a born-again Christian. You (and I, by inference) therefore, cannot be deceived.' The theory being that if you give up all your doubts and fears to Jesus, he cannot allow you to stray from what is true and just," said Kane.

"All the sources of Mary's eventual belief system emanated from religious-oriented sources: a friend in church who'd been to a bad therapist in New Hampshire, a Women's Aglow Conference speaker who talked about repressed memories, a prayer group in which Mary first experienced "body memories," and the various evangelical self-help books written by the Littauers, Dan Allender, James Friesen, and the Aglow's Fran Lance, topped off, of course, by the professional social worker's confirmation," said Kane.

Kane shares the letter his daughter wrote, retracting her mistaken belief.

Dear Daddy,

I love you very much. I am writing to say that I am sorry for what I've done to you and our family. I have made a grave mistake. I finally realize how deceiving our minds can be. My life back then was in turmoil and I was very confused.

I will not pass the blame to any other. I take full responsibility because God has given each of us a will and choices to make. I made a bad choice.

It has so saddened me to see you crushed by my actions. And I'm sorry that all this time has gone by to get me to this place of humility and honesty.

God vindicates the innocent. He sees your innocence and I finally see it too.

I love you very much.

Mary

As a result of Kane's experience, he got involved with the [False Memory Syndrome Foundation](#). Kane has been an activist for the foundation ever since. In Frank Kane's case, his daughter's Christian therapy — therapy that advocated a belief in repressed memories as the cause of current trauma — brought him to a crisis that forever changed his life.

I have related the above stories so that people can better understand the suffering of the "Josephs" in this situation. The women who retracted their accusations in the Rutherford and Kane cases also suffered. They were led to believe in memories retrieved during therapy — memories so unreliable, and, in Rutherford's case, memories that flew so much in the face of physical reality, they had to finally be discounted. These retractions came after much suffering to everyone involved.

For too long the pendulum in the church has swung over to the side of always believing the person who perceived he or she was injured. As a result, Christians have readily embraced the testimonies of the victims without question. We should not be so quick to take sides in our desire to sympathize. As Mike Stanton, a reporter, [cautioned](#): "Don't be seduced by people who cry, or experts claiming to have all the answers."³² We should not neglect our responsibility to view such uncorroborated allegations with a healthy dose of skepticism. Prejudging in a conflict between two people is not biblical. We are to make a full examination of the facts. If we are unable to do so, then the allegations must be considered rumor and should be discarded as such. To do otherwise is to believe gossip and slander about another believer. This is true no matter how emotionally compelling the victims' stories are.

So, after looking at some of the serious side effects of recovered memory therapy, why pursue Theophostic Ministry if memories are so unreliable? Why open that Pandora's Box? Smith claims the answers to a person's current problems are in his past.³³ He believes a person cannot

be healed emotionally unless the past is explored through memory work. He considers it worth the risk to open the Pandora's Box of memories.

This belief has its roots in Freudian psychology. This belief is not demonstrated in scripture, as I will discuss in Chapter [Three](#). Scriptural methods of resolving current emotional problems do not carry the risk of destroying familial relationships based on unfounded allegations. It is true that Christians may have to see their family divided over their allegiance to Christ. (Luke 12:53) But, nowhere does the scripture say we should divide our families over our allegiance to impossible-to-prove allegations about our childhood. That is simply wrong.

This is why Smith's methodology carries the same risks of other recovered memory techniques, all of which begin with the same premise: that in the past lies the answer to our present misery.

Smith believes using age regression techniques to explore and reveal repressed memories is essential to healing current emotional problems. He claims only the exploration of memories, in order to reveal the embedded lies, is useful in helping the person move beyond tolerable recovery.

"When we followed the emotions of these presenting issues, repressed memories surfaced which revealed how she had been abused in total confinement and was forced to eat detestable things."³⁴ Point: Smith believes in repressed memory.

In a conversation with a client named Paula, described in *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, Smith asks her if she has a memory picture that matches her current feeling. He explains: "It is very probable you have an early childhood event which felt the way you are feeling now." Smith wants to help Paula find an historical event that correlates with this feeling. Soon, Paula has allowed her mind to regress back to childhood.³⁵ Smith recently ventured into the murky world of age regression back to the womb, in his article, "Memories from the Womb," published in 2003.³⁶ Point: Smith believes in age regression methodology, including the value of regressing in the mind back to the womb.

"Most survivors of sexual abuse who come to me for help do not come presenting sexual abuse as their problem or concern."³⁷ Point: Smith admits that *most* people to whom he personally administered Theophostic ministry leave a Theophostic session with memories of sexual abuse they did not have *before*.

Smith tries to distance himself from cases like the Rutherfords, the Kanes, and even the Theophostic ministry episode in Wright's case, chalking up the unfortunate results to "forms of therapy distinctly different,"³⁸ from Theophostic. He believes that people administering Theophostic Ministry correctly — by his instruction — offer no leading suggestions, no personal opinions about memories that surface, and no suggestions to act based on memories that surface.³⁹ He assumes this

ensures Theophostic ministry will be free of the risks of the unfortunate side effects seen in these other cases.

However, the beliefs of the therapists/ministers in these cases mentioned above correlate closely with Smith's beliefs. All believed, like Smith, in the benefit of age regression and repressed memory therapy, and that is exactly what poses the danger that people will be misled and deceived. Smith claims when Theophostic Ministry is done correctly, this ensures deception will not occur, because God will prevent it. He believes Jesus will not allow the well-meaning Christian from being deceived in a Theophostic session. I question both the theology and methodology behind that assumption in Chapter [Four](#).

Memory Research

Can false memories be implanted? Ed Smith doesn't seem to think so. "The whole idea that counselor/ministers can create dissociation or 'false memories' is giving counselor/ministers much more power and suggestive influence than is even possible. Someone needs to set up a controlled environment and prove that planting 'false memories' is even possible," he says.⁴⁰

In actuality, as of 1997, over 200 experiments involving over 20,000 people had been done documenting how exposure to misinformation induces memory distortion. These studies were done under the direction of Elizabeth Loftus, a pioneer in false memory research and a distinguished professor of social ecology at University of California, Irvine.⁴¹ In her article, "[Creating False Memories](#)," she details experiments that demonstrate how easy it is to implant false memories during experiences. One famous experiment demonstrated the relative ease researchers had in implanting a false memory of being lost in a shopping mall as a small child in almost 30 percent of the subjects tested.

Loftus said, in an [interview](#) with *NewScientist*, she was committed to memory research because of the seriousness of false allegations. "I just can't stand the idea of someone who's innocent being railroaded, let alone locked up. There are all those people who, when somebody cries abuse, want to embrace it, and my first thought is to wonder if this is a false accusation."⁴²

Loftus describes how false memories are created. "Research is beginning to give us an understanding of how false memories of complete, emotional and self-participatory experiences are created in adults. First, there are social demands on individuals to remember; for instance, researchers exert some pressure on participants in a study to come up with memories. Second, memory construction by imagining events can be explicitly encouraged when people are having trouble remembering. And, finally, individuals can be encouraged not to think about whether their

constructions are real or not. Creation of false memories is most likely to occur when these external factors are present, whether in an experimental setting, in a therapeutic setting or during everyday activities.”⁴³

All three of the conditions Loftus lists for how false memories are created, I believe, are met in the methodology of Theophostic Ministry, as Smith himself describes it in *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*. There is obviously a social demand on the person in a Theophostic session to remember. “Going back to the memory,” is the very foundation of Smith’s methodology. Smith encourages the person to imagine events during Theophostic sessions. In one encounter he tells a woman to “visualize your husband touching you sexually. Tell yourself how shameful you are for letting him do this.” Following her response, he says “See your father having intercourse with you. Tell yourself how bad you are.”⁴⁴ And Smith also says it does not matter in a Theophostic session whether a memory is real or not. Those are the exact conditions that Loftus says are most likely to create false memories. Theophostic Ministry, when done as Smith himself says it should be done, carries the risk of generating false memories.

One [reporter](#), referring to Loftus and Richard Ofshe, a University of California at Berkeley sociologist and cult specialist, warned that such research has limitations when applied to traumatic injury. “While both have done work and published books that are an important part of the recovered-memory debate, too many reporters accept their theories uncritically, seemingly unaware that there are countering scientific views or that neither’s expertise is in traumatic memory.”⁴⁵ Loftus admits her personal viewpoint in a recent interview:

“In the 1990s, the theory of repressed memory came along, and I saw really wild tales being fobbed off on people — for example, 10 years of rapes being repressed into memory and then being recovered under therapy. There is no scientific evidence for this. And then I faced the wrath of the repressed memory crowd —therapists and patients — and they fight dirty,”⁴⁶ said Loftus.

She cautions “without corroboration, there is little that can be done to help even the most experienced evaluator to differentiate true memories from ones that were suggestively planted.”⁴⁷

Other studies have shown that recovered memories can, at times, be corroborated with physical evidence, thus demonstrating, in principle, that memory can be repressed as a result of trauma.

I won’t go into detail here about those studies, because I agree that no one has disproved repressed memories exist — you can’t disprove a positive assertion. However, all research on both sides of the debate has clearly demonstrated that recovered memories are *unreliable*, without corroborating evidence. Even supporters of the existence of repressed memories do not claim that all of them are accurate. Conversely, critics of

repressed memory therapy do not claim that all recovered memories are false. The truth falls somewhere in between.

There are cases where unreliable memories, retrieved during therapeutic sessions and believed by clients, have later been retracted by clients. On the other side, there is a high probability that there are cases where genuine abuse goes unacknowledged because the only proof is a malleable memory. There are most certainly examples of both the archetypical Josephs and Tamars in this story. Both are involved in Theophostic ministry. There may even be cases where genuine abuse was later retracted in error, as well as cases, seemingly bizarre, where innocent people may have confessed to crimes they never committed based on another person's recovered memory. (See the [Paul Ingram](#)⁴⁸ case.)

Everyone agrees that memory is not reliable. The question to ask is, does that matter? If memories are unreliable, and innocent people are sometimes falsely accused, why is it necessary to engage in repressed memory therapy at all?

Smith says it doesn't matter to him whether a memory that surfaces in a Theophostic session is true or false. He believes a person should "heal whatever the cost."⁴⁹ The cost, in some cases, can be very high indeed.

For three years, Wright tried to understand what was happening in his church as family after family opened one Pandora's Box after another. The stories were incredible, unbelievable. Was it real? Was some of it real? Was any of it real? He describes the difficulties he had determining the legitimacy of Theophostic memory regression until an event occurred that finally settled the matter once and for all. In a December 2003 e-mail, Wright told me:

"The many stories of abuse that I heard recounted were accompanied by real tears and emotional pain, such that even the most bizarre 'memories' sounded believable. Of course, having undergone the counseling, the people themselves were convinced that they were real. Yet, in spite of all I had tried to learn about repressed memories and Theophostic, I had pretty much concluded that the only way I could ever absolutely, without any doubt, know the truth about all of this was if someone were to accuse *me*. Otherwise, how can you ever fully know the hidden truth about someone else's life, even someone you think you know very well? You weren't with them every moment. Maybe their grandfather really was a 'Jekyll & Hyde.' So when I was first accused, in a strange way, and, despite all the trauma, there was a part of me that was rejoicing because my doubts and concerns had been vindicated. *Now I finally knew.* This issue had consumed our family and Faith Baptist Church for nearly three years. As I had increasingly suspected, what I had witnessed was bogus. For the first time, I could take a stand with genuine confidence about the truth of what had happened, which was now a full-blown per-

sonal crisis and no longer just a theoretical discussion.

“That knowledge was, and is to this day, a great source of empowerment for me. I believe personal experience is the only way to acquire that kind of bedrock conviction about the danger of recovered memories. Sadly, this kind of first-hand knowledge comes at a very high price, which no one ever voluntarily chooses to pay. It also belongs to a relatively small group of people, most of whom have been badly wounded. In trying to determine the validity of recovered memories, everyone else — including experts, therapists and those who now believe they are victims — are ultimately only guessing based on their assumptions about how human memory works. I assume virtually all those people who embrace these beliefs have been personally spared the nightmare of being falsely accused of child abuse. Those of us who haven’t been so fortunate understand all too well the great danger in what Theophostic Ministry teaches.”

Taking note of Wright’s comments, again, I pose the question: Is there a legitimate purpose to engaging in an activity that may result in believing inaccuracies about another person? Is recovered memory therapy worthwhile to pursue, knowing that objective truth, without corroborating evidence, will be impossible to determine? Are the potential side effects of recovered memory therapy worth the risk? Is Theophostic Ministry’s belief that the answer to current problems lies in our past true from a biblical perspective? Is it appropriate for a Christian to engage in memory regression knowing that this practice has been known to cause harm to innocent people? Does Jesus sanction this practice? Is it really scriptural, as Smith claims?

Perhaps one should also ask the following questions, knowing the risk that could occur if memories are recovered:

Why do you want to recover memories? What do you think such an exercise will do for you? Is there a compelling reason for you to know, one way or the other, if you were abused as a young child and no longer remember it? Memories recovered will be, more than likely, impossible to determine without corroborating evidence or someone else’s confession.

I take an in-depth look at both Theophostic’s underlying theology and spiritual methodology in chapters [Three](#) and [Four](#) in an attempt to answer these questions. However, for now, consider the following observation from the publishers of [*The Berean Call*](#).

“Simple logic says that probing into the past to uncover ‘lost memories’ of former traumas, as in psychotherapy or the Christian brand known as ‘inner healing,’ is a vain pursuit for two reasons: 1) one can never be sure of the accuracy of such memories, due to a lack of objective verification; and 2) if one ‘lost memory’ could have such a heavy influence upon the person’s thinking, emotions and conduct, who can say

that there may not be other ‘memories’ of equal or greater importance that likewise need to be recovered and ‘worked through’ endlessly?”⁵⁰

In conclusion, I expect some will read this chapter and believe I, as an individual, have no sympathy for the victims of child abuse because I have questioned the validity of recovered memories of sexual abuse. Quite to the contrary, I know what type of suffering is involved in being a survivor of child sexual abuse. By clicking [here](#), you can read the story of my abuse, which began in a church. I have never gone to a counselor or minister in an attempt to recover repressed memories. I have always remembered what happened to me from the time the incidents first occurred. I can remember the first time my stepfather raped me. I cannot remember, nor have I wanted to, every single time after that in which he raped or abused me again.

I had “tolerable” recovery during my twenty years as a professing atheist. However, as soon as I realized the gospel message of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, my “recovery” was replaced by my “regeneration.” I accepted the healing power of the gospel through the same methods people have used to hear and receive the Good News since Jesus himself walked on the earth. These methods include reading the Bible and reciprocal discipleship with other Christians — methods in existence millennia before Theophostic principles were in print. If I had undergone Christian counseling that attempted to find “lies” within my “repressed memories,” my life might have well been very different. I thank God that by His grace I did not walk down that dangerous road. Thankfully, I have no imagined memories of my early childhood. I’ve left such malleable territory alone. I did not open that Pandora’s Box. Nor have I needed to go down that risky road in order to live a vital, Christian life, be a good mother, and avoid addictive behavior. A daily walk with Jesus has been enough.

However, as a survivor of real abuse, I believe the cavalier way people describe memories of abuse that they never remembered prior to therapy or Theophostic ministry, is very damaging to the credibility of real, always remembered incidents of sexual abuse. The initial, vague, fleeting images in these “memories,” if not real, may soon *become* real to the person experiencing them. This happens after the person, who is awash in the experiential nature of Theophostic Ministry, suspends critical analysis, and accepts as reality something with vaporously thin substantiation. These fleeting images become real enough so that the person, with enough repetition, can casually tell, through his “Christian” testimony, that he was abused by a relative and be very believable. Why not? The person has convinced himself of something that Smith admits, in early therapy, the person sometimes doubts and questions.⁵¹ Maybe they want to deny these memories, when they first appear, not because of dissociation, or being in denial about horrible, forgotten abuse, but because,

deep down inside, their consciences resist believing a lie that will potentially destroy another person's reputation. They would be wise to heed the voice of conscience, a voice that God has given us to guide us in our Christian life.

The risk of Theophostic ministry's damage to personal relationships, because of mistaken memories of abuse, merits serious concern. However, a look at the underlying theological principles of Theophostic Ministry is reason alone for Christians to view Smith's writings with a skeptical eye, as we shall see in the next chapter.

[Jump to Chapter Three](#)

Please note: If you are reading this book because you believe you have been hurt by recovered memory therapeutic techniques as a result of engaging in Theophostic ministry, and you are emotionally distraught as a result of this, please read [Chapter 7](#) now.

(Footnotes)

¹ Joe Appel, "Cautious Relief for Tom Wright," *The Forecaster*, 11 July 2002

² Ed M. Smith, letter, "Article was intentional attempt to discredit good ministry," *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 14 Aug. 2003, 4A.

³ Fletcher, "Controversial International Ministry Operates from Campbellsville," *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 3 July 2003, 1A.

⁴ Yolande Lucire, Ph.D., "The Bearing of Daubert on Sexual Abuse Litigation" *The Australian Journal of Forensic Sciences* Vol.32 No 2, pg. 45-57, June-December 2000.

⁵ Fletcher, Controversial International Ministry.

⁶ Dwight Clough, letter, "Theophostic isn't about witch hunts and story shouldn't have been," *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 11 Aug. 2003.

⁷ Dwight Clough, web page, "In Defense of Theophostic," November 2003. http://www.dwightclough.com/theophostic_defense.html

⁸ Ed M. Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed., Alathia Publishing, 2000. p. 57. I believe Smith intended this to read: "I have always questioned the possible hidden agenda of those out there who feel obsessed with making other people's traumatic memory false. If I were seeking to hide my evil deeds I might want to discredit the reliability of what others remember."

⁹ A link to Stanley Cohen's book, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, in which he coined the term, "moral panic," can be found here: http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/pressAndInformationOffice/publications/books/Folk_Devils_and_Moral_Panics.htm.

¹⁰ Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1972. A new edition of his classic text was released in 2003, and, Cohen discusses his work in an interview by the British Broadcasting

Corporation in April 2003. http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/factual/thinkingallowed_20030430.shtml

¹¹ Lucire, The Bearing of Daubert.

¹² Fletcher, Controversial International Ministry.

¹³ Smith, Article was intentional attempt.

¹⁴ Dr. E. James Wilder and Dr. Ed M. Smith, *Keeping Your Ministry Out of Court*, Alathia Publishing, 2002. p. 71. This quote, and the next two quotes noted by the following two footnotes, are from Dr. E. James Wilder, who is giving a description of a hypothetical progression of thoughts that might occur in a session with someone who is recovering a memory of child abuse.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ A scanned image of this article is at this web page; <http://www.geocities.com/~therapyletters/sanjose.htm> . The article referenced was published May 20, 1996.

¹⁸ Deborah David tells her story on her web page, http://www.geocities.com/~therapyletters/who_am.htm.

¹⁹ Tom Bell, "Pastor's methods set off concerns," *Portland Press Herald*, 13 May 2002, 1A. (Wright said the *Portland Press Herald's* report that Miner's meeting with Harris occurred in 1998 was incorrect. The meeting actually took place in 1996. The full-blown accusations leveled against Miner by his daughter occurred two years later, in 1998, after Harris' trip to Campbellsville.)

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Smith, in *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, p. 368, asserts that Jesus literally appears, in spiritual form, during Theophostic sessions. "I could not explain in any other way than this being the real Jesus," he said.

²³ Appel, Cautious Relief.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Tom Bell, "Abuse Charges Dropped in Church 'Memory' Case," *Portland Press Herald*, 28 June 2002, 1A.

²⁶ Portland, Maine news television reports.

²⁷ "Court Cases Should Not Rely Only on Recovered Memories," editorial, *Portland Press Herald*, 15 May 2002, 8A.

²⁸ Wright said when he was arrested he asked for a Bible. The guard brought him a Catholic Bible, and he found himself reading Daniel 13, [Also known as the Book of Susannah] in which a woman falsely accused of a sexual crime was found innocent, while her accusers were charged under the Mosaic Law with bringing false witness. He said that God used that story to comfort and encourage him at that very difficult time.

²⁹ The quote referenced is: "Unless I am convinced by the testimonies of

the Holy Scriptures or evident reason (for I believe in neither the Pope nor councils alone, since it has been established that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures that I have adduced, and my conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God; and I am neither able nor willing to recant, since it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience. God help me. Amen." (WA, 7, 836-38.)

³⁰ Tom Rutherford, letter, *Ohio Association of Responsible Mental Health Practices Newsletter*, July 2002.

³¹ Not her real name.

³² Mike Stanton, "U-Turn on Memory Lane," *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August 1997.

³³ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* 119.

³⁴ Wilder and Smith, *Keeping Your Ministry Out of Court* 74.

³⁵ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* 26.

³⁶ Ed M. Smith, "Memories from the Womb," *Journal of the International Association for Theophostic Ministry*, Spring/Summer Edition 2003.

³⁷ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* 25.

³⁸ Smith, Article was intentional attempt.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Wilder and Smith, *Keeping Your Ministry Out of Court* 75.

⁴¹ Elizabeth F. Loftus, "Creating False Memories," *Scientific American*, Sept. 1997, Vol. 277 #3 pg. 70-75. <http://faculty.washington.edu/eloftus/Articles/sciam.htm>

⁴² Elizabeth F. Loftus, interview by Wendy M. Grossman, *NewScientist.com* (UK), 3 Sept. 2003.

⁴³ Loftus, *Creating False Memories*.

⁴⁴ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* 370.

⁴⁵ Stanton

⁴⁶ Loftus, interview.

⁴⁷ Loftus, *Creating False Memories*.

⁴⁸ Brad Shannon, "Man in Notorious Sex Case Finishes Term," *The Olympian*, 8 April, 2003, 1A. See also this link: <http://www.justicedenied.org/paul.htm>

⁴⁹ Ed Smith, column, "Redeem the Family Unit if Possible; But Heal Whatever the Cost," *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 9 Feb. 1996.

⁵⁰ Column, "Questions &Answers," *The Berean Call*, October 2003, pg. 2.

⁵¹ Wilder and Smith, *Keeping Your Ministry Out of Court* 75.

Chapter Three: Theological concerns with Theophostic Ministry

(For the latest update on Smith's theology, please see Update, page [140](#))

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Jer. 17:9 (NIV)

Sin-based Theology vs. Lie-based Theology

"S*in-based theology* believes that the root of my problem is my sin," said Ed Smith. He said he has "come to realize this is a misconception and a grave error." Once a person becomes a believer, Smith said, "the source of my sin problem is no longer in my heart since I now share the very heart of Jesus ... my trouble with sin is now in my mind or lie-based thinking." Smith calls this new insight lie-based theology.¹

The first academic paper on the theology of Theophostic Ministry appeared in the Fall 2003 issue of [Trinity Journal](#). Philip Monroe and Bryan Maier authored the paper.

"A Theological Analysis of Theophostic Ministry," concluded over two years of the two professors' research and analysis based solely on materials Smith authored. The paper's abstract said the article "concludes that Theophostic Ministry, as it is currently articulated, should warrant great caution before being used." Furthermore, they conclude, that as a whole, the theological basis of Theophostic Ministry is not consistent with responsible biblical doctrine.²

The authors also outlined their theological concerns with Theophostic Ministry in a September 2003 workshop, "Trauma and Embedded Lies: A Theological Appraisal of Theophostic Ministry." Over 300 people attended the pair's [presentation](#)³ at the American Association of Christian Counselors World Conference in Nashville.

Monroe and Maier limited their presentation and paper to two issues: Theophostic's view of sin and Theophostic's view of healing. These two areas are the ones most germane to Christian counseling, they said.⁴

Of the two, both men considered Smith's lie-based theology, which departs from an orthodox view of sin, of top concern.

"The most significant difference we have with Theophostic is whether sanctification is now complete or is something ongoing," said Monroe, in Nashville, speaking for both.

In their paper, Monroe and Maier outline Smith's dichotomy between pre- and post-salvation sin. They assert that Smith believes what "energizes a believer's sin is something different than that which motivates an unbeliever."⁵ They say that according to Smith, "sin in the

believer's life comes from unwittingly (innocently?) buying into a storehouse of lies that still remain in our minds even after conversion."⁶

They assert that Smith believes, "those who maintain that sin is still the deepest problem even in the life of the believer are guilty of adopting what Smith's labels *sin-based theology*."⁷

During the pair's presentation, Monroe drew attention to the theological assumptions he said undergird Smith's theories. Smith's assumptions include the beliefs "that battling lies is not part of the victorious Christian life; mind and heart are separate entities; mind/memories are containers of the lies we believe: sin is a willful choice or the result of being deceived, it's not a disposition; and most inappropriate behavior is motivated by lie-based pain."

The wound versus sin issue is at the root of Smith's theological differences with orthodox Christianity.

"Because we need to be healed more than we need to be forgiven, this approach renders traditional spiritual disciplines practically powerless without some kind of Theophostic experience to 'trigger' their effectiveness," said Maier, in an interview December 2003.

"According to Smith, sin is primarily a behavior stemming from motives that may not be malignant."⁸ In other words, in Smith's theology, sinful behaviors are assumed to be driven by a person's attempt to deal with wounds, rather than expressions of the evil inclinations inherent in the human heart, said Monroe and Maier. The men described Theophostic lie-based theology as a pendulum swung too extremely toward wounds as the causative agent in a Christian's failure to live a victorious life. They believe Smith downplays the importance of individual culpability in believing lies.

Theophostic Ministry "relies too much on a single methodology," said Monroe, during the pair's presentation. "It's people vigorously defending a quick cure versus a daily struggle with the sinful nature, and expecting God to always respond in a Theophostic ministry session within the methodology's expectation. Believing lies is a temptation to sin that we bear responsibility for."

Smith's model goes too far in the direction of advocating a passive reception of divine healing, rather than encouraging self-examination and perseverance through life's difficulties, they said.

"Sin versus lies/wounds – which side do you tend to focus on more? If you counsel victims, you're going to notice terrible damage – the effect of wounds. What if you work more with abusers? You might be more focused on their sin," Monroe said, in the pair's presentation. "If you focus too much on the sinful heart, the environment becomes almost inconsequential. We can become diagnosticians of sin. If I look too far in the other direction, the person who has suffered tremendous wounds will become passive. What happens when the pendulum swings too far? Both

are problematic. What is sin? It's a disposition – something I am."

Monroe said he and Maier are Reformed theologians. "We have a great respect for the scriptures. There's a pervasive effect of sin in the world that affects all of creation — the [noetic](#) effects of sin. We still suffer from that. We stand on the east side of the Jordan. We still live in a desert. We still suffer. We cannot change ourselves. Yet God uses the Christian community to sharpen us. As imperfect as it is, he uses the church to sharpen us," said Monroe, who advocated, in Nashville, for the importance of Christian discipleship.

Sin is not a new problem, and the temptation to being deceived by our sinful hearts is continually in a Christian's life, Monroe said, during their presentation. "Think of the image of the prostitute in Revelation.⁹ It's not until you get close enough to look inside the goblet that you see what's in it. Satan paints it and gilds it so it's attractive. What is the root of this deception?"

Monroe and Maier do not believe the root arises primarily from victimization Christians experience as children, which Smith believes influences them the rest of their lives through the lies attached to those experiences.

"While we do not deny the tremendous influence of the sins of others and Satan's ploys on our thinking, we are troubled by the lack of attention Smith gives to the individual's role in their own deception."¹⁰

In an interview, Monroe said, "I think the root of the problem is our desire to be our own god — to be autonomous instead of dependent creatures."

In Nashville, both professors affirmed their belief in the Christian's death to sin, and new life by the Spirit, described by Paul in Romans 6-8. "We have achieved peace through God. You'd better believe it. The law has been crushed. Yet consider Romans 7. You still have the struggle," Monroe said, referring to Paul's reference to the on-going struggle of *"another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members."*(Romans 7:23 NIV)

Both Monroe and Maier believe Theophostic teaching encourages an attitude of diminished self-responsibility with its emphasis on lie-based theology as a cure-all for emotional distress. "As ugly as the lies were, was it somehow safer to believe it?" Monroe asked the audience during the pair's presentation. "You cannot make a simple demarcation between lies and wounds."

Monroe, in the presentation, cited Psalms 42 and 43, and noted that the psalmist asks himself the question, "Why are you so down?" Instead of Theophostic's emphasis on seeking out the lies connected to memories of wounds incurred from others, Monroe said Christians need to examine themselves. "At beginning of that psalm, the psalmist talks about the

violent things done to him. What does he do? He takes his soul to task."

Monroe warned his audience in Nashville about the dangers of desire for repose, which both men perceive is evident in Theophostic methodology. "One of the greatest snares in spiritual life is to foster dreams and fancies of our own which do not tally with the statements of Jesus,"¹¹ he said. He urged them to look at their own responsibility for accepting a lie as truth. "For every lie, there is a response that I make – that's the part I have to deal with on a daily basis."

Maier spoke to that issue, too: "We are not just victims of lies – we are liars."

Monroe and Maier's work represents the first serious attempt, from the world of Christian academia, to review the theological foundations of the Theophostic movement. However, the Community Evangelical Free Church, in Elverson, Pa., tackled the same concern over Theophostic Ministry's view of sin in an evaluation they published in 2001. "[A Biblical Evaluation of Theophostic Ministry](#),"¹² states that Theophostic "presents an unscriptural view of effort in the Christian life,"¹³ and "displays a superficial view of sin."¹⁴

Smith takes passages referring to warnings against salvation by works, and "applies them to spiritual exertion of all kinds," the authors said. "He virtually mocks the notion of self-effort in the Christian life." This is contrary to scripture, the authors say, and they point to the following biblical passages as examples of prompting Christians toward "Spirit-energized striving and self-control." They list Prov. 25:28, Prov. 4:23, Prov. 29:11, 1 Thess. 4:4, 1 Pet. 1:13, 1 Pet. 5:8, and 2 Pet. 1:5-6, 1 Cor. 9:26, Heb. 12:1, 2 Tim. 2:6, Eph. 6: 11-12, and over a dozen others as evidence that God intends Christians to exert strong effort in overcoming temptation and enduring trials. Smith's teaching "inadvertently drains such passages of their effect. It does so by taking an array of problems traditionally seen among Christians as 'discipleship,' or 'growth' issues... and recategorizing them as 'woundedness' issues — and thus as issues that only Theophostic Ministry can address."¹⁵

Smith's superficial view of sin presents a picture of people who are entangled by spiritual lies as victims instead of sinners,¹⁶ the authors said. "The focus is upon the suffering person's pain and status as a victim needing the reassuring words of Christ."¹⁷

The shared concerns expressed by both Monroe and Maier, and the Elverson church's staff, involve the issue of Theophostic's appeal to a desire for spiritual passivity. This desire works against vigorous self-examination and the willingness to endure spiritual discipline in resisting sin and growing in faith. Both groups assert that a philosophy that denies such struggles are a part of the Christian's walk, though appealing, is not biblical.

What about Theophostic's theology of healing?

Theophostic Ministry's teaching on healing advocates a new methodology that makes some sweeping assumptions about God, said Monroe and Maier, in Nashville. "God only heals when we are receptive to hearing him. If I ask him he will speak. If you believe this, there's a bit of an equation that takes place," Monroe said.¹⁸ In other words, when someone enters a Theophostic session, there is the underlying assumption that God will give a personal revelation to the person during that session. There is also the assumption that experiencing God's truth is best done directly without an intermediary, said Monroe and Maier.

"When God speaks, it is personal (as opposed to the written word of Scripture) and delivers his message directly to the person (not through the prompting of a counselor)," both men said, in their paper.¹⁹

In response to Smith's assertion that the Theophostic minister must get out of the way and let God heal, Monroe and Maier said the ministry of reconciliation is an ongoing process of telling others how to be reconciled to God, as well as walking with them along the path. "We cannot take ourselves out of the ministry. As much as we mess it up, God uses us," Monroe said. "There is a tendency to look for a special process to activate God's healings. It seems to me God can heal in an instant, but more often than not he uses space, time and flesh to carry it out. If you live a theology that says you can't ask God for a miracle, you have a bad theology. But don't put God in a box," he said, as he warned against depending upon the surety of a formula for healing.

The danger of all methodologies, said Monroe, in the presentation, was something Oswald Chambers described: " 'As soon as we get wedded to a shortcut in dealing with souls, God leaves us alone.' But it seems if you read the Psalms or other places, God may, for a time, not answer. Job doesn't get an answer until the end."

These men agree with many followers of orthodox Christian doctrine who believe the kind of immediate healing touted as one of Theophostic's benefits runs the risk of minimizing the role of God-ordained suffering in a believer's life.

The purpose of suffering

In response to an article on Theophostic Ministry in *Christianity Today*,²⁰ Gordon Ginn, of Hartsford, Montana, wrote a [letter](#) to the editor warning against a desire for spiritual shortcuts. "It may well be another indication of this generation's 'quick fix' motivations and a misguided theology that overlooks growing in grace, which process includes illness and personal loss. Does God want everyone to be physically and psychologically well at all times? If so, then why does the Bible teach that we

should be content in whatever state we find ourselves? Personal trials, the Bible states, are for maturing character,"²¹ said Ginn.

LL (Don) Veinot, Jr., president of [Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc.](#), when asked about Theophostic Ministry, also warns against expecting an emotionally pain-free Christian life. "The overall idea [underlying Theophostic], although unspoken and undefined typically, is that: 'life ought to be perfect. My life is not perfect and it's someone or something else's fault. If I can get back to the original violation, I can fix it, and all will be well.' There are several problems with this type of thinking theologically," he said. "First, biblically speaking, we live in a fallen world, and the effects of sin permeate all of creation. Ergo, bad things happen which are beyond our control. Secondly, humanity is born with a sin nature and we do hurtful things to one another, either intentionally or unintentionally, as a result. When we focus on ourselves — our issues, past hurts, etc. — we find ugly stuff, some real and some imagined. As we focus on Christ, however, those hurts can be turned into strengths — wounded healers. Some of the greatest leaders down through history had some really bad stuff happen to them in their younger years that strengthened and fortified them for what they would end up doing."

Theophostic's focus on the trauma of our past is absent in scripture, say staff at the Community Evangelical Free Church. "The Bible, too, talks a great deal about remembering. But its focus is very different." Instead, they say, we are urged to remember God's miracles, his name, our slavery to sin before our redemption, God's faithfulness, and goodness. We are also commanded to remember the consequences of rebellion.²²

Monroe and Maier remind believers that we are not always "privity to God's timing or purpose of our *dis-ease*." Attempts to explain or avoid our afflictions can create frustration, while seeing suffering as an opportunity for reflection, even as we continue to seek healing, can yield spiritual benefits that exceed the temporal afflictions of this life.²³

The Theology of "Sufferology"

Richard Wurmbrand, founder of [Voice of the Martyrs](#), suffered 14 years in Romanian Communist prisons, where he was tortured for his faith. In *The Triumphant Church*, Wurmbrand urges Christians in the West to prepare for persecution that may come in the future. "Preparation for underground work begins by studying sufferology, martyrology," he said. Wurmbrand explained that Soviet police officers took courses in "arrestology — the science of how to arrest people so that nobody around shall observe." Wurmbrand noted, "If they have created a new name, *arrestology*, let us create the name *sufferology*."²⁴

What is sufferology? According to Wurmbrand, it is a spiritual preparation for suffering. He says believers can be baptized and believe,

but will not last long in an underground church if they are not prepared to suffer. “You might have the mightiest faith in the world, but if you are not prepared to suffer, then you will be taken by the police. You will get two slaps and you will declare anything.” For believers trained through God-ordained trials and suffering, being arrested and thrown in prison is not a time to panic, but an opportunity to witness, said Wurmbrand.

If we measure God’s intention to allow us to suffer by what types of afflictions believers around the world endure for the sake of Christ, we can only conclude that our ability to transcend suffering, instead of our ability to effect quick relief, may be the very tool God uses to grow us spiritually.

John Piper, in the same book, argues that all suffering in a Christian’s life is “with Christ and for Christ.”²⁵ He says all forms of suffering — whether by persecution, from illness, or emotional pain and grief — is an opportunity for Christ’s power to be magnified in our weakness. “If we are Christ’s, then what befalls us is for his glory and for our good whether it is caused by enzymes or by enemies,” said Piper.²⁶

Judith Couchman, a Christian author, said, “As a society we’re not anchored to a value system that respects endurance or the satisfaction of delayed rewards. Instant gratification propels us to settle for what’s quick and easy, yet that approach doesn’t reflect God’s character.”²⁷

I have experienced times of grief, fear, anxiety, personal loss, and deep discouragement. I have spent nights crying out to God and pleading with many tears. What individual has not endured such things who has lived a life where they expended much effort to advance God’s kingdom? True commitment to Christ is the fixed price without the discount. It is in those very valleys that I have received a fresh revelation of God’s mercy, power, grace and succor in my life. Looking back, I hesitate to think of what I would have lost if God had granted me the immediate relief I sometimes wished for. We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God, said Paul, as he strengthened the disciples. (Acts 14:22) The apostle was not speaking to unbelievers. These were Christians, born again, yet destined to suffer under God’s sovereign hand.

Does this mean we are not to seek relief? No, of course not. Yet, we must be careful in our quest for immediate relief from emotional distress that we do not depart from sound doctrine in search of a cure. Placing our trust in experiences instead of scripture is a dangerous course.

Experiential based theology

Smith’s “primary apologetic for Theophostic Ministry is experiential,” said the staff at Community Evangelical Free Church. Smith’s core argument is that Theophostic “works.”²⁸

“The idea of separating experience from theology is one of our main concerns,” said Maier. “He [Smith] said in his presentation [the day before at the AACC conference] ‘Theophostic is not a theology.’ Yet, his conversation and teachings focus on who God is, and what he does. We have a problem with what appears to be his theological position that undergirds his Theophostic principles – the underpinnings of what appear to be his theological principles. His response: His personal theological views should be separated from Theophostic. The point we’re making is we have a right to look at Theophostic views. We’re not looking at outcome studies. As founder and creator of Theophostic Ministry, we think his theology does matter. He criticizes the church, but doesn’t identify where he lands.”

“In an e-mail to us, he wanted us not to consider his theology, but just his experience. That’s a modernist assumption,” said Monroe. Modernists believe that practice (or experience) and theory can somehow be separated and stand apart from each other, he said.

In that e-mail message Smith said: “I would ask that you separate out my *interpretation* of what God is doing in a Theophostic Ministry session (my theology) from the principles of Theophostic Ministry itself.”²⁹

Monroe and Maier say they do not believe such a separation is possible.

In a [letter](#) to the editor of the *Central Kentucky News Journal*, Smith discounted the significance of Monroe and Maier’s presentation in Nashville. “Our theological differences were not about any major tenant [sic] of the faith but rather peripheral issues that have been argued by large numbers of people on both sides of the debate for centuries.”³⁰

However, Maier and Monroe do not consider Smith’s view of sin in a believer’s life a peripheral issue. “His own words don’t match what we believe in scripture. Our argument is very narrow: Does this match with historic Christian faith? Ed Smith has never invited theologians to supervise him. He’s never subjected it to any theological view except that it works,” said Maier. “Our goal is to provide an alternative voice in the journals. The majority of the information out there, at this point, is produced by Smith and his followers — a clearly one-sided viewpoint. All we want is for pastors and missionaries who might use [Theophostic] to compare it with scripture.”

Smith’s demonology

(Note: Smith has made major changes in his demonology. Elliot Miller, of Christian Research Institute, details this in his paper, “[An Evaluation of Theophostic Prayer Ministry](#).”)

“While some evangelical theologians believe that Christians can fall under the strong influence of demons, few would agree with Smith that hundreds of demons can inhabit a believer,” says Kevin Bidwell in his

article about Theophostic in *Christianity Today*. Bidwell quotes Millard Erickson, a teacher at Truett Seminary in Waco, and author of *Christian Theology*, which is widely regarded as a reliable and comprehensive introduction to systematic theology. “I am concerned about [any] approach that sees demons behind every rock,” says Erickson. “Somehow we have to blend our understanding of physical and psychosomatic illness with an understanding of demonic activity. I see Satan’s influence [as] much more diffused. The demonization model is direct. The reality may be more indirect.”³¹

“About 40 percent of the time,” Smith said, “I encounter resistance in the person hearing God speak due to some level of demonic interference.”³²

However, even those who accept Smith’s views about demonic inhabitation of a Christian’s mind³³ may be troubled by Smith’s self-disclosed, evolving beliefs about rebuking evil spirits. In *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, Smith recounts his early efforts at casting out demons by using “fervor and dramatics.”³⁴ Then, he later discovered his ability to make the demons stand passively at attention within a believer, during a Theophostic session. He even calls out the main demon spokesman and binds the other demons to it. “I demand that all directives I give this demon apply to all demons up to and including the second in command to Satan.”³⁵ He claims face-to-face encounters with “thousands of fully-manifested demonic spirits.”³⁶ He even allows demons to converse with him using the person’s vocal cords, and said, at times, the information reported by demons is extremely helpful.³⁷ Such editorial descriptions come complete with cartoonish illustrations of demonic figures.

Steve Cadman describes his difficulties with Smith’s approach to dialoguing with demons in his [article](#), “A Brief Overview of TheoPhostic Inner Healing model, (Part 2).” Cadman is a marriage and family counselor with Christian Counselling Inner Healing Art & Play Therapy, of Cambridge, Ontario.

Cadman describes a seminar he attended several years ago, in which Smith told participants he “even commands that he speak to Satan himself because he is at the top of the chain of command.”³⁸

Cadman said, “Examples of his speaking to and with Satan were disrespectful, demanding and rude at best, and tainted with arrogance and pride at worst (I suspect that this tainting may be a rubbing off of things from fallen angels as a result of engaging and dialoguing with them). I do not believe that this is biblical in any way, shape or form and that it is very dangerous to think that we will not be touched, tainted or subtly drawn into wrong attitudes or practices by engaging in this.”³⁹

Cadman cites the passage of Jude 9, where Michael the archangel does not dare to bring a slanderous judgment against Satan. Smith responds to previous critics who cited the same passage: “Michael is

Satan's peer, I am not. I am his authority and he is subject to me."⁴⁰

Smith neglects to cite the context in which this verse appears. *"In the very same way, these dreamers [men]...slander celestial beings ... Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand."* (Jude 8,10 NIV) In context, the verse is talking about men who are calling themselves part of the church, and who have secretly slipped in unawares. It could be debated that such men had no authority over demons because they were hypocrites, but true believers do have such authority. Nevertheless, Jesus himself cautioned his disciples not to rejoice that the spirits submit to you. (Luke 10:20) Obviously Cadman, who attended one of Smith's seminars, was disturbed by Smith's attitude toward demons.

In conclusion, Smith argues for acceptance of Theophostic Ministry based, not on its theology, but its efficacy. However, what are those claims of efficacy based upon? Obviously, they are based upon experience — personal encounters with a spiritual presence. We'll examine the spiritual concerns of Theophostic in Chapter [Four](#).

(Footnotes)

¹ Ed M. Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed., Alathia Publishing, 2000 p. 224-225. (Emphasis in original.)

² Bryan N. Maier and Philip G. Monroe, abstract, "A Theological Analysis of Theophostic Ministry," *Trinity Journal*, Fall 2003 Vol. 24 NS, No. 2. p. 169

³ Jan Fletcher, "Theophostic Ministry the focus of world counselor's conference in Nashville," *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 5 Oct. 2003, 1A.

⁴ Bryan N. Maier and Philip G. Monroe, "A Theological Analysis of Theophostic Ministry," *Trinity Journal*, Fall 2003 Vol. 24 NS, No. 2., p. 172.

⁵ Ibid. p. 175

⁶ Ibid., p. 175-176. (Emphasis original)

⁷ Ibid., p. 176.

⁸ Ibid., p. 175.

⁹ Revelation 17.

¹⁰ Maier and Monroe, Theological Analysis 177-178.

¹¹ This is a direct quote of Oswald Chambers, *The Philosophy of Sin*, published in the UK in 1937.

¹² Staff of Community Evangelical Free Church, Elverson, Pa. *A Biblical Evaluation of Theophostic Ministry*, Sept. 28, 2001. PDF version.

¹³ Ibid., p. 3

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁸ Bryan N. Maier and Philip Monroe, presentation, "Trauma and Embedded Lies: A Theological Appraisal of Theophostic Ministry," American

- Association of Christian Counselor's World Conference, 27 Sept. 2003.
- ¹⁹ Maier and Monroe, *Theological Analysis* 174.
- ²⁰ Kevin Bidwell, "Deliverance Debate: Unconventional 'Theophostic' counseling cites results in rebutting its critics," *Christianity Today*, 5 Feb. 2001.
- ²¹ Gordon Ginn, Ph.D., letter, *Christianity Today*, 19 Feb. 2001.
- ²² Community Evangelical Free Church, *A Biblical Evaluation* 11
- ²³ Maier and Monroe, *Theological Analysis* 184.
- ²⁴ Richard Wurmbrand, John Piper, Milton Martin, *The Triumphant Church*, Voice of the Martyrs, 1999, p. 11. (Emphasis in original)
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- ²⁷ Judith Couchman, "Staying on Purpose," *Discipleship Journal*, Jan/Feb. 2001, p.53.
- ²⁸ Community Evangelical Free Church, *A Biblical Evaluation* 2.
- ²⁹ Email letter received May 7, 2003, (Emphasis Smith's), Maier and Monroe, *Theological Analysis* 171.
- ³⁰ Ed Smith, "Theophostic Ministry Once Again Misrepresented," *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 26 Oct. 2003.
- ³¹ Bidwell, *Deliverance Debate*.
- ³² Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed, 148.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 297.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 304.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 312.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 137.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ Steve Cadman, webpage, "A Brief Overview of Theophostic Inner Healing Model, (Part 2), January 2003. http://www.christiancounseling.on.ca/news_theopostic_model_2.htm
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁰ Ed M. Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed., 322.

Chapter Four: Spiritual Concerns with Theophostic Ministry

“Because you disheartened the righteous with your lies, when I had brought them no grief, and because you encouraged the wicked not to turn from their evil ways and so save their lives, therefore you will no longer see false visions or practice divination. I will save my people from your hands. And then you will know that I am the LORD.” Ezek. 13:22-23 (NIV)

Ed Smith calls his technique a “ministry tool that works.”¹ Such a statement reflects an individual who gives much weight to an apologetic based on the experiential. When [confronted](#) with criticism regarding the theological principles undergirding Theophostic Ministry, Smith said, “the fact is, we have fruit, they have opinions. Jesus said you’ll know them by their fruit.”² Smith insists his critics should look at the results. He credits God for the positive changes he claims come through Theophostic methods.

Philip Monroe and Bryan Maier said Smith e-mailed them a letter following the pair’s critical comments regarding Theophostic theological assumptions at the Christian Association for Psychological Studies conference, in Chicago in 2002. “He wanted us not to consider his theology, but just his experience,” said Monroe.

Smith and his followers insist that people who experience Theophostic ministry first-hand will become believers in its healing power.

A flyer, distributed by Theophostic Ministry, reported information about a survey regarding the efficacy of Theophostic ministry, which was presented at the American Association of Christian Counselors conference in Nashville September 2003. Fernando Garzon, Psy. D., of [Regent University](#), Virginia Beach, Va., and a team of researchers, surveyed 1,354 Theophostic Ministry users. According to the flyer, over 80 percent had personally received TPM. Over half of them said TPM was the most beneficial method they had experienced. Thirty-nine percent said it was very helpful. TPM practitioners rated efficacy compared to other techniques. Comparative ratings of TPM were 70 to 85 percent in each category [of presenting concern], rating TPM more effective than other techniques they’d used.³

Prior to the study, however, Smith published an appeal for donations in order to help fund the Theophostic Ministry Research Center, a subdivision of the Christian Interventions Research Institute, at the Regent University School of Psychology and Counseling. Smith reported, in a 2001 *Theophostic Ministries Update*, that the School of Psychology was accepting tax-deductible donations for the center. Smith asked Theophostic supporters to contact Garzon if they want to participate in the study. In

the same paragraph, he encouraged them to send in donations to the project. Since the group he appealed to for funds may have included some of the very same people surveyed, the data presented in the survey may be biased.

Regent developed the research center to respond to the challenge of providing research support for the purpose of encouraging insurance company coverage of Theophostic therapeutic techniques, said Smith. This gives the appearance of self-interest at work among possible survey participants.⁴

This study measured only *perceptions* of the efficacy of Theophostic Ministry, not the actual efficacy in a controlled test. However, it is apparent that some beneficial effects, resulting in a cessation of emotional pain, are occurring in Theophostic Ministry. The method's growth is happening, in large part, from word-of-mouth testimonies touting the method's benefits.

Just what is responsible for the apparent relief experienced by some people who engage in Theophostic sessions? Some skeptics credit the power of the imagination, or the power of suggestion — the placebo effect — for the apparent sudden changes in relief from emotional pain.

Why Does Theophostic Appear to Work?

There are several ways to look at Theophostic Ministry, from a spiritual perspective. First, some may view Theophostic Ministry as being a true divine encounter with God. Others may view it primarily as a socially facilitated phenomenon, like hypnosis.

["A Biblical Evaluation of Theophostic Ministry,"](#)⁵ proposes both of these as possibilities. "First, in some cases God may indeed be helping people during their Theophostic encounters. His mercy is beyond all telling. He often rains down grace when people's understanding is deficient, or even when they are rebelling. The woman who touched Jesus' robe in Mark 5:25-34 did not 'do it right' when she approached Jesus. Her faith was misguided — she attempted to receive healing not by a personal encounter with the Savior, but by stealing a touch of his garment, as if it were magic."⁶

Secondly, the authors say people may be under the power of suggestion. They warn against gullibility: "Since virtually every religion, philosophy, medicine (real or quack), counseling method, and psychic reader in history boast testimonies of those marvelously helped, we must avoid the lure of anecdotal evidence as our primary means for establishing what is true."⁷

One professor poses the question of whether it is God who is speaking in a Theophostic session or a "God-representation."

"Smith contends that he does not make use of guided visualiza-

tion,” said David Entwistle, an associate professor of psychology, Malone College, in Canton, Ohio. I interviewed Entwistle in November 2003.

“To some extent, that may be accurate — unless someone is suggesting exactly what you should see, it is difficult to allege that he or she is *intentionally guiding* the visualization. However, the client manual includes expectations and examples of ‘God’ speaking: ‘Some people hear Him speak ... Other times He may heal memories simply by being present. Sometimes He speaks through word pictures’ (*Genuine Recovery*, p. 20).

One alternative explanation could be that, given this expectation, people *imagine* God’s presence or communication. The key question, in that case, would be whether it is really God, or a God-representation constructed by an individual’s imagination. The Inner Healing movement has long recognized that people with strong faith commitments can experience considerable relief through visualizing such encounters, but most Inner Healing advocates recognize that they are making use of visualization rather than experiencing literal encounters with the divine,” said Entwistle, who has authored two academic papers on Theophostic Ministry. The papers are slated for publication in the [spring 2004 issue](#) of *The Journal of Psychology and Theology*.⁸

Undoubtedly, God is mercifully working in some people’s lives during a Theophostic session, despite the questionable nature of Theophostic Ministry’s methodology, as suggested in the *Biblical Evaluation of Theophostic Ministry*. In others, perhaps a great many, the power of suggestion is at work. However, a key question remains. Is Smith correct in his belief that God is always behind these changes post-Theophostic Ministry? Let’s take a closer look at the spiritual methodology behind a Theophostic spiritual encounter.

The Spiritual Methodology of Theophostic Ministry

The main purpose of entering into a Theophostic session is to: 1) focus on the emotional pain; 2) follow that “smoke trail” of emotion back in time to the memories that were the source of the current pain; and 3) have a spiritual encounter, with Jesus, which will reveal the truth and give release from the pain of the lies connected to that memory or memories.⁹

In Chapter [Two](#), I discussed the issue of repressed memories. I demonstrated Smith believes this “smoke trail” will, many times, lead to a memory that has been suppressed, or forgotten. If the person begins a Theophostic session without knowledge of a particular event from his past, presumably because he has repressed the memory, this means he is seeking information that is hidden from him. Smith uses the analogy of a two-room house to explain why this knowledge is hidden. One room — the logical part of the mind — is lit. The other room – the experiential

part of the mind – is dark. The forgotten memory, and the lies embedded within it, are in the dark room.¹⁰ According to Smith, the knowledge is hidden from the logical mind and is not accessible through the normal, everyday means of understanding oneself. This includes using Bible study, or engaging in conversations with other Christians pursuing reciprocal discipleship, which Smith labels as cognitive activities. Those activities are useful only for finding things in the lit room, not the dark room. Smith asserts this hidden knowledge must be revealed through a direct encounter with God.¹¹ The person seeking God should initiate that encounter through a Theophostic Ministry session and should expect God to speak to him in a “Divine moment,” asserts Smith.¹²

Regardless of the fact that Smith uses psychodynamic concepts to describe the situation of hidden knowledge, Smith departs from traditional psychotherapy in that he pursues a spiritual means to reveal this dark room. During a Theophostic Ministry session, the person is seeking hidden knowledge about his past through the use of a “spiritual power.” Smith asserts that Theophostic counselors do not use scriptures or share their own insights with the person.¹³ The focus is on waiting, expectantly, for God to speak to the person. In essence, that is the methodology of Theophostic Ministry. “They report to me, I speak to the Lord, and the Lord speaks to them. We get to the lie, and what feels true,” said Steve Freitag, a Theophostic facilitator in Middleton, Wis.

Often, as evidenced in descriptions from Smith’s own writings, as well as testimonies of those who have used Theophostic Ministry, the person receives the truth in a visual way, in the mind’s eye. People report seeing Jesus carrying a big red ball, seeing Jesus with a lantern, or Jesus showing a picture of the alleged abuser as a puppy dog cowering in a corner. The spiritual encounter results in a vision in the mind’s eye. Sometimes, the person hears words, instead of seeing pictures.

The person and/or facilitator accepts the validity of this hidden information, revealed during a spiritual encounter, based on how it feels. The truth is true because it feels true. It is experiential truth. The notion that it is Jesus who has spoken to the person gives added reinforcement to the person’s belief that his emotions are, in actuality, revealing the truth.

In summary, these are the elements in his methodology that Smith credits for the changes in a person’s emotional state: 1) The person believes there is hidden knowledge from the past that needs to be discovered in order to be relieved of present emotional pain. 2) The person initiates, through a particular state of mind and purposed will, a spiritual encounter as a way of having this hidden knowledge revealed. 3) This knowledge is revealed, often, in the form of a vision, or in words spoken within the person’s mind from outside his own psyche.¹⁴ 4) The person accepts or rejects the vision or revelation based on how it feels.

This process is identical, in spiritual methodology, to the occult methods of divination.

The word “[occult](#)” comes from the Latin “occultus” which means “concealed.” In its usage today, it means “beyond the bounds of ordinary knowledge — the mysterious, the concealed, or that which is hidden from view.”¹⁵ [Divination](#) is also used to discover hidden knowledge from the past. “We use divination techniques to find answers we are looking for that may not be accessible in our present lives, or that aren’t available in the physical realm. We can search for answers about the future, present, or about the past — divination is not just attempting to foretell the future.”¹⁶

Smith apparently recognized this similarity, in methodology, to occult divination. “Could I be certain the source of the messages the people were apparently hearing was divine? Maybe I was opening them up to hear deceiving spirits?”¹⁷ I believe he proceeded forward in promoting this method, despite its striking similarity to divination, because he assumes divination applies only to future events. He advises that “Theophostic Ministry should not be used to gain insight into future events or for personal guidance for future decisions,” and he says to “beware of the ‘prophetic Jesus.’”¹⁸ Obviously he recognizes the temptation to divination involved in the methodology of Theophostic Ministry. Otherwise, why issue this warning?

I believe he proceeded also on the basis of two other assumptions. First, I believe in Smith’s view, his stated desire to “heal whatever the cost,”¹⁹ justifies divining the past as acceptable if the person is seeking revelation from God. He presumes that the person’s good intentions will protect him from deception. Secondly, the apparent relief of pain experienced by people under Smith’s use of Theophostic methods is evidence to him that the healing is from God. Can these assumptions be proven sufficient to allow one to proceed with a process that, as I will soon demonstrate, is considered by psychic practitioners, as well as Christian apologists, to be an occult practice?

Furthermore, the subjective experience of visualizing a Jesus who bounces balls, holds lanterns, and other such images, bears much similarity to the occult visualization techniques of divining knowledge from the spirit world.

A Doorway into the Occult?

Anton Hein, a Christian apologist on a [well-trafficked Internet site](#), said, “the visualization techniques that are part of inner healing almost always are un-Scriptural. They include trying to imagine what Jesus would have been saying to you had you consulted Him during the situation being visualized. Rather than listening to the Holy Spirit and check-

ing everything in the Word of God, you're taught to follow and rely on your impressions." Hein warns that, "People who rely on these subjective experiences and teachings, which do not pass the test of Scripture, can in so doing open themselves up to [occult](#) spirit guides."²¹

T. A. McMahon, in his article, "[Spirits of the Lie](#)," said occult visualization "is a favored technique among those who practice 'Christian' mysticism, known within evangelical circles as the 'contemplative movement.' Inner-healing teachers professing to be Christians recommend visualization for communicating with Jesus, who they claim 'will appear.'"²²

Some people would seriously question that divination is occurring in a Theophostic session, because none of the traditional divination tools are being used. There are no cards, omens, crystal balls, or anything else of that nature in operation. It's just a person closing his eyes and praying to God. However, people who practice New Age divination techniques say none of that is really necessary. In "[A New Look at Divination](#): Everyday methods are simpler than you think!," the writer answers the question: "How does divination work? ... You may find that the most effective divination tools are not the physical toys designed to bring messages from 'out there somewhere.' Your own insight, intuition, forethought, instincts and opinions are more 'divine' than any deck of cards. By looking within, and *trusting* what you find, you may decide that you need divination's friendly advice less often than you think!"²³ (Emphasis added)

Divination is also surprisingly easy with a technique known as scrying. [Scrying](#) is an ancient technique of obtaining visions merely by fixing the eyes on a focal point. This point can be the well-known crystal ball, or a bowl of water, flames, clouds, or almost anything. "Though some people go through rituals before they scry – it isn't necessary. If you wish to ask your spirit guides for guidance, go ahead. Some people say a little prayer and ask for the correct information to appear." During scrying, images will appear and form in the mind. "When this happens, allow your attention to focus on these mental images. From this point forward, the scrying surface is irrelevant; do not be distracted by it."²⁴

Obtaining a trance state is also surprisingly easy, and is accomplished, according to [New Age proponents](#) of divination, by something as seemingly benign as "concentrating on breathing deeply and regularly for a few minutes."²⁵ I am not saying that everyone who enters into a Theophostic session is going into a trance state. I am making a point that such states are very easy to achieve, and it is likely that some people are entering into a trance state during a Theophostic session without being aware of what they are doing.

I assert that looking within your past and trusting what is revealed to you through a spiritual power is divination. Is it safe to proceed

knowing this? Does God provide an exception to the prohibition that we are not to seek, through spiritual means, knowledge we do not possess about past events? Before I answer that question, let's look for a moment at the difficulties Theophostic ministry poses in terms of discerning whether or not the impressions received are actually from God.

Smith offers the following tests to determine whether or not the Jesus who appears to the person in a Theophostic session is really the genuine article. With an imposter Jesus, "there will usually be no face or it will appear grey or hazy and sometimes will have glowing eyes (usually red)."²⁶ Other signs of a "false Jesus," according to Smith, are that the words an imposter spirit speaks will be "easily discerned as false."²⁷ The real Jesus will feel loving, while the fake one will have no feeling, or be like a cardboard figure, or be evil or hostile.²⁸ Smith says he is "totally convinced" that the results of Theophostic Ministry are no fabrication, "but the Lord Jesus Himself visually and audibly manifesting truths to the wounded."²⁹ Is this confidence well placed?

According to Smith, when a false Jesus is encountered, it's so simple. All the person has to do is to bind the imposter in the name of Jesus.³⁰ This belief assumes that God will work to protect a person from spiritual deception even when they are purposefully engaging in divination. Scripture shows, that quite to the contrary, when people persist in wanting to obtain hidden knowledge using contact with a spiritual entity, He will allow them to continue down a road that may lead to spiritual destruction.

King Saul, in his fear of the Philistine army, inquired of God, but when God did not answer him by "*dreams or Urim or prophets,*" he determined to find the answer through other means. He searched, and found a medium. The vision Saul requested appeared (notice that the method, though forbidden, worked) and Saul said to the vision of Samuel, "*I am in great distress,*" Saul said. "*The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do.*" Samuel said, "*Why do you consult me, now that the Lord has turned away from you and become your enemy?*" I Samuel 28: 15-16 (NIV).

A careful reading of the prophets and books of history in the Bible reveal that, in some instances, if not most, these people of Judah and Israel who were seeking knowledge through divination thought they were still people of God. They were just augmenting the prescribed worship contained within the Mosaic Law. They were covering all the bases. They were not satisfied with God's way of revealing hidden knowledge — dreams, prophets, or through the priesthood using the Urim. They wanted more. They wanted a "touch from God," and *they were willing to initiate that encounter through a methodology.* The people's hunger for God was a result of their disobedience, because they had, through idolatry,

withdrawn from an intimate relationship with Him. Yet, in an effort to bring on the desired revelation with their own efforts, they dug a deeper divination hole for themselves, which in the end destroyed them.

There were times in the Bible when the word of the Lord was rare and the people received no visions. (1 Sam. 3:1) This time coincides with religious apostasy, as evident in the story of Eli and his wicked sons. The first step for those wanting to be closer to God is to get back to basic biblical doctrines and examine and test themselves for anything in their lives by which they may have been deceived. It's an activity, not a passive state of drifting back, and waiting for a spiritual apparition to appear, then justifying the entire episode as appealing to the Lord for guidance. From a biblical standpoint, emotional angst is not an excuse for engaging in divination.

Look at the episode of King Ahaz in scripture. *"Then King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria. He saw an altar in Damascus and sent to Uriah the priest a sketch of the altar, with detailed plans for its construction.*

"So Uriah the priest built an altar in accordance with all the plans that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus and finished it before King Ahaz returned. When the king came back from Damascus and saw the altar, he approached it and presented offerings on it.

"He offered up his burnt offering and grain offering, poured out his drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his fellowship offerings on the altar. The bronze altar that stood before the LORD he brought from the front of the temple — from between the new altar and the temple of the LORD — and put it on the north side of the new altar.

"King Ahaz then gave these orders to Uriah the priest: 'On the large new altar, offer the morning burnt offering and the evening grain offering, the king's burnt offering and his grain offering, and the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their grain offering and their drink offering. Sprinkle on the altar all the blood of the burnt offerings and sacrifices. But I will use the bronze altar for seeking guidance.'" 2 Kings 16:10-15 (NIV).

Notice from which altar King Ahaz sought guidance: the Lord's altar. He used the pagan altar to offer sacrifices, and yet, assumed he would still be able to receive guidance from the Lord. *The New International Version Study Bible* notes say: "Here Ahaz states his intention to follow an Assyrian divination technique in an attempt to secure the Lord's guidance."

It is just such a quest for hidden knowledge that led to the fall in the Garden. I venture to say, that if God wants someone to remember something from their past, He will bring it to their memory in the process of their normal life. I don't think He wants us to use mystical means to find hidden memories. The stakes are too high, the risk of deception too great. To "drift back," and put oneself into a passive state of mystical

receptivity and await words from a mystical Christ, is to open oneself up to deceiving spirits. If these deceptions were as easy to discern as Smith claims (the glowing red eyes of a false Christ), I suppose it would be a piece of cake to walk through those mystical paths without harm. However, numerous, educated, and thoughtful people have been slowly and methodically seduced by very subtle twists of scriptures taken out of their original contextual meaning. That is how apostasy always begins — with just the slightest amount of change. It's almost imperceptible in the beginning. It seems so close to the truth. This is the risk of engaging in mysticism: being misled by receiving insights that may contain, within them, doctrines taught by demons. (1 Tim. 4:1)

The Mystical Road

Agnes Sanford, (1897-1982) whose methodology is very similar to Theophostic Ministry's mystical techniques, advocated healing of the memories through mystical prayer. Over time, Sanford, a daughter of Presbyterian missionaries, dramatically departed from the basic doctrines of orthodox Christian faith. She eventually came to believe that God "made everything out of Himself," and "He put a part of Himself into everything."³¹ This Eastern mystical view is the inevitable result of anyone who persists in using divination techniques, no matter how noble the purpose, or how well intentioned the people are, or *how orthodox their doctrine was when they first began their mystical activities*.

"Sanford believed 'experience comes before theology.' She taught various visualization techniques, teaching that one could forgive another's sins through visualization."³² Visualization was key to Sanford's teachings, and she advocated that one should visualize a past situation then envision Jesus coming into the memory to solve the problem.

(Smith's theory and method arise out of the inner healing-healing of memories rootstock. Please see Update to *Lying Spirits*, page [142](#).)

In "[Women of the Faith](#)," an article published by the staff of [The Berean Call](#), the author says Sanford was "the woman who has had the most adverse influence on modern Christianity." This woman, who advocated the experiential, soon began "teaching occult visualization; promoting Jungian psychotherapy; believing that Jesus became a part of the collective unconscious of the human race; characterizing God as a 'Force'; seeing the makeup of the world in terms of thought vibrations; and claiming that through visualization we can create virtue in people, forgive them of their sins, and heal them, all from a distance and without their knowledge."³³

Sanford, alone, says the author, launched the Inner Healing movement, "with its terribly destructive healing-of-memories techniques." The author says Sanford's teachings were highly promoted by Vineyard Fel-

lowships and “became a chief therapy of many Christian psychologists.” Sanford’s School of Pastoral Care and her books greatly influenced church leaders, including John and Paula Sandford.³⁴ The Sandfords’ materials are one of the recommended references for further study in the back of Smith’s 2000 edition of *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*.

Dr. Jane Gumprecht, an evangelical Christian and author of *Abusing Memory: The Healing Theology of Agnes Sanford*, writes: “Sanford was a free spirit. Her rebellion against orthodox Christianity led her to rely on personal experience over what God says in His Word. Several times in her books she expressed the thought, ‘experience comes before theology.’”³⁵

“Gumprecht traces Agnes Sanford’s life and her development of unbiblical theological notions gleaned from a syncretism of occult spirituality, the Freudian unconscious, the Jungian collective unconscious, and depth psychology,” say Martin and Deidre Bobgan, in a [book review](#) of Gumprecht’s book.³⁶ “She shows how Sanford distorted Christianity to make it fit her ideas and turned Jesus into a ‘Time Traveler’ who supposedly guides people back in time to meet their so-called inner child, to remember the pain of their past, and to have Jesus heal the pain. She also shows how Sanford ‘affirmed the Freudian doctrine . . . that the unconscious is a powerful dark force which rules our conscious lives’ and used teachings about the inner child from mystical traditions and Jung’s Child Archetype.”³⁷

It is doubtful that Sanford’s apostasy was fully developed in the beginning of her discoveries regarding prayer and visualizing Jesus bringing healing to memories. There is almost always a progression that ultimately leads to apostasy. Those who leave sound doctrine often fail to realize how subtle, and how deceptive the first temptations to leave orthodox doctrine really are. Once a person begins to base a theology on the experiential, they have lost the sure anchor of sound doctrine. As a result, some amount of doctrinal drifting, over time, is inevitable. Smith admits he has “come to realize” the belief in sin as the root problem in Christian life is “a misconception and a grave error.”³⁸ This is a stance that well-regarded theologians believe departs from orthodox doctrine.³⁹ What else will Smith come to realize over time that departs from orthodox doctrine? If he has placed his belief upon the foundation of personal experience, he has left himself wide open to believing whatever personally feels true. Many have taken Bible verses out of context to justify such doctrinal drift.

In fact, Smith’s core shift in doctrine — “lie-based theology” — bears striking similarity to Gnostic beliefs about the causes of sin in a person’s life. “Gnostics do not look to salvation from sin (original or other), but rather from the ignorance of which sin is a consequence. Ignorance — whereby is meant ignorance of spiritual realities — is dispelled only

by Gnosis, and the decisive revelation of Gnosis is brought by the Messengers of Light, especially by Christ, the Logos of the True God. It is not by His suffering and death but by His life of teaching and His establishing of mysteries that Christ has performed His work of salvation."⁴⁰

Smith makes delineation in his theology between pre-salvation and post-salvation sin. In pre-salvation sin, he agrees with orthodox Christian doctrine. The cause of post-salvation sin, in Smith's view, is woundedness creating lie-based thinking — essentially resulting in a state of spiritual ignorance. The curative treatment for this ignorance, in Smith's Theophostic process, is exactly the same methodology as is advocated by followers of the Gnostic worldview. "A wound requires a touch from the resurrected living Lord, while sin requires the blood from a crucified and dead sacrificial lamb."⁴¹ This "touch" comes through a mystical encounter with Jesus. The Theophostic process is, essentially, a search for liberating knowledge brought by "God's light," through a personal, and mystical encounter with Christ.

"Knowledge to them [Gnostics] was not an intellectual exercise; it was not a passive understanding of some aspect of spirituality. Rather, knowledge had a redeeming and liberating function that helped the individual break free of bondage to the world."⁴² In other words, redeeming knowledge was not cognitive; it was mystical. Gnostics would also assert, as does Smith, that it is the authentic Jesus, and his revelation of hidden knowledge, that has set them free.

At its core, Gnosticism asserts that the individual's experiential knowledge is what liberates the "divine spark," within the soul, thus setting the person free. Early and modern Gnostics alike believe "they alone truly understood Christ's message, and that other streams of thought within Christianity has (sic) misinterpreted Jesus' mission and sayings."⁴³

Smith asserts his theology should not be considered, just his experience. "I would ask that you separate out my *interpretation* of what God is doing in a Theophostic Ministry session (my theology) from the principles of Theophostic Ministry itself," Smith said, in an e-mail message to two seminary professors who critiqued Theophostic Ministry.⁴⁴ Again, this separation of doctrine and experiential knowledge is a core principle in Gnosticism.

"Aside from anything you may have heard or read about Gnostic 'doctrine', Gnosticism is not, catagorically (sic) a doctrine. It is, rather, an epistimology (sic) . . . that department of philosophy that deals with 'what is knowledge' and 'how do we know that we know'. . . For all its mystical overtones, Gnosticism is fundamentally, an empirical teaching. Instead of demanding that you believe to the exclusion of all evidence to the contrary (Pistis), it places responsibility for identifying reality squarely on the shoulders of every individual. A belief can be a stepping-

stone, a message to oneself that more is possible, or it can be a blinder, preventing one from seeing the possibilities. Sometimes growth requires affirmations, sometimes trust, sometimes a paradigm shift. Belief, therefore, is an option, not a necessity. An individual may choose to believe to bridge the gap between the world of his experience and the world of Spirit, but many gnostics choose not to believe, finding beliefs to be obstructions to knowing, and instead pursue (sic) the experience of spiritual realities by whatever means they deem appropriate.”⁴⁵ Gnosticism advocates a complete separation of theology from experience.

Smith also asserts that efficacy should be considered the primary measurement of whether or not Theophostic Ministry is a legitimate pursuit for Christians.⁴⁶ Carl Jung, the famous Swiss psychologist, was a life-long student of Gnosticism. Jung found in Gnosticism what he believed was the efficacy of individual knowledge: He said, “we find in Gnosticism what was lacking in the centuries that followed: a belief in the efficacy of individual revelation and individual knowledge. This belief was rooted in the proud feeling of man’s affinity with the gods ...”⁴⁷

Smith’s doctrinal drift appears to be on a “Gnostic” course in some fundamental ways. The main danger of Gnosticism, as a heretical belief system, was in its insistence that it represented *true* Christianity. The same danger is inherent in Smith’s theology.

The scriptures have many references to how easily people are deceived and many of those refer to believers. False prophets and diviners deceive (Jer. 29:8). Many false prophets have gone out into the world to deceive (1 John 4:1). Friends deceive. (Obad. 1:7). Spirits deceive with false doctrine (1 Tim. 4:1). Pride deceives (Obad. 1:3, Jer. 49:16). Many will come in Jesus’ name to deceive (Luke 21:8). People who think they are wise by the standards of this age deceive themselves (1 Cor. 3:18). People using fine-sounding arguments deceive (Col. 2:4). False apostles deceive (2 Cor. 11:13). Passions and pleasures deceive (Tit. 3:3). Evil men and imposters deceive and are themselves deceived (2 Tim. 3:13). People who listen to God’s word and do not do what it says are deceived (James 1:22). False signs and lying wonders deceive (Mark 13:22, Rev. 13:14, 2 Thess. 2:9). The Devil deceives (Gen. 3:13, Rev. 20:10). Sin deceives (Romans 7:11). Flattering lies deceive (Psa. 12:2, Romans 16:18). Lastly, the human heart is deceitful above all else (Jer. 17:9).

In contrast to this multitude of warnings in scripture, Smith seems blissfully assured that his tests of what Jesus’ face should look like (no glowing red eyes), and the good intentions of the people seeking knowledge through known divination techniques are sufficient to keep the person using Theophostic Ministry from being deceived. He asks for an explanation as to why different people have consistent, and similar appearance and experiences with imposter Christs in Theophostic sessions. Because of this “consistency,” he apparently feels assured that people

will easily detect a false Christ, and that false Christs will always exhibit one or more of these characteristics.⁴⁸ This would be equivalent, in a way, to assuming that all robbers have a similar method of operation, and thereby being completely unprepared for an ‘honest-looking’ crook who robs by quiet deception. There is another explanation for this consistency.

In his book, *A Time of Departing*, Ray Yungen warns about the dangers of the contemplative prayer movement, another mystical, experiential technique, which has led Christians to promote a pantheistic view after engaging in Eastern-style, emptying-the-mind meditation sessions. Yungen defines a mystic as “someone who uses rote methods in an attempt to meet God.”⁴⁹ His book explains that it is not simple meditation upon the majesty, love, and greatness of the Lord that he is taking to task. It is the Hindu-style emptying of the mind, which is now being promoted by some in evangelical Christian circles as a form of Christian prayer. Those who use this method of seeking inner silence put themselves in a trance without God’s sanction.⁵⁰ Yungen comes to the conclusion that all those who meditate in this way, regardless of their original religious affiliation, eventually come to believe in a pantheistic view of God [God has put a part of himself into everything]. This consistency of belief can be explained as part of the seduction of those who persist in mystic trance-inducing techniques, and thereby draw from the same spiritual well fed through the teachings of demonic spirits. This same process could explain the similarity of experiences of those who have engaged in the mysticism of Theophostic Ministry. (Ed Smith now calls TPM “much like meditative prayer.” - *Basic Seminar Manual* p. 72. See [Update](#))

Yungen pinpoints the danger of the seductive idea that says, “Without a mystical technique, God is somehow indifferent or unapproachable.” It’s quite to the contrary, he said. “The shepherd does not expect the sheep or desire the sheep to perform a method of religious technique to be close to Him. He has already claimed them as His own. Remember Religiosity is *man’s* way to God while Christianity is *God’s* way to man.”⁵¹ Yungen points out that, “Legitimate mysticism was always initiated by God to certain individuals for certain revelations and was never based on a method for the changing of consciousness.”⁵²

This is precisely what some in the church have found alarming in Theophostic teaching: that a special method of religious technique is necessary for healing “wounds.” Theophostic Ministry takes an array of problems formerly recognized as things best addressed by discipleship and redefines them as “‘woundedness’ issues — and thus as issues that only Theophostic Ministry can address.”⁵³

The trend toward a more mystical, experiential focus is growing exponentially in Western churches, says Yungen. There is a vast move-

ment afoot to use mystical experiences for practical benefits, he says. For example, mystical techniques are being touted as the solution for stress, physical problems, and emotional problems — techniques practiced as a tool, which is the exact description Smith used to describe Theophostic Ministry.⁵⁴ This explains, Yungen says, the explosive growth of New Age philosophies within the church. “The advantage practical mystics have is that they only have to piggyback a seemingly benevolent meditation method onto whatever programs they are promoting — they do not have to proselytize people to a dogma, only a practice.”⁵⁵ This again is how Theophostic Ministry should be evaluated, says Smith: by practical experience, and not dogma or theology.⁵⁶ Yungen is speaking of contemplative prayer, in which the person closes his eyes and enters into a trance state through the repetition of a word or phrase in the attempt to achieve a mystical state and a “close personal contact with a powerful *presence*.”⁵⁷ The similarity to Theophostic techniques makes Yungen’s analysis pertinent to this issue as well.

There are other hints that a mystical connection is at work in Theophostic Ministry. Two Theophostic critics have made the observation that Smith’s description of his initial insight, which he developed into Theophostic Ministry, is “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.”⁵⁸ The Bobgans, authors of [*TheoPhostic Counseling: Divine Revelation? Or PsychoHeresy*](#), are referring directly to this quote from Smith’s *Genuine Recovery*:

“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.)”⁵⁹

In my research, I found another Theophostic proponent whose article, [*“Theophostic Counseling,”*](#) describes an odd and discomfoting side effect of Theophostic ministry. John Edmiston, a missionary and president of the Asian Internet Bible Institute, said he first heard of Theophostic Ministry in 1997 through a friend in Dallas, Texas, who trained Edmiston in Theophostic Ministry. He reports in his article, “Theophostic Counseling”:

“The only discomfort I have found with Theophostics is *that the changes in me were more rapid than I expected and my mind was often whirring late at night and it took some time to adjust to the ‘new confident me.’ It was like a lot of rearranging was going on in a remarkably short time period. I changed ‘more than I wanted to’* in a sense but all the changes were good and permanent.”⁶⁰ (Emphasis added.)

Both of these accounts sound very similar to those of others who have received doctrines later tested and found to be in error. Here’s an

example of a description from an [article](#) on spiritism that is evocative of Edmiston's and Smith's accounts:

"I kept hearing something like a tape recorder whirring in my mind. I recalled that a medium had once told me that you have to tell spirits to slow down when they talk to you because things go much faster in the 'spirit world.' I tried that and I started to hear: 'I'm with you. I'm here. I'm here. I'm always with you.' I decided I was remembering the bible (sic) classes where we learned that Jesus said "Lo, I am with you always.""⁶¹ (Emphasis added) This same person began her article with a strong statement of faith in God:

"Remember that there is nothing God won't or can't do for those who love him and trust him. What church or religion you belong to has no bearing on it. It's between you and Him and don't let anyone tell you different. He is, indeed, everywhere."⁶²

Smith will, undoubtedly, deny any involvement in divination. Due to the hybrid nature of Theophostic — the therapeutic/ministry/private enterprise hybrid I mentioned in Chapter [One](#) — Smith has the convenience of being able to shift to another face of this Janus-type creature when any aspect of his approach or belief system comes under critical review. I suspect that if attention is focused on the spiritual aspects of this endeavor, he may turn his creation around to another side and claim such knowledge received in Theophostic sessions comes through the aspects of traditional psychotherapy, such as repressed memory and age regression. In this way, he may attempt to find shelter from criticism by cloaking it in professional garb and the jargon of psychotherapy. At its root, however, is a mystical experience. There is a significant difference here between Smith's "creature" and other psychotherapeutic methods. Smith relies on a spiritual power to bring the person to the conclusions about their retrieved memories and the suppositions attached to them. My question is how do we know which spiritual power it is? Is it benign? Does it meet the tests of scripture and not just the "glowing red-eye" test Smith offers? And what bearing does this discussion have on the amazing results Theophostic supporters claim as proof that God is behind this?

I will venture a third explanation for Theophostic's efficacy, supported by scripture: the possibility, in some cases of Theophostic ministry, of counterfeit miracles. *"This evil man will come to do the work of Satan with counterfeit power and signs and miracles."* 2 Thess. 2:9 (NLT) This counterfeit power was very evident to the Apostle Paul. *"Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling."* Acts 16:16 (NIV). This same slave girl told the people that Paul and Silas were God's servants and *"have come to tell you how to be saved."* (v.17 NLT) Yet, scripture clearly shows her power came from

a demonic indwelling spirit. Paul also warned Timothy about the last days, when imposters would *"act as if they are religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly."* (2 Tim. 3:5 NLT). He compared these men to Jannes and Jambres who opposed Moses. (v. 8). Jewish tradition ascribes these names to the Egyptian court magicians who *"did the same things by their secret arts,"* as did Moses in the account of the first plagues. (Ex. 7:22 NIV)

One of the things I found very disturbing in reading Smith's personal accounts of using Theophostic ministry on individuals was the rapid shifting individuals experienced between episodes of vomiting, gagging, cursing, and other extreme forms of behavior during abreaction, and entering "perfect peace." Is this a faux peace? (This "peace" is discussed in greater detail in Update, page [155](#).) I have wondered if Smith's theories of casting out demons actually are, in reality working in reverse, and the person's immediate suppression of all emotional conflict – conflict that was life consuming in some accounts — is the moment when the demonic influence has actually occurred. The person is left, possibly, with a mind "whirring" into the night and a level of change that is almost frightening in its rapidity. The healing is subjective: essentially a change in emotion. This, to me, would be a rather simple job for a lying spirit to counterfeit. Scripture is clear that this is entirely possible throughout the history of God's people including up to our times. (Exo. 7:11; Matt. 24:24; Acts 8:11.) It is not just an episode that will occur at the very end of the age, with the ascension of the man of lawlessness. That will only be the final culmination to epochs of demonically powered counterfeit signs and wonders.

In summary, I believe God will not bless a technique that He himself has forbidden. This is especially true when He has provided sufficient means in scripture, and through other Christians, for us to resolve whatever trials and tribulations He allows us to endure, including whatever emotional problems arise as a result of them. Sometimes, He uses other people to help us, including medical and mental health professionals.

The true sign of whether or not Theophostic's effects are from God, in each individual case, is in Galatians Chapter [Five](#), when Paul contrasts the fruit of the Spirit with the fruit of the sinful nature. Paul says to the Galatians that *"The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict."* (Gal. 5:17 NLT).

When we resist being lead by the Holy Spirit, and follow the desires of our sinful nature, our lives will produce these results: *"sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, participation in demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own*

little group, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin.” (Gal. 5: 19-21 NLT.)

The mystical methods of Theophostic Ministry demonstrate, I believe, participation in demonic activities. In the next two chapters, I will lay out the case for my belief that the fruit of Theophostic is also demonstrated in impure thoughts (delusions of satanic ritual abuse), divisions (family estrangement and church splits), and the feeling that everyone is wrong except those in your own little group (beliefs in outlandish conspiracy theories promoted by Smith in his writings).

[Jump to Chapter Five](#)

(Footnotes)

¹ Edward M. Smith, *Healing Life's Deepest Hurts*, New Creation Publishing, and Vine Books Servant Publications. 2002. p. 15.

² Jan Fletcher, “Theophostic Ministry the focus of world counselor’s conference in Nashville,” *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 5 Oct. 2003 1A.

³ Theophostic Ministry flyer, “1354 Theophostic Ministry Users Surveyed with Dramatic Findings!” 2003.

⁴ “Theophostic Ministries Update”, 2001, p. 3.

⁵ Staff of Community Evangelical Free Church, Elverson, Pa. A Biblical Evaluation of Theophostic Ministry, 28 Sept. 2001. p. 4. PDF version.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Smith, in *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, p. 368, says he believes it is a literal Jesus who appears in the person’s mind: “I could not explain in any other way than this being the real Jesus.”

⁹ Smith, *Healing Life's Deepest Hurts* 22.

¹⁰ Ed M. Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed. Alathia Publishing, 2000 p. 35-36.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹³ Smith, *Healing Life's Deepest Hurts* 14.

¹⁴ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* 138-139.

¹⁵ Bill Crouse, webpage, “A Primer on Occult Philosophy,” 1994. <http://www.fni.com/cim/technicals/occultt.txt>

¹⁶ Melissa Crowe, webpage, “Divination,” 2000-2002, <http://www.meta-religion.com/Spiritualism/Wicca/divination.htm>

¹⁷ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* 173.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

¹⁹ Ed Smith, column, “Redeem the Family Unit if Possible; But Heal Whatever the Cost,” *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 9 Feb. 1996.

²⁰ Website: <http://www.apologeticsindex.org/>

²¹ From this page on Hein’s web site: <http://www.apologeticsindex.org/>

[i01.html](#)

²² T. A. McMahon, "Spirits of the Lie," *The Berean Call*, Nov. 2003.

²³ Link (Anthony), webpage, "A New Look at Divination: Everyday methods are simpler than you think!" <http://realmagick.com/articles/40/840.html>

²⁴ <http://www.crystalinks.com/scrying.html>

²⁵ <http://www.geocities.com/~firesilk/lecture15.html>

²⁶ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* 366-367.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 139

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 141

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

³¹ Webpage, "World-Renowned Spiritual Healer," Cornerstone Books, <http://cornerstone.wwwhubs.com/>

³² *Ibid.*

³³ In the Spring/Summer 2003 edition of the *Journal of the International Association for Theophostic Ministry*, Ed Smith discusses plans for the 2003 Theophostic International Convention in Minneapolis, Minn. He tells readers that he plans to lead a time of corporate ministry, and says, in past instances of such ministry, the "Holy Spirit has granted incredible measures of healing to hundreds of people all at the same time."

³⁴ "Women of the Faith," *The Berean Call*, July 2000.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Martin and Deidre Bobgan, review, "Abusing Memory: The Healing Theology of Agnes Sanford reviewed."

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* 224-225.

³⁹ See Chapter [Three](#).

⁴⁰ Susan Lucas, editor, webpage, "Gnostic Beliefs," Teaching Religion in Public Schools, 2002. Website created out of a University of Alabama, College of Education graduate course, "Church, State and Schooling." Taught by Dr. Natalie Adams. <http://www.teachingreligion.com/gnosticism/beliefs.html>

⁴¹ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* 59.

⁴² Lucas, *Gnostic Beliefs*.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Email letter received May 7, 2003, (Emphasis Smith's), Bryan N. Maier and Philip G. Monroe, "A Theological Analysis of Theophostic Ministry," *Trinity Journal*, Fall 2003 Vol. 24 NS, No. 2., p. 171.

⁴⁵ Webpage, "What is Gnosis?" <http://www.the-gnosis-site.com/>

⁴⁶ Fletcher, *Theophostic Ministry*

⁴⁷ Lance S. Owens, web page, "An Introduction to Gnosticism and The Nag Hammadi Library," Gnostic Society Library. <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/nhlintro.html>

- ⁴⁸ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* 367.
- ⁴⁹ Ray Yungen, *A Time of Departing*, Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2002, p. 39.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 123. (Emphasis original)
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- ⁵³ Staff of Community Evangelical Free Church 4
- ⁵⁴ Smith, *Healing Life's Deepest Hurts* 15.
- ⁵⁵ Yungen, *A Time of Departing* 25.
- ⁵⁶ Email letter received May 7, 2003. Emphasis his. Quoted by Bryan N. Maier and Philip G. Monroe, in "A Theological Analysis of Theophostic Ministry," *Trinity Journal*, Fall 2003. (See also Chapter [Three](#))
- ⁵⁷ Yungen, *A Time of Departing* 23. (Emphasis original)
- ⁵⁸ Martin and Deidre Bobgan, *TheoPhostic Counseling Divine Revelation? Or PsychoHeresy?*, EastGate Publishers, 1999. p. 11.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁰ John Edmiston, webpage, "Theophostic Counselling," Asian Internet Bible Institute, 1997.
- ⁶¹ Mavis Cullen, webpage, "Always Together In Love," <http://www.ofspirit.com/maviscullen1.htm>
- ⁶² *Ibid.*

Chapter Five: Troubling questions about satanic ritual abuse

“And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”
2 Cor. 11:14 (NIV)

In an [article](#) published in [Physician Magazine](#), Paul Simpson, a Christian psychologist, describes a somewhat embarrassed couple sitting in his office. This couple hands Simpson a letter from their youngest daughter, now grown. The daughter, who believes she has more than one personality, speaks in the plural as she refers to herself. This is an excerpt from that letter:

“Father, you never did stop sexually abusing us until the day we moved out. It started in the crib with you making us [explicit sexual reference],” says the daughter. “Both of you involved us in the cult when we were 4. You held our hands over a knife and killed some cats while another man caught the blood in white bowls. You painted us with the blood and made us drink it, too. When we were older you told us to ‘Kill or be killed.’ So we killed the baby. The man in charge cut out the heart and held it up and blessed it. He made me eat some of the heart.”¹

Simpson, a critic of recovered memory therapy, was formerly a proponent of the controversial therapy in the early 1990s. He tells his story in his book *Second Thoughts: Understanding the False Memory Crisis*. In 1993, Simpson founded Project Middle Ground, which promotes dialogue between recovered memory therapy clients and their estranged families — families like the one who handed him that letter from a daughter who signed it: “Hate you always.” A significant percentage of those who engage in recovered memory therapy believe they have been victims of Satanists. Simpson calls Theophostic Ministry “a dressed up version of recovered memory therapy.”²

Ed Smith said, over the years he has often questioned his audiences — composed of counselors, pastors, and lay ministers — on how many of them are currently working with clients who report memories containing satanic ritual abuse elements. He reports a consistent affirmative answer from over half of the people he surveys.³

Simpson is now an advocate out to debunk recovered memory therapy. In July 1997, Simpson shared his perspective in [The Retractors’ Voice](#), a false-memory syndrome organization newsletter. Simpson had extensive experience in intervention of physical and sexual abuse cases, including working with Child Protective Services, with runaways, and in inpatient care. “I first encountered recovered memory therapy (RMT) in the early 90’s when I was working at a psychiatric hospital in Scottsdale, Arizona. There, like the rest of the nation, RMT was very popular. I applied my-

self and quickly learned regression techniques through seminars and individual training. Sure enough, I was soon able to regress clients and have them recover numerous traumatic ‘memories.’ Early in this work, nagging questions began for me, but I found that colleagues wouldn’t allow for any questioning of RMT or the horrific images clients were developing. So I began my own search to better understand this movement I had become a part of,”⁴ said Simpson.

He eventually came to realize that he had “jumped onto a fad bandwagon.” He subsequently began contacting former clients in an effort to correct what he now felt was misplaced confidence in the validity of these memories. He told them he had “serious doubts about the reality of the traumatic images they had uncovered.” Receptions varied: “Some were relieved but some were angered,” he said. As a result, his colleagues considered him a traitor. “Being a retracting therapist was anything but pleasant,” he said.⁵

Physician Magazine published Simpson’s article, “Recovered Memories: Fact or Fiction?” in 2001. At that time, Simpson said that nationally, of the people who claim to have recovered memories, 18 percent of those claim to have memories that include satanic ritual abuse themes. Clients are overwhelming Caucasian, female and under 40, as well as highly educated (59 percent have college degrees). Over half of all therapists, nationally, believe memories can be retrieved from very early childhood and the womb, and over a quarter believe in hypnotic retrieval of memories of past lives, he said.⁶

The *Portland Press Herald*, in Portland, Maine, interviewed Simpson in the aftermath of the Tom Wright case,⁷ in Yarmouth, Maine. “Simpson says a therapist’s point of view inevitably affects the kind of memories a client supposedly recovers. Clients of Christian therapists, he says, may uncover memories of Satanic ritual abuse, while New Age therapists unleash memories of alien abduction. It’s never the other way around. ‘It serves the therapist’s worldview,’ he said. ‘It helps to confirm the underlying beliefs that the therapist has about reality.’”⁸ Simpson said, in the article, that this type of therapy has largely disappeared from mainstream psychology, although it flourishes in independent churches. He told the *Press Herald* he considered recovered memory therapy to be dangerous and debilitating.⁹

Recovered memory therapy quickly gained acceptance in the therapeutic community in the 1980s, and rose to giddy heights of popularity in the 1990s. However, a resulting series of mega-sized lawsuits in highly publicized cases has dampened enthusiasm among many secular therapists. The hot air balloon of recovered memory therapy has been progressively losing altitude, with a growing number of therapists and patients questioning the reliability of the method.

Simpson’s book includes some statistics from a review of repressed

memory claim referrals, investigated by the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries. This 1996 review was initiated by the Mental Health Subcommittee, Crime Victims Compensation Program,¹⁰ and sought to determine the effectiveness of regression therapy. Memory researcher Elizabeth Loftus also mentions this same study in "Repressed Memory Accusations: Devastated Families and Devastated Patients."¹¹

Reviewers randomly selected 30 cases out of 187 for review. The findings prompted the state of Washington to discontinue further payments under the compensation program for recovered memory therapy.

All but one client contended they had been abused in satanic rituals. Of these, the average age when the alleged abuse began was 7 months. All alleged cases involved family members. Seventy-six percent remembered cannibalism and consuming body parts. All of the clients claimed to have been tortured or mutilated. There were no medical exams corroborating this.

These people were well educated, and 83 percent were employed before recovering memories. Three years later, it was a different story. Only 10 percent were employed. It was the same with marriage. Seventy seven percent were married when they recovered the first memory. Of those almost half were divorced or separated after recovered memory therapy, and almost a quarter had lost custody of minor children. All 30 client cases reviewed revealed that every person in the study had become estranged from their families.

Loftus reports the average cost of a non-repressed memory claim under the Washington State Crime Victims Compensation Program was under \$3,000. For the 183 repressed memory claims, the price tag was four times higher, with one claim exceeding \$50,000. "In just over four years, the State of Washington had paid out more than \$2.5 million for repressed memory claims."¹²

In the abstract for her paper, Loftus says, "family members are not the only devastated group. Data from a recent report on patients who received compensation from a crime victims' compensation fund after recovering extensive histories of abuse in therapy reveal that some patients' lives are devastated after 'memory' recovery. Their health declines, they lose their jobs, they get divorced, and in some cases they lose custody of their minor children. Although these data do not prove that it was the therapy itself that made the patients worse, they do ring alarm bells about treatment outcomes for some recovered memory patients, and show a pressing need for information on this topic."¹³

Loftus cautions that, due to the nature of such a limited sample, the preliminary data from the Crime Victims Compensation study doesn't necessarily paint a picture that is representative of all repressed memory cases. However, she encouraged further research into this particular avenue of study with crime victims.

"For example, this statement was recently made in a prominent journal: 'What seems to be happening in the recovered memory saga is not unlike what happened years ago with thalidomide: the premature release of an apparently promising medication produced such disastrous side effects that it had to be withdrawn' (Munro, 1996, p. 200). An improved study adapted from the initial ideas and contribution produced by Parr and her colleagues (1996a, b) would go a long way towards testing this hypothesis underlying the 'thalidomide' analogy."¹⁴

Some clients of recovered memory therapy, angry that, post-therapy, they subsequently lost years with family members through broken relationships because they believed bizarre events about their pasts, have taken therapists to court. *Psychiatric Times* recounts the story of Dr. Bennett Braun's widely publicized case. Braun, a psychiatrist, at one time was an internationally renowned expert in dissociative identity disorder (DID). "In a stunning move made to avoid a trial, an October 1997 settlement totaling \$10.75 million ended one of the most controversial and widely publicized lawsuits ever brought against a psychiatrist by a former patient who later retracted memories of recovered abuse," reported the *Psychiatric Times*.

Patty Burgus and other family members had sued Braun and the prestigious Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Hospital in Chicago, among others. The suit claimed that bizarre recollections of satanic ritual abuse and other trauma, which were recovered during the course of psychiatric treatment, were false and the result of negligent care over a six-year period."¹⁵

Braun, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, helped train many other therapists who treat multiple-personality disorder [also called dissociative identity disorder], through annual conferences, videotapes and seminars around the country. In August 1998, the state of Illinois moved to strip Braun's medical license. "The 23-page filing signals another blow to a field of mental health that has seen its acceptance challenged in recent years," said *Tribune* Staff Writer Cornelia Grumman.

Following therapy with Braun, Burgus said she was convinced she had eaten meatloaf made of human flesh and had served "as the high priestess of a satanic cult covering nine Midwestern states."¹⁶

"The damage I saw people experience in that therapy, the lives that were lost, the careers, the marriages, the women who lost their children, people who lost their minds, it was so sad," said Burgus, at hearing of the state's complaint against Braun."¹⁷

Grumman reported that, although repressed memory therapy took off in the 1990s, critical views by states and courts, and skeptical looks by the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association have caused the therapy to lose credibility."¹⁸

Despite the severity of the action initiated against Braun by the state

of Illinois in 1998, which resulted in Braun's agreement to a two-year suspension of his medical license in October 1999, and five years probation, Braun is once again practicing medicine in Helena, Montana. According to the Associated Press, Braun began soliciting patients Oct. 1, 2003.¹⁹

A diagnosis of dissociative identity disorder — the area in which Braun trained other therapists — often goes hand-in-hand in cases where satanic ritual abuse is alleged. Dr. E. James Wilder, who co-authored a book with Smith, *How to Keep Your Ministry Out of Court*, says people who are survivors of satanic ritual abuse "almost always" are suffering from dissociative identity disorder (DID).²⁰ People with this diagnosis often believe they have many "alters" — or other personalities.

David Entwistle, an associate professor of psychology, said satanic ritual abuse continues to be a hot topic, both in the field of mental health and in Christian circles. Entwistle's two academic papers on Theophostic Ministry are slated for publication in the [spring 2004 issue](#) of *The Journal of Psychology and Theology*.

In these papers, Entwistle evaluated several of Smith's publications on Theophostic Ministry. He expressed concerns about several claims, not currently substantiated by empirical evidence, including claims regarding the efficacy of Theophostic Ministry as a treatment method for a wide variety of disorders. He also expressed concern that several claims about neurobiology and memory are substantially at variance from modern psychological research. In addition to these psychological concerns, Entwistle is critical of some of Smith's theological claims for the basis of the Theophostic Ministry process and his application of hermeneutics in interpreting scripture. Given these concerns, Entwistle suggested that the use of Theophostic Ministry warrants considerable caution.

Entwistle said the same journal, which is scheduled to publish his papers, recently devoted an entire issue to the topic of satanic ritual abuse.²¹ The publication also devoted an issue to the topic over a decade ago titled: "Satanic Ritual Abuse: The Current State of Knowledge"²²

"I have not seen any published studies on therapist beliefs, but SRA seems to be a phenomenon that experienced a peak in interest that is now declining, although there are still many people who 'specialize' in treating SRA & DID. Because of their openness to supernatural claims, it may be that Christians are more willing to consider SRA claims than are people who hold naturalistic worldviews. However, the lack of confirmatory evidence for most of the alleged SRA phenomena is extremely troubling," said Entwistle. He cites a recent work published on abnormal psychology, which says:

"This historical trend of increasing multiplicity suggests the operation of social factors, perhaps through the encouragement of therapists ... Another recent trend is that many of the reported cases of DID now include more unusual and even bizarre identities than in the past (such

as being an animal) and more highly implausible backgrounds (for example, ritualized satanic abuse in childhood)."²³

Smith believes satanic ritual abuse is widespread, and those who suffer from it also have dissociative identity disorder. It could be assumed that Smith's clientele demonstrate a higher rate of these two disorders than is seen in the population seeking treatment at large. Should people be concerned with Smith's beliefs in the common occurrence of DID and SRA? Entwistle thinks so.

"I always become concerned when a therapist diagnoses and treats a disorder at rates that are incommensurate with what his or her peers are doing. While some specialists may attract certain clientele (just like cardiologists attract heart patients), it is troubling when one sees a pattern that suggests over diagnosis, whether the diagnosis in question is ADHD [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder], OCD [obsessive compulsive disorder], or DID," said Entwistle.

A plethora of successfully waged lawsuits have undoubtedly contributed to the decline in the credibility of recovered memory therapies, as well as the diagnosis of satanic ritual abuse trauma and DID. Proponents of recovered memory therapy, however, are not dissuaded by lawsuits. Instead, those who are "true believers" in a satanic cult conspiracy theory interpret arguments posed against the existence of massive numbers of satanic ritual abuse victims as confirmatory evidence. They believe in a strategic conspiracy, which denies abuse they believe is still happening to thousands of people. Some of the strongest believers in a vast conspiracy of secret satanic baby-eating cults are professing, conservative Christians.

Many Christians uncritically accept a secret, large-scale, satanic cult conspiracy

Smith is a professed believer in the credibility of large-scale satanic ritual abuse, particularly as it is recounted in the recovered memories of dissociated Theophostic Ministry clients. He denies that the negative effects seen in the Washington State study apply to people who use Theophostic ministry, including those who recover memories of satanic ritual abuse. Instead, done correctly, he says such ministry will give the person release from his or her pain. Smith wrote, in a [letter to the editor](#) responding to my first article on Theophostic Ministry: "Only that which the person surfaces himself, on his own, is ever processed or discussed in a Theophostic ministry setting. Should a memory surface that was not consciously known before the ministry session began, the Theophostic ministry facilitator does not act on it or make any suggestion as to what the person should do with it other than lead the person to a place of release from the pain contained in the reported memory."²⁴

Some Christian apologists believe the power of suggestion is at work anyway. "Sometimes the power of suggestion alone, either from a therapist or from one of the numerous books churned out by the 'survivor movement,' was enough to convert a loving daughter into an angry 'abuse victim,'" said L.L. Don and Joy A. Veinot.²⁵ When you consider that Smith's writings, including his training manual, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, contain many consistent scenarios of people recovering traumatic memories of childhood sexual abuse, sometimes with bizarre features, the opportunity for suggestibility among Theophostic ministry participants is obvious.

In *Keeping Your Ministry Out of Court*, Smith and Wilder warn both professional and lay counselors that satanic ritual abuse victims are more likely to sue their therapists.²⁶ Obviously they've noticed the action in the courtrooms across the nation. Smith says ministry to those who are victims of satanic ritual abuse "affords the most liability and threat for false accusation, mishap and relationship conflict." Yet Smith expresses great concern for people who believe they have suffered satanic ritual abuse. He advocates strongly for the Church not to shy away from ministering to what he believes are an increasing number of victims.²⁷ He is convinced that the pain evidenced by clients during an abreaction is proof enough of the reality of satanic ritual abuse. "It is impossible to believe that these memories have been implanted by the counselor/minister/therapist when they are accompanied by such strong physical manifestations," he says.²⁸

Wilder describes the people who believe they have suffered satanic ritual abuse as always recovering memories in therapy, and almost always having dissociative disorders [commonly called split personalities]. He said, "the objective [of satanic cult torture] seems to be a mind-controlled obedience to the group," and occult rituals involve torture, murder, and sexual perversion.²⁹ Wilder says, "almost always" judges, law enforcement, politicians and wealthy or famous people including religious leaders, are involved, as are sometimes the client's neighbors, church members and family friends. However, "most often the suspects are parents and grandparents."³⁰

The litigious nature of satanic ritual abuse treatment becomes apparent when you realize that just about anyone can turn up in someone else's satanic ritual abuse recovered memory. Your odds are greatest, however, if you are the person's parent or grandparent.³¹ Think it's crazy you would ever be accused? Think again. Proponents of the conspiracy theory believe "prominent individuals in the church and community" are "'double-agents' — working both a Christian/respectable role and a clandestine cult role."³² If you're a regular church-going, respectable person with a well-manicured lawn who always pays your taxes, you're just the one most likely to be running the local coven in your garage,

basement, or backyard, according to the conspiracy theory. In the test problem at the end of Smith and Wilder's discussion of satanic ritual abuse, the scenario involves a woman who uncovers hidden memories of her radio preacher dad and mother subjecting her to prostitution and child pornography.³³ (Are televangelists next on the list of suspected cult leaders, I wonder?)

A dearth of physical evidence does little to dissuade conspiracy believers. They point to a very organized cover-up by highly-placed and well-funded cult members as reason for the lack of evidence. Even reluctant victims who resist believing in the validity of their own recovered memories don't dissuade Wilder. He laments that despite "emotionally powerful and graphic in detail" recovered memories that emerge during ministry sessions, these "do not necessarily convince the sufferer of their validity, let alone the legal system, of their *uncontestable* truth."³⁴ (Emphasis added). Wilder admits, here, his belief that all such recovered memories are true, regardless of how implausible the scenarios really are, or even whether or not the client herself believes them to be true.

Smith's beliefs about satanic ritual abuse, as expressed in his writings, place him squarely within a larger Christian and professional subculture obsessed with satanic ritual abuse conspiracy theories. Although Smith may not share all the beliefs of others who ascribe to this conspiracy theory, it's important to explore the foundations of the beliefs that Smith shares in common with the larger subculture. What is the origin of these compelling and fantastical tales? (Note: In his revised manual, released April 2005, Smith still demonstrates his obsession with SRA. See Update to *Lying Spirits*, page [152](#).)

These ideas seem to have irresistible appeal to some Christians. They spread as effectively as the flu, with a group contagion that seems impossible to contain despite all rational arguments to the contrary.

The Veinots say that the idea that large numbers of people have suffered from satanic ritual abuse can have disastrous consequences. "*Ideas are not harmless!* They play out in the real world." The couple cites the myths and fables Hitler used to his advantage about Jews eating Gentile children — ideas that had circulated in Europe for centuries.³⁵

These same myths about cannibalistic Jews are still published in Arabic newspapers in Egypt. Millions of Arabs are told that Jews still murder innocent Christians and use their blood in order to make their secret Passover matzo. I read such an article in an Egyptian state-published newspaper four years ago, in which the author pointed to a vast world-wide Jewish secret conspiracy that involved the kidnapping and murder of Catholic priests and young children. Instead of "satanic panic," I suppose you could say that Arab Muslims may be much more likely to believe in a "cannibalistic Jews panic." It would be fascinating to see what kind of recovered memories surface among psychotherapy or

Theophostic ministry clients in countries where this type of material is widely disseminated to a naive and uneducated public. On their [website](#), the Anti-Defamation League has a picture of an Arabic book, *The Cry of the Innocent*, that perpetuates the Passover-matzo-made-from-human-blood myth.³⁶

This legend of baby-eaters has enduring qualities. According to a [religious tolerance group](#),³⁷ this legend has been around since first-century Rome, when Christians took in the babies abandoned by the Romans and subsequently were accused of taking them to eat them in secret rituals.

[Minucius Felix](#), a third-century Roman writer, in an early piece of Christian apologetic literature, wrote about the prevailing Roman view of Christian groups in an attempt to discredit rumors about secret cannibalistic cults. In the following passage, the opponent to Christianity speaks:

"I know not whether these things are false; certainly suspicion is applicable to secret and nocturnal rites; and he who explains their ceremonies by reference to a man punished by extreme suffering for his wickedness, and to the deadly wood of the cross, appropriates fitting altars for reprobate and wicked men, that they may worship what they deserve. Now the story about the initiation of young novices is as much to be detested as it is well known. An infant covered over with meal, that it may deceive the unwary, is placed before him who is to be stained with their rites: this infant is slain by the young pupil, who has been urged on as if to harmless blows on the surface of the meal, with dark and secret wounds.

"Thirstily — O horror! — they lick up its blood; eagerly they divide its limbs. By this victim they are pledged together; with this consciousness of wickedness they are covenanted to mutual silence. Such sacred rites as these are more foul than any sacrileges. And of their banqueting it is well known all men speak of it everywhere; even the speech of our Cirtensian testifies to it. On a solemn day they assemble at the feast, with all their children, sisters, mothers, people of every sex and of every age. There, after much feasting, when the fellowship has grown warm, and the fervour of incestuous lust has grown hot with drunkenness, a dog that has been tied to the chandelier is provoked, by throwing a small piece of offal beyond the length of a line by which he is bound, to rush and spring; and thus the conscious light being overturned and extinguished in the shameless darkness, the connections of abominable lust involve them in the uncertainty of fate. Although not all in fact, yet in consciousness all are alike incestuous, since by the desire of all of them everything is sought for which can happen in the act of each individual.

"I purposely pass over many things, for those that I have mentioned are already too many; and that *all these, or the greater part of them, are true*,

the obscurity of their vile religion declares”³⁸ (Emphasis added.) In other words, the argument made by first century Romans opposed to Christianity was that the very obscurity (lack of evidence) of Christian worship proved the suspicion of a secret baby-eating cult was true. This is exactly what some therapists say today about satanic ritual abuse cults. Because these Christians had pity on the babies Romans abandoned to die, and took them in and raised them, they were falsely accused in exactly the same way.

Joy Veinot recounts a chilling conversation she had with a Christian therapist who claimed to specialize in satanic ritual abuse. The therapist told Veinot that the most upstanding people were secret satanic cultists. When asked by Veinot why she believed such people were cultists and what type of evidence she had to ascertain this, her reply astounded Veinot. “Oh, no, there’s nothing like that. These people have connections within the police departments and judges, up to the highest levels in the nation,” she replied, affirming that evidence would never be found. Pointing to the therapist’s twisted thinking, Veinot observes: “How do we know there *is* a conspiracy? Because there is no evidence!”³⁹

Through the centuries, public hysteria, whipped up by religious and secular leaders for political purposes, attributed these evil, secret cults to Jews, and other groups not in favor with the prevailing political/religious powers. This enduring legend is readily available in the public’s mind as one of many frightening “boogey-man” tales, in much the same way as the vampire legends that circulated in Europe. In the right therapeutic conditions, when a person’s imagination is at work in an effort to solve a current problem, these cannibalistic images surface. They are always tied to whatever group is currently on the acceptable vilification list. In Christian circles, pagans are acceptable targets, just as they were in the witch-burning era of Europe.

Tragically, the “satanic panic” myth — with its own share of people-eating-people stories and making meatloaf out of body parts— has been swallowed by gullible Christians as the ugly rumor weed grows, said the Veinots.

The Warnke Hoax

A case in point: Many Christians are still unaware of the Warnke Hoax, said the Veinots. Mike Warnke’s autobiographical book, *The Satan Seller*, published in the 1970s, convinced millions in the church that he had been a high priest of Satan who converted to Christianity. Warnke’s story, complete with black-robed figures seeking “soft pink sex,” and sprinkling cat’s blood over willing victims during dark rituals did more to launch a satanic panic than any other event. [Warnke](#) still runs a ministry from Central Kentucky, and his recent engagements now include

churches in England and Scotland. In 1992, *Cornerstone* magazine released the longest article in its history, ["Selling Satan: The Tragic History of Mike Warnke,"](#)⁴⁰ a 24,000-word expose of Mike Warnke's ministry, which began in the 1970s. The article interviewed people from Warnke's past, and provided a very different story from the one portrayed in Warnke's book. Dates and places didn't add up. Warnke's college friends couldn't correlate the wild tales in Warnke's book and, in fact, remembered a different version. The article garnered a first-place award for investigative reporting from the Evangelical Press Association. *Selling Satan: The Evangelical Media & the Mike Warnke Story*, is a book-length account and is available from [Cornerstone Press.](#)⁴¹

Trott and Hertenstein end the article with a finger pointed squarely at the collective denial of those who knew Warnke's testimony was full of holes, yet refused to let the public know about the hoax. In fact, those who knew kept their silence for two decades. "After Warnke's testimony began circulating, those few who knew the truth kept silent: they felt powerless against the immensity of the story. Where could they turn? Well, the publisher would be a place to start. We need the active participation of all members of the Body of Christ in provoking each other to righteousness and, where necessary, in providing biblical confrontation and counsel,"⁴² they said.

Despite the debunking of Warnke's story, others followed with books, radio and television appearances, and jumped on the "I'm a recovering Satanist" bandwagon with gusto. According to the Veinots: "It wasn't long before these accounts (and others – both Christian and secular) spawned an urban legend that was widely believed — with the help of Sally Jesse Roseanne Geraldo Raphael — that black-robed bands of Satanists were routinely sacrificing thousands of children in wooded areas outside of nearly every town. Many thousands of children allegedly were kidnapped *every year* for this purpose. As the 'rumor weed' grew, it became 'common knowledge' that babies were being specially bred just to be sacrificed. It wasn't long before 'everyone knew' that law enforcement agencies and the court system had been thoroughly infiltrated by these monsters." Inevitably, spurred on by the contagion of an urban legend and the seductive idea that evil wasn't in *us*, it was in *them*, victims appeared en masse. "No one could have predicted how much damage this beastly 'weed' was about to inflict upon secular society and the Church."⁴³

Even without a shred of physical evidence, people who sell such conspiracies make a lot of money doing so. Selling satanic tales was certainly profitable for Warnke, according to Trott and Hertenstein's expose. During the late 1980s, Warnke's Kentucky-based ministry was raking in \$2-million-plus a year. Warnke and his wife, Rose, filed tax returns showing close to a half-million dollars a year in joint income in 1990.⁴⁴

Trott and Hertenstein noted that “the growth of Warnke Ministries in the mid-eighties paralleled a sudden explosion of public fears about Satanism.” An appearance by Warnke on ABC “20/20” was just one of a deluge of television talk shows and books containing accounts of satanic crimes. “Stories of hideous satanic crimes were often woven together by self-proclaimed ‘experts’ to demonstrate the existence of a worldwide satanic conspiracy similar to the Illuminati network outlined in *The Satan Seller*,” said the authors of the expose. “Each year, goes the theory, thousands of children are being sacrificed in satanic rituals laced with sex and violence. Alleged adult survivors of satanic ritual abuse testify to the hidden cult’s existence. *The Satan Seller* seems tame in comparison. Yet when evidence for the conspiracy is requested, true believers (including a few therapists and police officers) often refer skeptics to Warnke and his book as a final authority.”

The footnote citation at the end of the previous sentence referenced by Trott and Hertenstein in their expose has compelling application to Theophostic Ministry. They cite the following: “One well-known example: James G. Friesen, Ph.D., *Uncovering the Mystery of MPD* [multiple personality disorder, now called dissociative identity disorder] (San Bernardino, Calif.: Here’s Life Publishers, 1991), uses Warnke’s book in both text and footnotes to bolster far-reaching claims concerning a satanic cult conspiracy.” Friesen is listed on the Theophostic Ministry [website](#) as author of one of the testimonials to the wonderful results of Theophostic Ministry: “‘Dr. Ed Smith has discovered how to prepare traumatized hearts so that God can transform them. Thank you Ed Smith for your vision, and thank you for your faith. Thank you for helping people open the windows of their lives, so that God can brighten even the darkest corners with His light.’ Dr. Jim Friesen. Shepherd House Ministry. Author of *Unraveling the Mystery of MPD* and Co-Author of *Life Model: Living from the Heart that Jesus Gave you*.”⁴⁵

Smith includes a full page of material from *Uncovering the Mystery of MPD* in *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*. He refers to it as a “helpful book.”⁴⁶

Law Enforcement urges reason in SRA debate

Such beliefs in conspiracies, and the willingness to accept as factual any source that supports the position despite evidence to the contrary, arise from a paranoid belief system, said Kenneth Lanning, in [“Investigator’s Guide to Allegations of ‘Ritual’ Child Abuse.”](#)⁴⁷ Lanning wrote the report in 1992, while a Supervisory Special Agent in the Behavioral Science Unit, National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, Federal Bureau of Investigation, in Quantico, Va. In the report, he took a stand strongly against the hype and hysteria and called for a reasoned, logical approach to investigating such claims.

Lanning calls what the public refers to as satanic ritual abuse, "multidimensional child sex rings." He says, "these cases seem to have the following four dynamics in common: (1) multiple young victims, (2) multiple offenders, (3) fear as the controlling tactic, and (4) bizarre or ritualistic activity.

"Multidimensional child sex rings typically emerge from one of four scenarios: (1) adult survivors, (2) day care cases, (3) family/isolated neighborhood cases, and (4) custody/visitation disputes." The profile of an adult survivor, is that they "are suffering the consequences of a variety of personal problems and failures in their lives (e.g., promiscuity, eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, failed relationships, self-mutilation, unemployment). As a result of some precipitating stress or crisis, they often seek therapy. They are frequently hypnotized, intentionally or unintentionally, as part of the therapy and are often diagnosed as suffering from Multiple Personality Disorder. Gradually, during the therapy, the adults reveal previously unrecalled memories of early childhood victimization that includes multiple victims and offenders, fear as the controlling tactic, and bizarre or ritualistic activity. Adult survivors may also claim that 'cues' from certain events in their recent life 'triggered' the previously repressed memories.

"The multiple offenders are often described as members of a cult or satanic group. Parents, family members, clergy, civic leaders, police officers (or individuals wearing police uniforms), and other prominent members of society are frequently described as present at and participating in the exploitation. The alleged bizarre activity often includes insertion of foreign objects, witnessing mutilations, and sexual acts and murders being filmed or photographed. The offenders may allegedly still be harassing or threatening the victims. They report being particularly frightened on certain dates and by certain situations. In several of these cases, women (called 'breeders') claim to have had babies that were turned over for human sacrifice. This type of case is probably best typified by books like *Michelle Remembers* (Smith & Pazder, 1980), *Satan's Underground* (Stratford, 1988), and *Satan's Children* (Mayer, 1991)."⁴⁸

Lanning explains his reason for writing the report. "The reason I have taken the position I have is not because I support or believe in 'satanism,' but because I sincerely believe that my approach is the proper and most effective investigative strategy. I believe that my approach is in the best interest of victims of child sexual abuse. It would have been easy to sit back, as many have, and say nothing publicly about this controversy. I have spoken out and published on this issue because I am concerned about the credibility of the child sexual abuse issue and outraged that, in some cases, individuals are getting away with molesting children because we can't prove they are satanic devil worshippers who engage in brainwashing, human sacrifice, and cannibalism as part of a

large conspiracy,"⁴⁹ he said.

In the report Lanning lays out a logical argument against the likelihood of a large-scale satanic ritual abuse conspiracy, while not denying that law enforcement should always investigate things on a case-by-case basis. He says:

"Some of what the victims in these cases allege is physically impossible (victim cut up and put back together, offender took the building apart and then rebuilt it); some is possible but improbable (human sacrifice, cannibalism, vampirism); some is possible and probable (child pornography, clever manipulation of victims); and some is corroborated (medical evidence of vaginal or anal trauma, offender confessions).

"The most significant crimes being alleged that do not *seem* to be true are the human sacrifice and cannibalism by organized satanic cults. In none of the multidimensional child sex ring cases of which I am aware have bodies of the murder victims been found — in spite of major excavations where the abuse victims claim the bodies were located. The alleged explanations for this include: the offenders moved the bodies after the children left, the bodies were burned in portable high-temperature ovens, the bodies were put in double-decker graves under legitimately buried bodies, a mortician member of the cult disposed of the bodies in a crematorium, the offenders ate the bodies, the offenders used corpses and aborted fetuses, or the power of Satan caused the bodies to disappear.

"Not only are no bodies found, but also, more importantly, there is no physical evidence that a murder took place. Many of those not in law enforcement do not understand that, while it is possible to get rid of a body, it is even more difficult to get rid of the physical evidence that a murder took place, especially a human sacrifice involving sex, blood, and mutilation. Such activity would leave behind trace evidence that could be found using modern crime scene processing techniques in spite of extraordinary efforts to clean it up.

"The victims of these human sacrifices and murders are alleged to be abducted missing children, runaway and throwaway children, derelicts, and the babies of breeder women. It is interesting to note that many of those espousing these theories are using the long-since-discredited numbers and rhetoric of the missing children hysteria in the early 1980s. Yet 'Stranger-Abduction Homicides of Children,' a January 1989 *Juvenile Justice Bulletin* published by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice, reports that researchers now estimate that the number of children kidnapped and murdered by nonfamily members is between 52 and 158 a year and that adolescents 14 to 17 years old account for nearly two-thirds of these victims. These figures are also consistent with the 1990 National Incident Studies previously mentioned.

"We live in a very violent society, and yet we have 'only' about 23,000 murders a year. Those who accept these stories of mass human sacrifice would have us believe that the satanists and other occult practitioners are murdering more than twice as many people every year in this country as all the other murderers combined.

"In addition, in none of the cases of which I am aware has any evidence of a well-organized satanic cult been found. Many of those who accept the stories of organized ritual abuse of children and human sacrifice will tell you that the best evidence they now have is the consistency of stories from all over America. It sounds like a powerful argument. It is interesting to note that, without having met each other, the hundreds of people who claim to have been abducted by aliens from outer space also tell stories and give descriptions of the aliens that are similar to each other. This is not to imply that allegations of child abuse are in the same category as allegations of abduction by aliens from outer space. It is intended only to illustrate that individuals who never met each other can sometimes describe similar events without necessarily having experienced them.

"The large number of people telling the same story is, in fact, the biggest reason to doubt these stories. It is simply too difficult for that many people to commit so many horrendous crimes as part of an organized conspiracy. Two or three people murder a couple of children in a few communities as part of a ritual, and nobody finds out? Possible. Thousands of people do the same thing to tens of thousands of victims over many years? Not likely. Hundreds of communities all over America are run by mayors, police departments, and community leaders who are practicing satanists and who regularly murder and eat people? Not likely. In addition, these community leaders and high-ranking officials also supposedly commit these complex crimes leaving no evidence, and at the same time function as leaders and managers while heavily involved in using illegal drugs. Probably the closest documented example of this type of alleged activity in American history is the Ku Klux Klan, which ironically used Christianity, not satanism, to rationalize its activity but which, as might be expected, was eventually infiltrated by informants and betrayed by its members.

"Why are victims alleging things that do not *seem* to be true? Many possible answers were considered. The first possible answer is obvious: clever offenders. The allegations may not seem to be true but they are true. The criminal justice system lacks the knowledge, skill, and motivation to get to the bottom of this crime conspiracy. The perpetrators of this crime conspiracy are clever, cunning individuals using sophisticated mind control and brainwashing techniques to control their victims. Law enforcement does not know how to investigate these cases.

"It is technically possible that these allegations of an organized con-

spiracy involving taking over day care centers, abduction, cannibalism, murder, and human sacrifice might be true. But if they are true, they constitute one of the greatest crime conspiracies in history.

"Many people do not understand how difficult it is to commit a conspiracy crime involving numerous co-conspirators. One clever and cunning individual has a good chance of getting away with a well-planned interpersonal crime. Bring one partner into the crime and the odds of getting away with it drop considerably. The more people involved in the crime, the harder it is to get away with it. Why? Human nature is the answer. People get angry and jealous. They come to resent the fact that another conspirator is getting 'more' than they. They get in trouble and want to make a deal for themselves by informing on others.

"If a group of individuals degenerate to the point of engaging in human sacrifice, murder, and cannibalism, that would most likely be the beginning of the end for such a group. The odds are that someone in the group would have a problem with such acts and be unable to maintain the secret."⁵⁰

Lanning warns the public to be skeptical of such claims.

"Until hard evidence is obtained and corroborated, the public should not be frightened into believing that babies are being bred and eaten, that 50,000 missing children are being murdered in human sacrifices, or that satanists are taking over America's day care centers or institutions. No one can prove with absolute certainty that such activity has *not* occurred. The burden of proof, however, as it would be in a criminal prosecution, is on those who claim that it has occurred.

"The explanation that the satanists are too organized and law enforcement is too incompetent only goes so far in explaining the lack of evidence. For at least eight years American law enforcement has been aggressively investigating the allegations of victims of ritual abuse. There is little or no evidence for the portion of their allegations that deals with large-scale baby breeding, human sacrifice, and organized satanic conspiracies. Now it is up to mental health professionals, not law enforcement, to explain why victims are alleging things that don't seem to have happened."⁵¹

Lanning's logic, unfortunately, still falls on deaf ears. I suspect the problem of mass allegations of satanic ritual abuse, and the resulting trauma to individuals and families by therapists who collude with clients in this delusion, will eventually be resolved in the courts. Ultimately, history will prove this situation to be a glaring example of a sociological problem, not a therapeutic one. The wrong segment of professionals has garnered the public's attention with their one-sided therapeutic perspective. Eventually, the experts in cultural trends, who often write the history books, will win the debate and the truth will be told.⁵²

"Paranoid type belief systems are characterized by the gradual

development of intricate, complex, and elaborate systems of thinking based on and often proceeding logically from misinterpretation of actual events," said Lanning, in the report. "Paranoia typically involves hyper-vigilance over the perceived threat, the belief that danger is around every corner, and the willingness to take up the challenge and do something about it. Another very important aspect of this paranoia is the belief that those who do not recognize the threat are evil and corrupt. In this extreme view, you are either with them or against them. You are either part of the solution or part of the problem."

Lanning himself has been accused of being a highly-placed conspirator. "In response to accusations by a few that I am a 'satanist' who has infiltrated the FBI to facilitate cover-up, how does anyone (or should anyone have to) disprove such allegations? Although reluctant to dignify such absurd accusations with a reply, all I can say to those who have made such allegations [is] that they are wrong and to those who heard such allegations is to carefully consider the source," he said.

He cautions law enforcement officers and professionals in the field of ascertaining child abuse to avoid the "paranoia" that has crept into this issue and into some of the training conferences.

He pointed out that a "flood of law enforcement seminars and conferences have dealt with satanic and ritualistic crime. These training conferences have various titles, such as 'Occult in Crime,' 'Satanic Cults,' 'Ritualistic Crime Seminar,' 'Satanic Influences in Homicide,' 'Occult Crimes, Satanism and Teen Suicide,' and 'Ritualistic Abuse of Children.'"

Lanning said, "The information presented is a mixture of fact, theory, opinion, fantasy, and paranoia, and because some of it can be proven or corroborated (symbols on rock albums, graffiti on walls, desecration of cemeteries, vandalism, etc.), the implication is that it is all true and documented. Material produced by religious organizations, photocopies and slides of newspaper articles, and videotapes of tabloid television programs are used to supplement the training and are presented as 'evidence' of the existence and nature of the problem."

Lanning noted that the growing number of conferences and books about satanic ritual abuse are profitable. "There are those who are deliberately distorting and hyping this issue for personal notoriety and profit. Satanic and occult crime and ritual abuse of children has become a growth industry. Speaking fees, books, video and audio tapes, prevention material, television and radio appearances all bring egoistic and financial rewards," he said.

Many people in the church, who are not professional therapists, may be unaware of a serious and long-standing debate within the Christian therapeutic community. Therapists are sharply divided over the issue of whether satanic ritual abuse is a therapeutic problem or a sociological phenomenon best described as a contagious panic-inspired delusion.

When I did a topical search on the *Journal of Psychology and Theology's* website, I found the briefs of articles listed in the Fall 1992 issue very informative. They testified to the stark division of opinion among therapists on this issue. My search yielded a [webpage](#) that detailed the journal's attempt to provide a forum on this topic. An editorial by M. Rogers introduces this issue. This is described as "a call for closer examination of evidence and a coming together of people who do not agree on the issues to share what they know about SRA/MPD and religious abuse and to attempt to resolve the scientific as well as spiritual problems generated by the rift."⁵³ The rift is broad, indeed.

Some experts provided an article demonstrating the view that Satanists have incredible powers of mind control and have the superhuman ability to create alter personalities in their victims. "Recent experience with victims of ritual abuse suggests the presence of 'cult-created' multiplicity, in which the cult deliberately creates alter personalities to serve its purposes, often outside of the awareness of the victim's host personality. Each cult-created alter is programmed to serve a particular cult function such as maintaining contact with the cult, reporting information to the cult, self-injuring if cult injunctions are broken, and disrupting the therapeutic process that could lead to the individual breaking free of the cult."⁵⁴ This opinion presupposes fantastical abilities of mind control that most would admit is simply beyond the power of human beings to do, much less to do and keep the process secret at the same time.

Another warned that, "The vulnerability of dissociative disorder patients to exploitation suggests the need to carefully review the standards of practice of mental health professionals, whatever their level of education and theoretical/technical persuasion."⁵⁵ Theophostic "lay ministers" may have no knowledge of what these standards are. Furthermore, does a few days in a seminar or watching a video course properly teach someone to diagnose, much less treat someone suffering from multiple personalities?

One author pinpointed the impossibility of dialogue regarding the treatment of satanic ritual abuse, and even the evidence for its existence: "Professional dialogue between divergent perspectives concerning SRA is encouraged, and a rationale for such dialogue is presented. The author acknowledges, however, that fundamental differences in world view may work against finding forums for this sort of interchange."⁵⁶

This begs the question: How can a reasoned debate occur between groups when one side in the debate may be suffering under a sociologically induced delusion?

S. A. Mulhern shared research that demonstrates how satanic ritual abuse seminars conducted between 1987 and 1990 were a form of proselytizing. Her conclusions appear to bolster Lanning's contention that

similar seminars negatively influenced some law enforcement officials, too. "Such presentations were designed to convert clinicians before they began listening to patients to believe in the plausible existence of satanic blood cults. Diagnostic and treatment techniques recommended in SRA seminars, as well as postulated explanations for patients' exacerbated clinical symptoms, all pre-supposed the facticity of networks of organized groups of perpetrators," she said. Such "proselytizing techniques ... are inappropriate in medical education courses. Patients' better interests are ill served when their therapists' 'educated' ears have been deafened by uncritical belief."⁵⁷

Another researcher put forth the argument that belief in satanic ritual abuse as a common problem comes about as a result of a moral crusade. "The hypothesis is that allegations of ritual abuse are manifestations of the social construction of an imaginary form of deviance which is being promoted by a moral crusade against Satanism ... The conclusion is that controversies surrounding claims about ritual child abuse can be best understood if they are investigated in the social context of the moral crusade against satanism."⁵⁸

Other authors seem to have noted that the secular press is taking a critical look at the satanic panic belief and urged Christian journalists to do the same. Bob and Gretchen Passantino's paper was published the same year that Trott and Hertenstein exposed the Warnke Hoax. The description of their article in the journal says: "The approach of Christian investigative writing underpinning the article is that believers should promote a higher, not lower standard than the secular press. Biblical and common sense principles are enunciated for the sorting out of truth from untruth in relation to SRA sensationalism."⁵⁹

In fact, the Passantinos wrote, "[Public Trust: Should Christians Tell the Truth?](#)"⁶⁰ This article appeared in the same issue of *Cornerstone Magazine* as the expose on Mike Warnke's book. The Passantinos say: "We approve of investigations that uncover political corruption in Washington, insider trading on Wall Street, and consumer fraud in the corporate world. One would think that our outspoken faithfulness to truth telling would extend to telling the truth about sin within the Church."⁶¹ It is obvious the Passantinos advocate outspoken faithfulness in regards to the facts behind satanic ritual abuse debate as well.

Smith makes the argument that the same sort of denial is going on regarding satanic ritual abuse, as happened 20 years ago with the denial of childhood sexual abuse.⁶² The difference, as one can see in Lanning's report, is that early advocates for exposure of hidden childhood sexual abuse were not alleging the fantastical conspiracies of the satanic ritual abuse stories.

Lanning admits society was in denial about childhood sexual abuse, and that he "has done everything I can to make people more aware of

the problem.” However, he says, some professionals, in their zeal to make people more aware of child abuse, have exaggerated the problem.⁶³

Smith says, despite the lack of physical evidence, there are “obvious victims all around us with evidence of real trauma.”⁶⁴ He says the aspect of “uncanny similarity of the memory content from one victim to the next” is hard to refute.⁶⁵ Smith’s excessive reliance on experiential knowledge without requiring empirical or confirmatory evidence may be blinding him to other adequate explanations for this “evidence.”

Christians consider accounts of UFOs and past lives unbiblical and therefore impossible. However, these phenomena are accepted as fact by millions of people based on the same subjective testimonies as recovered memories. UFO “survivors” have the same “uncanny similarity” in their memory content. They, too, claim the same evidence of real trauma.⁶⁶

I have shared the information in this chapter because I suspect that illustrative material concerning the satanic ritual debate has not sifted down to the level of the average pew sitter. Yet, it is Christians in the pews that are being seduced by this hype into signing onboard with Theophostic ministry. The resulting experience in a Theophostic session can encourage them to suspend logic and depend on feelings, as I explained in Chapter [Four](#). I would hope that any thoughtful person could, by the use of their mental faculties, be able to see the hysteria that is driving this belief.

One of the difficulties in ridding ourselves of such a tenacious myth is that highly educated people fall for it. It was the same during Hitler’s regime. Highly educated Germans believed all kinds of myths and sinister things about Jews. Their education, however, did not prevent them from falling under a deception. However, because highly educated people promote this as true, based solely on people’s subjective reports, the public accepts it as credible. It is so easy to look back in history at the Spanish Inquisition, the Nazi-propaganda-inspired Holocaust, and other massive examples of human gullibility to moral panics and say that we cannot be victims of the same madness. By combining such urban legends, with our inherently evil tendencies, we can do a lot of harm to our families, our communities, and ourselves. We think the therapeutic world of modern America is above such nonsense, but in this case, we are wrong. We need to do more, as Christians, to hold the psychotherapeutic profession accountable in this regard.

Festus accused Paul of being out of his mind. *“Your great learning is driving you insane.”* (Acts 26:24 NIV) Paul was not out of his mind, but I fear that this could truthfully be said about the more vociferous proponents of this paranoia-driven conspiracy. Their arguments are just not reasonable. Certainly, we face demonic opposition. Those who study the scriptures know that this opposition uses arguments and pretensions against the knowledge of God, not baby-eating rituals, to defeat

the gospel. (2 Cor. 10:5 NIV) In fact, the evidence from third-century Rome would indicate the unfounded rumors of baby-eating Christians were part of the “argument and pretensions” Satan inspired against the church. The same rumors, accepted by Christians today, are undoubtedly doing harm to our mission of spreading truth to the lost.

It would seem to me that the true satanic attack is in the incredibly effective distraction this debate on satanic ritual abuse has created. It has captured the thoughts of many gullible people. It has discredited, before the general public, the logical and rational arguments for the gospel. Instead, the debate has cloaked the church in a garment reminiscent of the superstitions of the medieval “Dark Ages,” when the light of Christ was hidden from millions directly through the work of corrupt churchmen. When we use the same argument to advance so called “truth,” as do the proponents who believe in their past lives and their trips aboard UFOs, we do a great disservice to a God who gave us *physical evidence* in the resurrection of Christ. Over 500 witnesses saw the Son of God raised from the dead. Some ate food with him. Some touched his hands and feet. Many of these witnesses were still alive when the Apostle Paul wrote 1 Cor. 15.

In arguing against the credibility of the recovered memories of satanic ritual abuse, I am not discounting the fact that isolated incidents of bizarre abuse do happen. As Lanning said in his FBI report: “I believe that there is a middle ground — a continuum of possible activity. Some of what the victims allege may be true and accurate, some may be misperceived or distorted, some may be screened or symbolic, and some may be ‘contaminated’ or false. The problem and challenge, especially for law enforcement, is to determine which is which.” All I am saying is that therapists who maintain a worldview that this type of activity is commonplace are fostering a climate that is swamping the Church and law enforcement with bogus claims. As Lanning says, true abuse, may, in this climate, be under prosecuted. By allowing that kind of climate to persist without soundly and publicly condemning it, the Church — including her professional psychotherapeutic contingent — is collectively guilty of allowing activity to occur that is morally and ethically wrong. Many churchmen in Nazi-controlled Europe later bemoaned their tolerance of cultural myths against Jews after it exploded into a horrendous pogrom called the Holocaust. A similar event happened, on a far smaller scale, in Salem, Mass., in 1692. Both events resulted in people committing murder in the name of God.

Simpson deserves a lot of credit for trying to inform the public of the truth behind the recovered memory debate. He demonstrated Christian character when he went back to clients and admitted he had unwittingly misled them. Unfortunately, he appears to be a minority voice. Many more who understand the nature of this deception should publicly speak

loudly and clearly in order to warn others.

Who are the accused in this latest moral crusade? Tragically, they are church-going parents and grandparents.

Smith boasts of huge sales of materials that continue to propagate his belief in widespread satanic ritual abuse.⁶⁷ As in the case illustrated in Simpson's book at the beginning of this chapter, innocent people are being slandered with the worst possible lies imaginable — just like the third-century Christians of Rome. Surely Christians should recognize the very real deception at work in the minds of clients and therapists who promote this myth.

Anyone who ventures into Theophostic ministry may be susceptible to this same delusion that has wrecked the personal lives and relationships of others. Simpson said Theophostic Ministry was "pretty dangerous stuff." He's right. Instead of fruit, it would appear that the satanic ritual abuse beliefs of Theophostic Ministry are a dangerous "rumor" weed. This weed, when ingested, is nothing less than poison.

The next [chapter](#) will examine pastoral concerns about Theophostic ministry in the local church.

(Footnotes)

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⁶⁷ Fletcher

Chapter Six: For pastors: The risks of Theophostic beliefs to your congregation

(Ed Smith now warns of “Deacon Georges,” who cry heresy and bring printouts from the Internet. Pastors are encouraged to prepare churches for Theophostic by preaching sermons on the Theophostic principles. For more information, see *Lying Spirits Update*, page [154](#).)

“Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.” Acts 20:30 (NIV)

“**I** must say that much good has come from out of the teaching found in Theophostic Ministry with millions of people being released of deep emotional pain from the lies they had believed, but with this good also came much conflict,” said Ed Smith. “Many churches have split, ministers have lost their positions and relationships have been separated.”¹ Smith describes his reframing of the “traditional views of conflict and pain.” He said, “With the influx of Theophostic Ministry into the local church much conflict surfaced for many people, but out of the conflict also arose much healing.”²

Theophostic Ministry brings conflict into churches. Smith’s own history in Campbellsville churches he personally attended, as he launched Theophostic Ministry, illustrates this point.

In February 1996, Smith sent out personal invitations to churches in three rural Kentucky counties for the official kick-off training session of Theophostic Ministry. Smith shares in a recent book that he was caught off guard by the cool reception he received at that seminar. “I was faced with a room full of people with their arms crossed, glaring at me as though I were peddling the latest infomercial product.”³ Smith said, in another book, that although he invited every pastor in those three counties to the seminar, none responded.⁴ The leadership of the congregation that allowed Smith to use church facilities to host the first seminar did not embrace Smith’s teachings, either. As a result, Smith said he moved to another church, which did embrace Theophostic teaching.⁵ The church Smith now attends, as of the writing of this book, is New Covenant Church in Campbellsville, Ky. New Covenant was birthed out of a church split in the summer of 1999, when Elk Horn Baptist Church, of Taylor County, Ky., lost two pastors and half of its congregation following a dispute between paid staff and the church’s elders.

In a discussion about how to deal with churches that refuse to accept Theophostic ministry, Smith tells the story of a friend of his who brought Theophostic into a local church. Initially, things went well. However, people dissenting to the ministry eventually appeared. The friend left

the church, ran an ad in the local newspaper, and drew 60 people from the former church and many more seekers.⁶ This story sounds strikingly similar to what happened in the Elk Horn Baptist Church split.

According to Smith's account in *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, Elk Horn Baptist church was the church he refers to on page 254 that "was open and has allowed a fully developed ministry."⁷ He said he moved to this congregation within two years of launching Theophostic Ministry in February 1996, which would have been sometime in 1998. In August 1999, Elk Horn Baptist Pastor Dan Hunt split the church, taking several dozen core members with him, along with the associate pastor, Tim Richardson.

A member of Elk Horn Baptist Church, who requested anonymity, was there during the church split. This person said Smith left Campbellsville Baptist Church (the church Smith said did not embrace Theophostic Ministry) and began to attend Elk Horn Baptist Church in the year or so preceding the church split. At first, the person reported, and continuing thereafter for about a year, Theophostic Ministry was done "here and there" quietly in the church. "Our church was very open to Theophostic," the person reported. Then Hunt began to promote Theophostic ministry publicly from the pulpit. "That's when the elders put a stop to it. That's when the split occurred," the person said. There were several other issues involved, but Theophostic ministry was the main point of contention as evidenced by the departing group, the person said. "All the Theophostic supporters went to New Covenant. Every one of them." The first Sunday Hunt left as pastor of Elk Horn Baptist, the person reported that 75 people left that very day. "The sad thing is they're almost all back. Except for the Theophostic biggies, they're all back," the person said. At the time of the church split, the person said half of the church departed, including Smith, who went with the New Covenant group.

Hunt and Richardson relate their experience in establishing New Covenant Church in another church's strategic plan. The Taylorsville, Ky. Community Church Strategic Plan, a PDF [document](#) on the Internet that describes plans for planting a new church in the Taylorsville community, includes an interview with co-pastors Hunt and Richardson. In that document, Hunt and Richardson said they started New Covenant with 35 core members. Seventy-nine people were in attendance at the first service, in August 1999.⁸

Hunt and Richardson also admitted the Campbellsville community was not receptive to the new church. "Campbellsville is traditionally a Baptist area," they said. "Many residents do not trust non-denominational works. The attitude is, 'Why do we need another church?' From their perspective, church starts are thought of as cults."⁹ Both pastors acknowledged that the core members for New Covenant came from Elk

Horn Baptist Church. "Many from the core group came from the church that Dan previously pastored. They were not solicited, but came anyway. Most of the church's publicity is by word of mouth," they said. Local Baptists "almost totally rejected" the new church.¹⁰

I attended a New Covenant outreach service, in late summer 1999, at the Campbellsville City High School. Hunt preached on the exact same topic Smith elaborates on in *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, in a section titled, "Biblical Perspective on the Rise of Satan and the Fall of Man." Smith's writings in this section accurately represent the sermon I remember Hunt preaching at that community outreach service following his recent departure as pastor of Elk Horn Baptist Church.¹¹

I also attended a service at New Covenant in February 2000 in a building the congregation still resides in, which was formerly used by the Social Security Administration. During that service, Hunt presided over a foot-washing service. This involved his washing the feet of a group of young men he had been training to be the elders of the congregation. The age differential was striking. All the "elders" I saw were young men, while Hunt was middle-aged. Hunt, during his sermon, advocated for local evangelism. One of the projects he urged local members to do, for the stated purpose of evangelism, was to wash public bathrooms at a local city park. This struck me as a novel approach to spreading the gospel. Hunt made it clear that he wasn't going to be the one to do this: the members were going to clean toilets. At the time, I was struck by the oddities of this service. Unaware of the nature of Theophostic Ministry at that time, I do not remember any reference to Theophostic during the two services I attended.

Since the church split occurred, Dan Hunt has left New Covenant. Richardson is still at New Covenant, as of December 2003.

Elk Horn Baptist may be one of the very first congregations to be divided over Theophostic theology and methodology. In this case, Smith cannot argue that the split occurred because someone was not performing Theophostic ministry according to his methodology, since he, himself, was the one who introduced and administered Theophostic ministry at Elk Horn Baptist.

In *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, Smith devotes an entire chapter to "Theophostic Ministry and the Church." His stated intention in writing the chapter is to "provide some guidelines for bringing the Theophostic Ministry principles into the local church with as little upheaval as possible."¹² In recognition of the fact that many churches have viewed Theophostic Ministry with a high-degree of skepticism, Smith offers several strategies for bringing Theophostic ministry into the local church. His first recommendation is to sneak it past the leadership by avoiding the name, Theophostic, until people in the church have experienced it through miracle healings, thereby building credibility for the method.¹³

Though some of Smith's followers have suggested he change the name, he admits that the time is long past when that is a possibility. He goes on to cite his reason for registering Theophostic as a trademark: to protect the integrity of the process. Then, he recommends describing his methodology as "a Biblical approach to ministry that allows Jesus to bring truth to the lies one believes."¹⁴

Smith says opposition to Theophostic Ministry arises from the church's unbelief in miracles. He makes some observations regarding the cultural tendencies in churches. He points to the tendency of some congregations to suppress people's emotional pain through a focus on non-experiential approaches in small group ministry.¹⁵

Philip Monroe and Bryan Maier, who co-authored an academic paper¹⁶ critiquing the theological basis of Theophostic Ministry, agree with Smith's observation. "The church has, far too much, relied on cognitive knowledge than living in the presence of God. Theophostic is pointing out there is an error. This is not a new problem," said Monroe, delivering a presentation both men had prepared at the American Association of Christian Counselors World Conference in Nashville, September 2003.

Smith's solution to this problem is to use Theophostic Ministry's experiential technique both in Sunday schools, and at prayer altar ministry, when people come to the front of the sanctuary for prayer.¹⁷ In this section of *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, Smith intermixes legitimate criticisms over the church's failure of encouraging suppression of emotional distress in corporate settings with what he considers unfounded skepticism to Theophostic's controversial methodology. By doing so, he unjustly labels legitimate skepticism as unbelief in the power of God, and, at the same time, gives his blessing to his followers as they proceed to foster conflict in congregations over Theophostic ministry. He argues that such conflict is the legitimate cost of healing, and is done for valid spiritual reasons, i.e., the failure of the church leadership to address real needs of congregants. Those who have critiqued Theophostic would argue, however, that pastors and elders have good reason for a cool reception to the mystical, experiential, and controversial theology of Theophostic Ministry, regardless of the church's perceived failings in fostering healthy relationships. A failure in one area does not necessitate dividing a church — a result that Smith acknowledges happens all too often. Instead, Smith says if the pastor doesn't agree with Theophostic Ministry, it may be time to leave and "find a church where it is possible to minister more freely."¹⁸

Smith makes an interesting observation. He says people and congregations, when "they cross the bridge of experience," accept Theophostic Ministry, whereas previously, they had been skeptics.¹⁹ What is the mechanism at work when people cross the bridge? Is it crossing from sinful unbelief over to belief in the power of the miraculous as personally experienced in a healing miracle as Smith asserts? Or is it a suspen-

sion of discernment and giving in to the lure of a deceiving mystical experience? How should a pastor judge this? Should he delve into the mystical, experiential pool of memory regression combined with inner healing through a spiritual power? Should he decide through his own experience what is true? Or should he compare the teachings of Theophostic with his congregation's theological viewpoint, as the church's elders corporately understand it, through the revelation of scripture? What does the Apostle Paul say? *"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears."* (Acts 20:28-31 NIV) Are these church splits just that: the result of men distorting orthodox Christian doctrine in order to draw disciples after them?

In 2003, Smith said Theophostic practitioners were typically middle-aged, "Spirit-filled" Christians from a variety of denominational backgrounds. He listed the affiliation of Theophostic practitioners as including Baptist, Pentecostals, Catholics, and Mainline Protestant churches.²⁰ Obviously, many churches from across the spectrum of Christendom are in danger of divisive splits over Theophostic Ministry.

[Tom Rutherford](#), an Assembly of God pastor in Springfield, Mo., shared his concern about the rapid spread of Theophostic ideas in churches in a phone interview with me in August 2003. "A number of folks are in the trenches," he said, enumerating calls he has received from pastors with concerns about Theophostic Ministry. "They are on the front lines of this stuff. It's making inroads into the congregations. What happens is a spiritual leader in the congregation, and perhaps his wife, attract a bit of a following. Some results give them some credibility. Now there's 30 or 40 people on a crusade for this stuff. The pastor smells a foul odor to it and confronts them. Then their hair just bristles. It's time for war. The pastors I've talked to are groping in the dark on how to deal with it spiritually."

When asked if he was familiar with cases of people who claim to have been hurt by Theophostic Ministry, Monroe said, "Yes. Churches have been split. People have been hurt."

Both Monroe and Maier embarked upon a two-year study of Theophostic materials after they began receiving more and more inquiries from pastors and students concerning Theophostic Ministry. When asked if he saw Theophostic Ministry as a potentially divisive movement within the church, Monroe said, "It certainly is." Maier agreed, "It is divisive."

Liability and ethical issues for the local church

David Entwistle has authored [two academic papers](#) on the topics of practice issues, and ethical and legal issues in Theophostic ministry. Entwistle says the way Theophostic Ministry is commonly understood is deceptively simple. In reality, it's a complex process. In a November 2003 interview, he pointed to the detailed explanation of the Theophostic process described in "Theophostic Ministry: Case Study Data Suggests Research Is Warranted." This academic paper, authored by Fernando Garzon, and a team of researchers, was presented at the International Conference of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies in Richmond, Va., March 23, 2001.

Garzon's paper describes the five phases involved in Theophostic Ministry with an uncomplicated case in an operational description: 1) Affect Bridge Phase, which includes the therapist listening for "cue words," that might suggest negative beliefs; 2) Cognitive/Affective Exposure Phase, in which the "clinician identifies the key lies believed," with the client's help, and rates the believability of the lie on a 10-point scale; 3) Prayer for Cognitive Restructuring, during which the clinician waits until there is a sense of closure; 4) Evaluation of Initial Prayer; which goes through the rating process again, and 5) Further Prayer Intervention as Needed, in which the clinician may repeat steps 3 and 4. Additionally, other intervention may involve initiating the entire process over from phase one, in regards to remaining lies.²¹

Describing Theophostic simply as a "prayer ministry," may not convey the full picture of what is happening in a Theophostic Ministry session. Furthermore, if it's just a "prayer ministry," why is it so important to follow such a specific protocol? Actually, the same psychotherapeutic techniques Smith advocates — memory recovery, age regression, cognitive restructuring and rating scales — are, in Smith's training and promotional materials, advocated for use by both professionally trained therapists and laymen alike. In one promotional brochure, Theophostic is advertised as suitable for treatment of schizophrenia, a recognized mental illness; fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome, which are physical illnesses; and sexual addiction, which many Christians would consider a sinful behavior, not necessarily an illness.²² I asked Entwistle, "how can the same psychotherapeutic technique be used by professionals and layman alike?"

"Techniques can be shared by professionals and paraprofessionals. For instance, lay people and paramedics should both know how to use a tourniquet to stop profuse bleeding, and in extreme situations, lay people may use more invasive procedures (e.g., people who go on wilderness adventures may take along suture materials in the event that emergency intervention is necessary but professionally inaccessible).

However, under normal circumstances, legal statutes and ethical codes attempt to define 'recognized psychological procedures.' The problem, of course, is that many techniques are common to both professional and non-professional approaches: empathy is a part of being a good friend, a good pastoral counselor, or a good psychotherapist. Since TPM is not a recognized psychological procedure, even though it makes use of a number of common psychological techniques, it does not seem to me to clearly fall within the confines of a 'psychological intervention,'" said Entwistle.

"However, psychologists who use unconventional treatments would need to take the following APA Ethics guidelines into account:

"2.01 Boundaries of Competence: (a) Psychologists provide services, teach, and conduct research with populations and in areas only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, consultation, study, or professional experience.'

"And the following section on informed consent:

"10.01(b) When obtaining informed consent for treatment for which generally recognized techniques and procedures have not been established, psychologists inform their clients/patients of the developing nature of the treatment, the potential risks involved, alternative treatments that may be available, and the voluntary nature of their participation.'

"On the other hand, if TPM is not a 'psychological intervention,' then one wonders how a licensed professional could ethically deliver and bill for services as 'psychotherapy' using only those techniques, especially given Smith's claims that TPM should be understood as ministry rather than counseling," said Entwistle.

There are other areas of ethical concern with Theophostic Ministry beyond those mentioned by Entwistle. Are the training manual, seminar, and video-training materials Smith promotes sufficient to ensure ethical compliance of lay counselors?

Christian Counseling Ethics: A Handbook for Therapists, Pastors & Counselors, makes the following recommendations:

"Becker (1987; see also Scanish and McMinn, 1996) notes the need to adequately and carefully select, train and supervise lay counselors so that they can function effectively within the limits of their helping abilities and training, and so they can learn to refer more difficult clients to appropriate mental health professionals.

"... Briefly, lay counselors should be carefully selected, using criteria such as (a) spiritual maturity; (b) psychological or emotional stability; (c) love for and interest in people, including having empathy, genuineness, and warmth or respect for people; (d) appropriate spiritual gifts for helping ministries (e.g., encouragement or exhortation, healing, knowledge, wisdom, discerning of spirits and mercy); (e) some life experience; (f) previous training or experience in people-helping (if possible, but not es-

sential); (g) age, sex, and ethnic/cultural background appropriate to the needs of the clients served; (h) teachability and availability; and (i) ability to maintain confidentiality.

"[W]hile a systematic training program is essential, there is great variety in the length of training and the counseling approaches ... or modalities ... covered. Usually a minimum of twenty-four to fifty or more hours of basic training in listening and helping skills over a period of several weeks to several months are provided for the lay counselors."²³

For pastors, trying to measure the ethical and legal compliance of a lay-led Theophostic ministry in a local church can be difficult due to the hybrid nature of Theophostic. When church leaders consider the added risk of Theophostic's use of recovered memory therapy, the situation becomes even more complex. Smith's therapeutic/ministry/private enterprise hybrid is hard to position in the public's mind. In my research about the dangers of recovered memory therapy, it seems that many of the previous lawsuits successfully won in recovered memory cases have involved a true therapeutic model with people who have some sort of professional credentials, as well as liability insurance. With Theophostic Ministry, lay practitioners may unintentionally assist people in believing in unreliable memories, which then, may cause negative effects in those people's interpersonal relationships. If legal action arises as a result of those unintended consequences, the Theophostic facilitator may not have the professional training, the professional credentials, or the liability insurance to deal with the resulting legal and moral complications that might arise. Pastors should seriously consider the adequacy of Theophostic Ministry training, which, in some cases, is nowhere close to the 24 to 50 hours considered a minimum for lay counselors.

What happens when things do go wrong? What if, following Theophostic sessions, someone retrieves a memory and, as a result, acts on that memory causing emotional or financial harm to another person, and that person brings about a lawsuit? What will the potential liability be to the congregation that sanctioned Theophostic ministry?

Smith has, himself, changed his description of Theophostic from counseling to ministry. Does changing the name, however, change the nature of what is occurring? Does a name change eliminate the potential liability that process may carry? Many states have "practice laws," which define certain specific interventions as actions requiring state oversight regardless of what name the person uses to describe the activity. For example, certain medical procedures remain medical procedures whether a person labels them something else or not.

These are difficult questions to answer precisely because Smith has created a hybrid. If someone seeks responsibility for potential liabilities on the basis of Theophostic Ministry as psychotherapy, then the "lay minister," may attempt to evade the issue by calling it "prayer ministry."

However, that may not satisfy those who seek redress for harm they may perceive has occurred, or, convince civil authorities that negligence in pastoral care hasn't occurred. Furthermore, Smith contradicts himself, and speaks in the language of the professional therapist in his training manual. In a book published in 2002, he warns non-licensed Theophostic practitioners to "avoid all terminology and jargon that belongs to the professional community such as dissociation, multiple personality, alters, subconscious, disorders, etc."²⁴ Yet, in 2003, he was still selling copies of *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, which contains references to dissociative identity disorder, and many other such terms.

Turning to the ministry side of this hybrid: If a pastor desires to read and investigate Smith's theology and beliefs, he must pay for the privilege and buy trademarked and copyright-protected materials. This makes it all the more likely, under such circumstances, that Smith's followers can successfully pull off the sneak-it-past-the-pastor-without-naming-it-advice. Theophostic ministers are trained with copyrighted materials not freely available to pastoral oversight unless the pastor, too, spends the money and orders the materials. "Up until now, you've had to pay \$200 or \$300 for a seminar to find out what he believes," notes Maier. He was referring to the September 2003 conference of the American Association of Christian Counselors, where, for the first time, Smith was freely distributing copies of his latest book, *Healing Life's Deepest Hurts*.

What happens if one turns to another side of this multi-faced Janus — the private enterprise piece of this hybrid? Smith exercises his right to sell training materials through his family-owned, private corporation. I suppose, if anyone tried to look at product accountability from a private enterprise perspective, a Theophostic facilitator could always veil his operation under the cloak of freedom of religion and make a compelling case. As a result he can attempt to avoid the question that other secular entrepreneurs must face up to: Just what potential effects do their products have on the public? And how much responsibility do they have to inform potential buyers as to the risks of their services or product? Even though we have the religious freedom in America to freely promote religious ideas, Christians still have an ethical responsibility to run a private business with full public disclosure as to the potential effects such ideas may have on the general public.

All of this would be a moot point, but for tragedies like the case of Tom Wright, ²⁵[falsely accused](#) following his pastor's training in Theophostic Ministry in Campbellsville in 1998. Considering the high stakes consequences when things do go wrong, the difficulty of deciphering the ethical issues and legality of Theophostic Ministry within a church setting can open up potential liability to church leadership that should not be underestimated. Some of these issues may likely end up decided in our court system.

Legal risks aside, perhaps the most important thing to consider, from a spiritual standpoint, is the risk Theophostic Ministry poses to a pastor's flock in possibly leading them to believe lies about themselves and others. (See chapter [Two](#) and [Five](#).)

Special concerns for the persecuted church

Many will read this book from the comfort of a Western world perspective. Most of you may have the safety of living in a country with the freedom to express your beliefs and the recourse to a legal system that gives individuals who are falsely accused a fighting chance to exonerate themselves. However, many Christians reside in restrictive countries that do not allow for the free expression of religious beliefs, or in countries that have legal systems that do not offer the same degree of protection.

Reading the testimonies of the persecuted church — both modern and historic accounts — demonstrates clearly that false accusations of sexual misconduct have been used as a method of persecution against God's people since the days of the patriarchs.

Joseph was imprisoned in Pharaoh's dungeon on charges of attempted rape. Richard Wurmbrand, founder of [Voice of the Martyrs](#), suffered 14 years in Romanian Communist prisons, where he was tortured for his faith. He recounts the story of a Lithuanian Christian, V. Petkus, who was tried in a Soviet Court for homosexuality because he had taught young men who had gathered in his home to hear the gospel. Wurmbrand recounts that it was a "habit of the Communists to invent numerous charges against believers." He lists Sister Arbutenko, who was charged with ritual murder; and Solzhenitsyn, who was charged with incest.²⁶

Gong Shengliang, also named Gong Dali, a Chinese pastor who founded the South China underground church movement, was falsely accused and recently convicted of rape. Yet authorities were hard pressed to find an accuser. One of the women Chinese authorities tortured in order to obtain false witness against Pastor Gong died as a result of the torture. Originally sentenced to death, Gong's sentence, following international outcry, was reduced to life in prison. Advocates for the persecuted church fear for his health.

There are many places on this earth where those hostile to the gospel look for opportunities to falsely accuse Christians. Theophostic Ministry has acknowledged that people in [Afghanistan](#)²⁷ and India²⁸ have been trained in Theophostic ministry. Both countries have on-going incidents of hostility against Christians, according to advocates for the persecuted church.

I have a special concern for those who may use Theophostic Ministry

in countries where Christians are persecuted. In Chapters [Two](#) and [Five](#), I make the case that Theophostic ministry has the potential to generate false memories of sexual abuse. If Tom Wright had lived in a restrictive country, his story may have turned out very differently. Instead of suffering a divorce, a few days in jail, a stained reputation, and hefty legal fees, a similar allegation may have cost him his life in Afghanistan, Pakistan, or any number of other restrictive nations. I am concerned that governments that oppose Christianity may opportunistically use Theophostic-inspired recovered memories to arrest, and perhaps even torture or murder Christians in countries hostile to Christianity. If such governments catch rumor of “recovered memories” among local Christians, they may jump on this opportunity to drag innocent people away. In countries where the right to a fair trial does not exist, terrible things could indeed happen.

In the West, someone who comes up with the idea that he or she may have been abused, based on information revealed during a Theophostic session, may see little harm in sharing this information with others. In other countries such misguided fantasies could result in the torture and death of other Christians if those rumors circulate among the local police.

How will a church-based Theophostic ministry, in a country hostile to Christians, ensure that these things do not happen? Based on what I have learned about Theophostic Ministry, I think this is a danger that missionaries and advocates of the persecuted church would be wise to consider. Mission boards and other groups who advocate for the persecuted church should take a hard look at Theophostic Ministry, assess the risk, and if convinced of the potential for harm, should speak out on the possible danger of Theophostic Ministry to believers in restrictive nations.

What response should the local church have?

In response to the concerns regarding potential liabilities and possible spiritual and ethical problems that may arise from Theophostic Ministry, some pastors may consider the best course is to make no changes in the church’s approach to hurting people. Changes may not be necessary in some congregations. However, I would encourage pastors and church leaders to consider that Theophostic Ministry has pointed to a real need for the Church to be more responsive to emotional struggles within the Body of Christ. The vacuum created in some local churches, through years of neglecting relational discipleship has, in part, created opportunities for movements like Theophostic Ministry to make great inroads into congregations. The pent-up demand for relational discipleship arises from genuine unmet needs for encouragement through the

Body of Christ. Wise pastors will spend the time to disciple lay leaders in the congregation, who can then spend time getting to know individual families and church members and help people make biblically well-informed and sound decisions on how to handle life's problems.

If you, as a pastor, think you should refer a certain individual to psychotherapy, first, ask yourself honestly if you can find a way to address the person's concerns through Christian discipleship. An excellent resource written by an advocate for Christ-centered "care of souls" ministry, is [*"A Radical Proposal: Christ-Centered Ministry versus Problem-Centered Counseling,"*](#) by Martin and Deidre Bobgan. (EastGate Publishers, 2004). Approach a decision to refer someone to psychotherapy with caution, understanding that some within the Body of Christ have posed legitimate concerns over what appear to be essential conflicts in the "world-views" of psychotherapy and Christianity. If you do refer someone to psychotherapy, please be aware of the controversy within the counseling community over recovered memory therapy. Encourage your parishioner to be an informed consumer. Find out what the counselors in your area believe before you make any referrals. Do they have a large client base of satanic ritual abuse survivors? If so, that's a red flag warning. Do they believe memories can be recovered from the womb or early infancy? Another red flag. Do they cite proof of these beliefs from suspect sources? Another red-flag. Take the time to be informed and, thereby, be a more effective shepherd for your congregation. If you do refer, it's very important to make sure therapists also have appropriate training and are licensed.

Lastly, if someone in your congregation has fallen victim to these beliefs or has a family member who has accused him of "unbelievable" abuse, encourage him to read the next [chapter](#).

(Footnotes)

¹ Ed Smith, excerpt "Reframing the Devil: A Non-warfare Perspective of the Defeated Kingdom of Darkness," a work in progress that he references in *Theophostic Ministries Update newsletter*, 2001. p. 7.

² Ibid.

³ Edward M. Smith, *Healing Life's Deepest Hurts*, New Creation Publishing, and Vine Books Servant Publications. 2002. p. 177.

⁴ Ed M. Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed., Alathia Publishing 2000, p. 254.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., p. 259-260.

⁷ Ibid., p. 254.

⁸ Taylorsville Community Church strategic plan. <http://www.newchurches.com/downloads/files/Strategies/StudentChurch>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* 289-292.

¹² Ibid., p. 251.

¹³ Ibid., p. 252-253.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 252-253.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 256-257.

¹⁶ Bryan N. Maier and Philip G. Monroe, "A Theological Analysis of Theophostic Ministry," *Trinity Journal*, Fall 2003 Vol. 24 NS, No. 2., p. 169

¹⁷ Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery* 257.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 254.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 258-259.

²⁰ "How is the Research Stacking Up," Spring/Summer 2003 edition of the *Journal of the International Association for Theophostic Ministry* (condensed version).

²¹ Garzon, Hardy, Smith, Borden, Cagle, Jageman, and Simonaviciute, "Theophostic Ministry: Case Study Data Suggests Research Is Warranted," presented at International Conference, Christian Association of Psychological Studies, Richmond, Va., March, 2001.

²² Theophostic International Convention 2003 brochure.

²³ Tan, Siang-Yang, Lay Counselor Training. In Sanders, R. K. (Ed.) (1997). *Christian Counseling Ethics: A Handbook for Therapists, Pastors, & Counselors*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. p. 237.

²⁴ Dr. E. James Wilder and Dr. Ed M. Smith, *Keeping Your Ministry Out of Court*, Alathia Publishing 2002, p. 48.

²⁵ Joe Appel, "Cautious Relief for Tom Wright," *The Forecaster*, 11 July 2002

²⁶ Richard Wurmbrand, *The Sweetest Song*, Living Sacrifice Book Company, 1988, p. 83-84.

²⁷ Ed M. Smith, letter, "Article was intentional attempt to discredit good ministry," *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 14 Aug. 2003.

²⁸ "Theophostic Ministry in India," Spring/Summer 2003 edition of the *Journal of the International Association for Theophostic Ministry* (condensed version).

Chapter Seven: For those who suffer: Forgiveness, healing, and restoration

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.” 2 Cor. 1:3-6 (NIV)

For the person who has received recovered memory therapy:

First, and most importantly, if you are having any self-destructive or suicidal thoughts, please stop reading this book and get help now! Call a local hotline, a trusted friend, a pastor (not involved in your recovered memory therapy), or a physician who doesn’t advocate recovered memory therapy, to help you through the initial feelings of grief.

Secondly, only those memories, which appeared during therapy, are the topic of concern in this book. Any memory you have always remembered from the time it initially occurred is, more than likely, a genuine memory and any subsequent recovered memory therapy you may have received does not invalidate that memory. It is the memories that have arisen through recovered memory therapy, particularly those from infancy or early childhood, that are the most suspect. In my case, I have always remembered the sexual abuse I suffered in early and mid adolescence. These were real events in my life. No one is saying that these types of memories are the product of imagination. If you went into recovered memory therapy and you had always remembered a particular individual sexually abusing you prior to that therapy, then that is probably an accurate memory. If, after recovered memory therapy, you subsequently “recovered” new memories of other people sexually abusing you, those memories are highly suspect. If, prior to entering recovered memory therapy, you had no memories of anyone sexually abusing you, then is it unlikely, although not impossible, that these events actually happened.

If you are reading this chapter because you suspect that memories recovered during Theophostic sessions may not be true, I offer you some common sense advice in the following paragraphs.

First, there is always the possibility that your memory may be true. Without physical evidence you will not be able to prove it one way or the other. However, if this memory appears totally out of character for what you know about this person, and you had no previous suspicions

in this regard about this person prior to Theophostic ministry, then the chances are very slim that the memory is true. Use your common sense. Do not rely solely on subjective impressions received during a Theophostic session in making decisions about the relationships in your life. That is a very dangerous thing to do. Read the Bible and listen to the voice of your conscience. This is much more reliable than using a mystical technique, which is all Theophostic ministry is. God will convict you, over time, and you will know how to deal with this situation if you are really sincere in seeking the truth through the means God directs you to use. Beware of your desire to seek physical signs, heavenly confirmation, prophetic words, or anything mystical. Just spend time humbly reading the Bible, and quietly praying, while keeping your mind alert, and God will help you in deciding what to do. Ask God to search your own heart for anything that could lead you into deception.

Secondly, if, after consideration, you no longer believe your memory was accurate, you now face the possibility that you have caused harm to your personal relationships based on a mistaken idea. As a result, if you took actions based on that belief, you may be suffering grief over what has resulted from your actions. Please don't despair about the damage to relationships that may have resulted from your recovered memory therapy. A wonderful discovery awaits you. Only those who fully realize the depths of their own depravity can fully appreciate the richness of God's grace and mercy. Even as you feel the pangs of conscience and are overwhelmed by how to right the wrongs you have inadvertently caused, the power of God is already at work. He is working all things to the good for those who love God and have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Centuries before you were born, God brought the Apostle Paul to his senses, on the dusty road toward Damascus, while Paul was still intent and on his way to harming others. Throughout the coming days, and coming years, following his Damascus Road experience, Paul had to face the results of his religious deception. He remembered the people he had tortured, and even killed, and undoubtedly he was filled with deep remorse. (Acts 26:2-11) Other believers doubted the sincerity of his repentance, adding to his grief. (Acts 9:26) However, Paul recognized that, in his life, God was setting forth a marvelous example of the depths of His mercy and grace, so that others would believe and accept God's forgiveness. *"But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life."* (1 Tim. 1:16 NIV) No sin, no wrong, no mistake is beyond the reach of God's mercy to heal. He is the God of reconciliation. (Col. 1:20; 2 Cor. 5:18)

Understand, however, that the very moment of realization of your personal sin is also the same moment when Satan, the accuser, will

tempt you to doubt that God's mercy and grace is sufficient to redeem you from your mistakes. *"Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, 'The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?' Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel."* (Zech. 3:1-3 NIV) While God has chosen you to receive the richness of his grace and mercy, Satan stands at your right side in an effort to convince you that God's mercy isn't enough, or that you're not good enough or deserving enough to receive it.

We all fall short of the glory of God, and God knows this better than we do, but, He doesn't listen to Satan's accusations against us when we believe in the sufficiency of the atoning sacrifice of His son, Jesus Christ. Jesus died on a Roman cross and was raised to life on the third day. He is coming back for all those who believe and we, too, will be raised incorruptible on that glorious day! We who believe are hidden in Christ, whose light is so bright that men cannot look directly upon it when it shines in all its glory. This blinding light consumes our failings and the stain of our sin. That is the position we have in Christ, and that is what God sees when he looks upon his children.

Satan's accusations may be right. Your own conscience may agree that you have rendered much harm to your loved ones. However, the best way you can minister to those you have wounded is not to rail against yourself, but to accept God's forgiveness, lean on His strength, calmly accept the consequences of your actions and trust that God will work things to the good. Commit your family into His hands through humble, heartfelt prayer. Then do whatever God leads you to do in your effort to express your heartfelt repentance to your family. He will provide others to help you.

When I came to my senses, at 40, following two decades as a professing atheist, I was horrified to realize that I had taught my children there was no God. My oldest was 12. Through all his formative years of childhood I had actively prevented him from hearing the truth. In that moment of realization over what I had done, God brought to mind a Bible verse that I had heard in a sermon, which I will share with you. This verse brought me hope and comfort. *"I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten — the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm — my great army that I sent among you."* (Joel 2:25 NIV)

If your family has been hurt by recovered memory therapy, if your relationships have been damaged because you believed in something that you now believe wasn't true, God can restore what the locusts have eaten. Trust that He will do this in His time and in His way. Give your family time to accept what has happened. During the time that they are trying to accept what has happened and are working through the grief

of what has been lost, do not expect to receive sustenance and emotional succor from them. You may have to wait for them to heal. God will provide for both them and you during the restoration process.

Lastly, consider what the appeal of recovered memory therapy was, to you, and why you were attracted to these ideas. It is helpful for anyone who has been deceived, to look back for a time and to try to learn from mistakes.

The Western culture has been selling the idea that we are victims, not sinners, for a long time. If you are a victim, for a time you can receive sympathy and that is a very appealing thing. It may be so appealing that you want to stay there. Certainly, there is a time and place to be consoled for the pain of the past, especially pain that was inflicted by others. But we need to be so careful that, in cases where we cannot even remember serious abuse in our past, we don't promote ourselves as victims just to avoid facing our real problems. These problems may be more related to the consequences of our present-day sin, or just the difficulties of living in a fallen world, than about the past. The key is to move beyond seeing ourselves as victims into taking responsibility for the wrongs that we do. It's hard to admit we are sinners. It means we have to take responsibility for ourselves. It means that, ultimately, we must acknowledge we are our own worst enemies. We are the main ones responsible for our own problems in our current life. Yet, it is in *this* recognition, as well as the understanding of how our past wounds may drive our motivations, that we are restored and healed. As long as we are trying to blame our present problems on the people in our past, or even on the people in our present, we miss out on God's true healing. We ALL do this in varying degrees. Admitting it is painful. But confession, repentance, and faith in God's promises, as revealed through scripture, are the cure for what ails us.

My stepfather raped me over a period of several months when I was 16. Yet, what brought me to God was the realization that a cancer-causing sexually transmitted infection (HPV virus) I caught at age 17, was due to my own choice to be sexually promiscuous after I had escaped from my stepfather. This virus caused what a doctor thought was a cancerous tumor when I was five weeks pregnant with my fifth child at the age of 39. My husband's unbelieving relatives urged me to have an abortion so that the tumor could be removed right away. Of course they were concerned for my life. I wasn't a Christian when that tumor was discovered, but I soon became one. And in the process I had to come to terms with the fact that *I* had caused this disease. I had done it. I couldn't blame other people. No one held me down the day I got that virus. I made a choice to have sex with a young man who gave me this virus.

I also realized that I couldn't sacrifice my unborn child because of my past mistakes. I had to face up to the consequences. I made the choice

to carry the baby to term without knowing whether the tumor was cancerous or not. In making that choice, I refused to believe that it is morally acceptable to “heal whatever any cost.” Not only did I choose not to abort my baby, I also refused to have surgery that carried a 30 percent chance of killing my unborn child.

My baby survived, and was born healthy and at full-term. Shortly afterward, I suffered through some painful surgery to excise the tumor, which turned out to be non-invasive. But even if I had died, I would have died a Christian. I would have died accepting responsibility for my mistakes and willing to lay down my life for another. That is true life! As a result of my experiences, I discovered that seeing one’s self as a victim is not satisfying to the soul. When we continue to see ourselves as victims, and define ourselves by what we’ve survived or suffered instead of the character we’ve developed through choosing to do the right thing in the present, regardless of how difficult that is, we inevitably end up victimizing someone else. We do this when we shift the blame for our own problems to someone else who may have hurt us.

I’m not discounting how painful suffering can be. I must have wept an ocean of tears over the sexual abuse I suffered in my teens. However, I firmly believe God will provide *biblical* means for us to be transformed through suffering. In that process, He will reveal areas in our lives that need to be released into His care. He will also reveal places in our own hearts that need to yield our will to His.

My first husband used to tell me that I had suffered more than anyone he had ever met. It was baloney. I have since found that there are millions of people who have suffered far more than I can imagine, and some of them suffered as the most committed of Christians. When I left the role of victim behind, I discovered how much gratitude I began to have for all the blessings God has showered upon me. I experienced a growing compassion toward those who suffer unjustly. This is the beginning of Christian maturity. Of course, a big part of healing from the wounds of others is to seek God’s power so that we can truly forgive those who have hurt us. Although I had already forgiven my stepfather before I became a Christian, I did not have compassion and heartfelt sorrow for him, as a human being, until I had the understanding of God’s mercy in my own life. That God-given insight truly healed the hurt from the past. I did not need a special, mystical process to activate this insight.

There is, however, a need at times to express grief from what we’ve lost as a result of our experiences. Sometimes when we grieve a recent loss, even something like the loss of a job, we grieve other losses in our lives that still seem unfinished. When people go through times of crisis, sometimes the opportunity to put the matter to rest — to grieve fully — just isn’t there. Life moves on, and the grief has not been expressed. There is also, at times, a need to forgive ourselves as well as others who

have hurt us. There is nothing wrong with taking some time to look at scripture, share Christian testimony, and put your life experiences in perspective in a loving, collegial atmosphere of Christian discipleship. I personally believe a Bible study, geared to putting childhood sexual abuse in perspective, can be a productive, helpful thing for people who may need to go back and revisit this issue so that they can put it to rest. However, I don't recommend doing so with someone who offers a mystical approach, or a therapeutic approach that says, "let's see how much stuff we can excavate." That is not necessary. Some women may only need one time of sharing this with another person they trust to be released of the guilt. Others may benefit from more. I believe churches need to be responsive to this need in a sensitive fashion. Some churches have even developed Bible studies for women who were sexually abused as children.

Being raped hurt. Past sins of both self and others have consequences. I thought about it off and on during the first 20 years of my adult life. But, even before I was a Christian, I still loved, laughed, enjoyed my husband, Charlie, and my children, and I learned and grew in maturity. My moments of joy far outweighed my moments of grief. The problems I experienced in my life were the result of my own sinful selfishness much more than something from my past. The only times in my adult life that I was truly unhappy for an extended period of time was when I was still persisting in sexually immoral behavior in my late teens and early twenties, during the six months that I participated in a sex abuse survivors group in my early 30s, and lastly, in my first few years as a Christian when God was walking me through trials in order to strengthen my faith. Those trials yielded a deep satisfaction I could not have found any other way, because my faith did grow.

When I became a Christian, all the pain from that period in my life greatly lessened, and today I rarely give it a thought. The things God has shown me about myself — things that needed to change *in* me — He did through convicting me with scripture and through the Holy Spirit, usually in operation through the voice of conscience.

I'm not trying to be unsympathetic to people who have suffered in this way. I'm just trying to bring some perspective into this highly emotional topic. Life in a sinful world is painful for all of us. But God promises to be with us if we will believe. He wants us to focus on the good things he has given us, and to move forward, straining ahead to win the prize. (Phil 3:13-14) Every single human being on this planet has suffered as a result of the fallen nature of humankind. It can be a liberating thought to realize you're really not that special in what you've suffered. You are special in how you respond to that suffering. If you respond from the depths of human nobility through a growing knowledge of the love God has for you, then that is special indeed. Think about how you

can best help someone else who has suffered more than you.

For the loved ones of the person who has received recovered memory therapy

If you, on the other hand, have been falsely accused of something you haven't done, based on a relative or friend's recovered memory experience, and that person is still living under that grievous deception, take heart. A significant percentage of those so deceived do eventually retract their allegations, although it may take many years for the person to realize they were deceived. Even if he never retracts it, like any other major grief in life, there is recovery in the future. You will grieve, but you will have joy and laughter again. Let God take care of you while the pain is sharp and the agony fresh. Take it one day at a time. Many other parents have grieved the loss of a relationship with a child through death or estrangement.

If you are not a Christian, and are reading this book because someone you know has accused you or someone you care about, of abusing someone else as a result of Theophostic ministry, I want to assure you that this event is not a true representation of Christianity. The God of Christianity is not a God who delights in accusing people. Quite to the contrary, he loves everyone in the whole world and wants only for people to repent of their unbelief and turn to him so that they can be forgiven for *every* sin. God made complete provision, through faith in Jesus Christ, so that all who believe do not have to face condemnation from God for a failure to live a righteous life. Your wound may have come from someone claiming to have God's authority, but that doesn't mean he did. He is mistaken. He has been taken *"captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."* Col. 2:8 (NIV)

There is nothing in the Bible that supports these kinds of accusations against innocent people arising from recovered memory therapy. God specifically calls for two or more witnesses to any wrongdoing. He is a God of due process, not a God of kangaroo courts or of slander based on an undependable memory. I would encourage you not to be discouraged from seeking God, if you have the desire to do so, because of this false representation of him through another person. The same thing happened to me. A leader in the church, who did molest me several years before my stepfather later raped me, in my early adolescence, taught me a lot of nonsense and he claimed it was genuine Christianity. As a result of his false teaching, combined with the sexual abuse, I became an atheist for 20 years. However, when people seek God based on His revelation of Himself through His own words that are not twisted by people seeking their own agenda, they find that He is good. *"Taste and see that the*

LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.” (Psalm 34:8 NIV)

Taste Him for yourself. You will find the pain you are enduring much easier to bear if you have God to help you. He’s on your side. When people read the words of Jesus himself, they sometimes are surprised to realize that many have propagated lies in his name that he never said. Or, they twisted his words out of context and used them to berate and hurt, or discourage others.

If you are innocent, try to empathize with the person who has been misled. In the end, they have lost much. They have to live every day grieving over a life they have lost unnecessarily to deception. Unlike a person who has suffered real abuse and may have to terminate unhealthy or dangerous relationships, these people have suffered the loss of family or friends when there was absolutely no need to do so. When you think about it, that is very tragic. Vigorously defend yourself if need be, with competent legal help, but try to have mercy on this person. He truly does not realize what he is doing.

If you are a Christian, you already know that God will vindicate you. *“For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants.” (Psalm 135:14 NIV)* However, you may never be vindicated in this life. The sooner you accept this as a possibility, the sooner you can come to a place of forgiving the person who has hurt you. You know, in your heart, that you must forgive, even if the person never reconciles. Remember Jesus’ last words on the cross: *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34 NIV)*. To be falsely accused is a common event for true Christians and is what happened to Jesus. I encourage you to read testimonies coming from the persecuted church. These will do much to sustain you. Learn from what Jesus did, and how he suffered for us. Most of all, trust, that in your unjust suffering, God is moving in mysterious ways, and will bring the light of truth to others as a result of your affliction. Lean on God and rest in your innocence.

If it is your child or spouse who has accused you, I know you are heartbroken. How could your own flesh and blood betray you? Yet, like most parents or husbands and wives, you yearn not for vengeance but for restoration. You wish the nightmare would end and you could, once again, be reconciled with your beloved daughter or son, husband or wife. I don’t have any words that will take your pain away. But in writing this book, I have come to realize that I need to pray for people like you and I promise that I will. I wrote this book because I have learned of your pain and sorrow. I don’t know who you are, but God does, and He is faithful to be by your side. One day, all truth will be revealed.

Lastly, if you are reading this book, and you are guilty of abusing someone and you are seeking a way to discredit your accuser, I pray you will repent before you fall into the hands of the living God. He who searches hearts and minds knows the truth. All those who fail to humbly

repent will suffer an eternity apart from God. I pray for you, too.

Conclusion: Theophostic Ministry's Lethal Defect

"And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again." Phil. 1:6 (NLT)

Ed Smith sincerely believes that Theophostic Ministry brings healing to people; that this healing is from God; and that Theophostic Ministry rests solidly on biblical doctrine. He has worked diligently and with much effort to bring these beliefs to people around the world. He has written tens of thousands of words, traveled many miles, and put much effort into selling the benefits of Theophostic Ministry. He appears to have a deep compassion and genuine care for other people. He has demonstrated keen perception, at times, in identifying areas where the Church, particularly in the Western countries, has failed in some congregations, to bring a vibrant, relationship-oriented Christianity to the people in the pews. Sadly he fails to see the potentially disastrous course that lies ahead for some who engage in Theophostic sessions and make false conclusions about their past and about how God speaks to Christians. Even without this blind spot, Smith's views pose a myriad of concerns over his theological perspective for many in the Body of Christ.

In Smith's view, it is "heal whatever the cost."¹ In his cost-benefit analysis a person's relationships are expendable, both in the "original biological group"² God has placed us in, as well as the church family. He demands that we evaluate Theophostic Ministry by its fruit. When examined, that fruit reveals congregations divided over disputable issues, families divided over allegations that haven't a shred of proof, and a cloud of scandal hanging over respected members of the community, who are alleged to be secret members of satanic cults. That, my friend, is not the fruit of righteousness. That is the fruit of deception.

There is a lethal defect in Smith's methodology, because it ultimately rests upon recovered memory therapy for its "healing" power. It is a very thoroughly mixed amalgam of truth and deception. In reading Smith's writings, one must take the time to comb through each paragraph. Some, taken out of context, are true. But the sum total is very wrong. To put it succinctly, Smith's philosophy empties the cross of its power to transform us, and instead, places trust in a mystical/therapeutic/entrepreneurial hybrid that is a cheap imitation of the true gospel. It is an adulterated gospel, which mixes in Gnostic-style mysticism, needed, in Smith's belief, to finish the work that God began in us through the cross.

Contrary to Smith's insistence on adding to the gospel message, the blood of Christ is sufficient when we deny ourselves, take up our cross

and follow him in true repentance and poverty of spirit. These are all that is needed for our spiritual wellbeing. Lie-based theology is ultimately a theology based on lies. It is a theology based upon the lie that asserts our wounds require a special touch from a mystical Christ, when, at the cross, God tells us we are spiritually healed by his stripes.

Smith further discounts the power of the cross in his illustrations in *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*,³ when he pictures the work of the cross in our lives as something that hampers us with a ball and chain. In his view, we struggle to live the victorious life because the blood of Christ is enough to save us, but not enough to equip us and give us emotional healing. One can only conclude that Smith himself has failed to understand the ultimate power of the crucified life. His methodology offers a poor substitute.

Smiths' substitute gospel not only demeans Christ's sacrificial death, it is a potentially toxic philosophy that harms others through its methodology. Not only is it an ineffective gospel, it is dangerous to the public at large. More and more people are beginning to recognize the dangerous potential of recovered memory therapy. One [medical doctor](#) likened the situation to the Thalidomide debacle: "What seems to be happening in the recovered memory saga is not unlike what happened years ago with thalidomide: the premature release of an apparently promising medication produced such disastrous side effects that it had to be withdrawn."⁴

Even a statewide newspaper editorial board recognized the danger and sounded a warning: "While such therapy may be appropriate in some clinical circumstances, recovered memories shouldn't become the sole cause for indicting or convicting a person of sexual abuse. Psychologists say that the human mind can create false memories that seem entirely real, just as it can forget and later recall actual events in a person's life. Deciding which memories are accurate and which are not requires some kind of corroborating evidence."⁵

In *Hurtling Toward Oblivion: A Logical Argument for the End of the Age*, Richard A. Swenson, M.D., proposes the following axiom: "If the negatives are sufficiently dangerous, they cannot be offset by the positives *no matter how beneficial the positives are*."⁶ Swenson proceeds to give a variety of scenarios to illustrate the point that a little bit of "lethal" negative far outweighs a lot of positive. "No matter how large the quantity or quality of positive, if the negative is harmful enough, it wins. If the negative reaches a level severe enough, then it has the power to disqualify the entire experience. It is instructive to realize that *increasing the positive will usually not lessen the disqualifying character of the negative*. It must, therefore, be regarded separately when doing assessment."⁷

In my first [article](#) about Theophostic Ministry for the *Central Kentucky News Journal*⁸ I revealed the public's concern over the possibilities of "lethal negatives:" i.e., innocent people being imprisoned. Smith con-

sidered this slanted news. However, there is another way to look at such news coverage. Remember the disintegrating Firestone Tires on Ford Explorers a few years back? “The Firestone [tire recall](#) is perhaps the most deadly auto safety crisis in American history. US regulators on 16 October, 2000 have raised the death count to 119 (the death count has steadily risen from 62, later to 88 and 101 deaths reported on 9/20/2000). Experts believe there may be as many as 250 deaths and more than 3000 catastrophic injuries associated with the defective tires. Most of the deaths occur in accidents involving the Ford Explorer which tends to rollover when one of the tires blows out.”⁹

Hundreds of thousands of people rode in vehicles upon that same brand of tire without injury. But to the people who died as a direct result of a defect in the product, that “lethal” event far outweighed the positive experience of many others. That “lethal” negative, rightly portrayed in the press as such, resulted in a much-needed correction to protect the public. The same principal is in operation with Theophostic Ministry. However, Smith, unlike Firestone, has no control over the “quality” of the product he so avidly promotes. There is no state agency, no consumer protection entity, no ministry organization, and no licensing authority that could have prevented what happened to Tom Wright, and what will, undoubtedly, in the hands of sinful people, happen again to others. As Christians, however, we have a responsibility and a moral obligation to run from anything that has the potential to bring such harm to innocent people.

I believe, as a journalist, that the “false accusation count” following Smith’s promotion of the use of recovered memory therapy will steadily rise until the number of suffering people reaches a point where some will undoubtedly petition civil authorities for redress. In the end, the negative will far outstrip the positive. One of the reasons this hasn’t yet occurred in large numbers is because, 1) The accused are often Christians, who “turn the other cheek,” and suffer in silence in the hope that their wayward daughter, son or grandchild will come to his or her senses and retract the slander; and 2) The accusations are so humiliating to endure that most people are ashamed to even speak of such “unspeakable” things outside of the family.

The Firestone Tire Recall is a perfect example to illustrate Swenson’s premise. The negative must be regarded separately. That is what I have done, as a journalist, in this book: regarded the negative potentiality of Theophostic separately. This is the legitimate area of public trust that has been placed in the hands of journalists. It is not slanted news to expose potential “lethal” negatives; e.g., the possibility that some people may sit in jail for 20 years on false charges, or even that a beloved grandchild will grow up cut off from his family’s heritage because of a false memory of abuse on the part of his mother concerning his grandfather. Despite

those who advocate for law and order at any cost, our system of justice is based on limiting the “lethal” negative as much as possible.

No journalist worth his salt will shrink from peering into the potential of lethality in a religious movement just because proponents try to shelter it under the cloak of God’s name. Jesus said many would come, and will continue to come, in his name claiming great religious works.

“On judgment day many will tell me, ‘Lord, Lord, we prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Go away; the things you did were unauthorized.’” (Matt. 7:22-23 NLT)

When I investigated Theophostic Ministry’s claim that its miraculous healing powers were of divine origin, I found no evidence to support that claim beyond subjective experiences of people who, as scripture clearly demonstrates, can be easily deceived. When the benefit, as solely evidenced by subjective emotional feelings, is weighed against very real legal fees, slander and ruined reputations, and estrangement within families and churches, the “lethal” negative, in the end, outweighs the good. No one has the moral right to claim healing based on a methodology that evidence has shown has the potential to result in the ruination of innocent people. It is not, “heal whatever the cost.” That is not God’s way. I believe the things done in the name of Theophostic are unauthorized by God.

Smith’s column, “Redeem the Family Unit if Possible; But Heal Whatever the Cost,” appeared in the Campbellsville newspaper Feb. 9, 1996. Just five days later, on Feb. 14, 1996, I left a Campbellsville doctor’s office, confronted with a difficult personal choice. I was two months pregnant with my fifth child, and, suddenly, I had to decide whether to pursue “healing whatever the cost” to my embryonic child.

At the time, I was a professing atheist. That Valentine’s Day was my last day as an atheist. My doctor had discovered what he believed was a cancerous lesion on my cervix. He informed me that if I did not have immediate surgery to remove the lesion, I would not live to see my baby born. He discounted the risks of the surgery to my unborn baby, saying that he had done several of these surgeries and not yet lost a baby. He said I already had four children and it was more important that I live than this baby inside me live. However, I discovered within a few days that the surgery carried a 30 percent chance of killing my child.

I chose not to heal at the cost of my child’s opportunity for life. I was very frightened, but I knew her life mattered, too. Before I even knew whether it was cancer or not, I elected to continue the pregnancy anyway. I hoped that even if I eventually died from cancer, perhaps the baby would have an opportunity to grow and be viable before I grew too sick to sustain her life. My husband supported me in that decision.¹⁰

God blessed my willingness to sacrifice my own interests on be-

half of another. He blessed me by giving me the faith, within just a few weeks, to believe in the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. By the time I was eight months pregnant, I had become a Christian, and I would soon discover these words, as I read the Bible for the first time since childhood: *"If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will find true life."*(Mark 8:35 NLT) This biblical principle is key to a spiritually robust life in Christ.

By contrast, Smith believes that healing emotionally is so important it matters not whether families are hurt and churches are split, in the pursuit of lie-infested memories. At its heart, Theophostic Ministry advocates a consuming self-centeredness that is anti-cross and anti-Christ. Such self-absorption is the antithesis of how we are to live as Christians.

As I end this book, I readily disclose, that I, too, fell for the [Warnke Hoax¹¹](#) in 1997, as a new believer. My first book, written as a new Christian in 1997, was a thriller novel, which incorporated a story line involving a satanic cult. I used ideas from Warnke's book in writing that novel. I now thank God that I did not see that work published, and for the handful of people who did read my draft copy, I offer my apologies for my small part in misleading the Body of Christ.

I spent a year in a church that placed great import upon subjective experiences that came complete with tingling spiritual thrills, but in the end were empty of God's true power. The experiences were so powerfully "felt," I was tempted to "expand" my belief system to validate them as "biblical" just because they appeared so "real." In my [testimony¹²](#), I offer my own experience of this time, in which I was spiritually tested. I offer it as a warning to others of how easy it is to fall under the sway of some highly emotional experiences which seem to carry the very power of God, but, when viewed over time, lead to no righteous fruit being manifested in a person's life.

The power of Satan to deceive us should never be underestimated. The power to deceive oneself is even more deadly. I recently came across, what I think is an excellent metaphor to illustrate the great danger in Theophostic Ministry.

In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, by C.S. Lewis, an episode occurs in the volume, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. A ship, carrying the main characters of the story, sails into an inky black darkness that surrounds a mysterious island, which the ship's crew and passengers cannot see. After a time, they hear a man splashing around in the water, yelling, "Mercy! Even if you are only one more dream, have mercy. Take me on board. Take me, even if you strike me dead. But in the name of all mercies do not fade away and leave me in this horrible land." They take him on board and find that he has a look of utter horror on his face. He tells them that he has been on an island where dreams come true. He urges

them to flee at all cost. At first, the people on the ship do not realize their danger. They consider that this man is talking about a place where day-dreams come true. Then, they suddenly realize, terror striking them all, that he is talking about night dreams — *dreams you cannot control* — the kind that also bring nightmares. Now they are consumed with fear, and begin to row with all their might in an effort to flee out of this darkness. As they are leaving, some crewmembers begin to imagine all kinds of monsters are after them. “Do you hear a noise like ... like a huge pair of scissors opening and shutting...over there?” one asks another. “Hush!” says another. “I can hear *them* crawling up the sides of the ship.” Another sailor says, “Ugh! There are the gongs beginning. I knew they would.” Because their imaginations were running wild, they began to fear that they were steering in circles in their effort to flee. How could they really know for sure? *They had no point of reference they could depend upon to guide them.* Lucy, a main character, begins to cry out to Aslan (God) for help. First a tiny speck of light appears, and then an albatross appears and leads them out of the darkness.

Smith is right about one thing: this island of hidden memories is veiled in darkness. Because of the very nature of the darkness, we can never know what arises from our imagination versus what arises from reality. *God sends his light to lead us out of this place, not to lead us in.* The ship’s crew, as portrayed in the story above, was suddenly thrown into terrifying confusion. Would they sink the ship because of a delusion? Suddenly, they were faced with the knowledge that they could no longer tell what was real from what was not real. The very definition of psychosis is the uncontrolled experience of suffering from distorted perceptions of reality. Why would any Christian, or anyone else, for that matter, want to venture into such a place? The only reason people go there is because they have been sold a bill of goods that the answer to their current problems requires sailing back in time to a dark place. When they do set such a course, they are taking on a grave risk of deception.

Smith might look at this analogy and see it differently. He might see God’s light in the story as a metaphor for Theophostic Ministry, ending the fear and bringing truth. However, I think the story points, instead, to the wisdom of avoiding some areas in our lives that are best left with their mysteries intact and undisturbed. Once you embark on a journey to the island of hidden memories you will lose your point of reference, and in your search for a guide, you will not be able to tell, as easily as Smith claims, the real Jesus from the fake one. You may find yourself steering in circles following the one who masquerades as an angel of light. Like some, you may find yourself going in circles for many, many years, losing precious relationships, and irreplaceable time with loved ones that God intended for you to have and enjoy.

Smith says it doesn’t matter whether a memory is real or not. The

parable above illustrates that it matters very much. In his fear, a person will take action based on information retrieved from his dark room, even if he cannot determine the reality of a memory or not. Smith's "dark room," is best left that way — in darkness. People enter thinking there is something of value to be found. Yet, the power of the human imagination is so great, that what they find instead are rampant fears set free from the moorings of reality. A journey into those waters is a journey out of light. God's light leads us away from such places into *today*; into the moment where we *can* change; into the opportunity for love, for growth, for maturity that awaits us if we will seize the opportunity God gives us in our *present* life.

The power that is in us is stronger than the power that is in the world. (I John 4:4) For all those who seek the truth with a sincere heart, you will find it. That truth is not a corporation, a new methodology, or a lying spirit disguised as manufactured vision. That truth is a person, Jesus, and he speaks in a small still voice deep in our hearts. Listen to the voice of reason, the voice of conscience, and be faithful to what you know, deep in your heart, is right. Be like the noble Bereans, as you search the scriptures for the truth in order to test every man's teaching. Don't be seduced by a "feeling," no matter how good that feeling may be. Don't be seduced by testimonies not fully grounded in scripture. Many may claim to have been healed, but it is the basis of that healing that must be examined. If you find you have been misled, don't be afraid to publicly admit you were wrong. In fact, you have an obligation, as a Christian, to do so. There is great freedom in genuine confession and repentance. The only thing you may lose is pride, and the humility you gain, as a result of an honest admission of failure, is priceless in God's eyes.

May the grace of God be with you as He completes the work he started in you.

Jan Fletcher

(Please read [Update](#) to *Lying Spirits*.)

(Footnotes)

¹ Ed Smith, column, "Redeem the Family Unit if Possible; But Heal Whatever the Cost," *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 9 Feb. 1996.

² Ibid.

³ Ed M. Smith, *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, 4th ed., Alathia Publishing, 2000 p. 17-18.

⁴ Munro, A. (1996). "Recovered memories in psychotherapy," *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 41, p. 200.

⁵ “Court Cases Should Not Rely Only on Recovered Memories,” editorial, *Portland Press Herald*, 15 May 2002.

⁶ Richard A. Swenson, M.D., *Hurtling Toward Oblivion: A Logical Argument for the End of the Age*, Navpress, 1999, p. 93. (emphasis original)

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96. (emphasis original)

⁸ Jan Fletcher, “Controversial International Ministry Operates from Campbellsville,” *Central Kentucky News Journal*, 3 July 2003, 1A.

⁹ Webpage, Firestone Tire Recall Legal Information Center, <http://www.firestone-tire-recall.com/>

¹⁰ My baby was born healthy and full-term. I had curative surgery post-partum for a lesion that turned out to be non-cancerous after all.

¹¹ Jon Trott and Mike Hertenstein, “Selling Satan: The Tragic History of Mike Warnke,” *Cornerstone* Vol. 21, Issue 98, 1992.

¹² Jan Fletcher, *Counted Worthy to Suffer Dishonor: A former atheist testifies to the power of God*. 2002. www.undergroundbride.com/ebook.html.

Update: The continuing seduction of Theophostic Ministry

*The following update to Lying Spirits is from Jan Fletcher's [presentation on Theophostic Ministry at the 2005 Discernment Ministries Conference in Lafayette, Indiana July 1-2](#). This update is in response to Ed Smith's extensive revisions in the *Basic Seminar Manual for Theophostic Prayer Ministry*, released in April 2005.*

How does Theophostic work?

Here's the actual process of Theophostic as Smith describes in his 14 steps from his newly revised *Basic Seminar Manual*, released in April (Chapter 7):

1. "Prepare the person for Theophostic Prayer Ministry." **My comment:** This now includes signing release forms, such as a hold harmless agreement. This preparation also includes preparing the person for a state of meditative prayer. (p. 72)
2. "Encourage the person ... to seek to identify earlier memories that may be a source of his current emotional pain." **My comment:** Now, the person is convinced that his present problems are rooted in past memories.
3. "Identify memory clues in the person's presenting problem and use the present emotional stirring as a 'jumping off point' for identifying historical issues." The Theophostic facilitator listens closely for clues to a "shadowy historical picture," that contains the true source of the person's problems. **My comment:** Now the person is actually involved in memory regression.
4. "Identify secondary shielding emotions hiding vulnerable pain that the person may have." **My comment:** a search for feelings is now underway.
5. "Identify the person's deeper painful emotion rooted in the lie-based memory."
6. "Identify the person's historical memory picture(s) matching the presenting emotion." **My comment:** Repressed memories may surface here.
7. "Identify the person's lies that are exposed by the painful emotion."
8. "Rate the believability of the lie."
9. "Have the person identify and expose the lie and embrace its pain." **My comment:** In Smith's previous manual, he instructs facilitators to encourage clients to embrace the pain in a new concept he called "stirring the darkness." He said it was "probably the most radical shift

in my counseling approach.” (BTR p. 133) He said, “I seek to stir up the darkness and encourage people to immerse themselves as deeply as they can in this darkness. It is in this painful and excruciating state that God is most clearly understood.” (BTR p. 68.) Smith’s recipe for encouraging an “abreaction” resulted in this truly repugnant example of a Theophostic session in BTR p. 370: “Focus on your father touching you. Try to stir up the shame and guilt.” The female client responds: “I don’t feel shame. It was not my fault.” Smith stirs up the darkness and says, “Visualize your husband touching you sexually. Tell yourself how shameful you are for letting him do this...” He continues: “See your father having intercourse with you. Tell yourself how bad you are.” In the new book, Smith says he no longer adheres to this concept, and has removed it. This is an improvement!

10. “Ask the Lord to reveal His truth to the person.” **My comment:** This is when the person “watches for, listens and feels” for a special revelation from “Jesus,” who “has the ability to enter into our historical moment and reveal truth in the experience.” At this point, the facilitator discerns the source of the revelation is actually Jesus. Smith says, “During Theophostic Prayer Ministry, demons sometimes masquerade as Jesus, appearing visually in people’s minds looking like Jesus. Do not be alarmed by this tactic.” On page 233, Smith says, “I have found that when a person looks carefully at the face of a demon ‘Jesus,’ it will usually be dark or hazy, or look angry, scornful, or evil.” By the way, Smith explicitly warns against all forms of channeling or divining the future using Theophostic, because, apparently, some people have found Theophostic can be useful for that. He gives examples of facilitators who ask “Jesus” questions, then “trust the ministry recipient to receive Jesus’ answers for them.” (BSM p. 194) I had one person tell me she knows people are using Theophostic to contact the dead. Although Elliot Miller justifies Theophostic’s basic method as biblical in his paper, even he admits observing “TPM sessions wherein the recipients reported answers from Christ that seemed quite credible and others wherein the answers seemed quite dubious.” (p. 11, [“An Evaluation of Theophostic Prayer Ministry.”](#))

11. “Remove the ‘clutter’ or obstacles that keep the person from moving forward.” **My comment:** One example of clutter is if the person makes the mistake of logical thinking, because this will interfere with his receiving truth. (BSM p. 145)

12. “Confirm the healing.” **My comment:** Smith says he has “the person feel through all parts of the memory slowly to be sure it is completely free of all negative feelings. I want the ‘peace of Christ to rule in his heart.”

13. “Process residual lies, residual sadness, and other associated memories.” **My comment:** In this section, Smith introduces truth-based

pain as opposed to lie-based pain, further expanding his mystical model to include healing for all emotional pain, whether resulting from lies implanted by Satan, or just from life's hardships, like the death of a loved one.

14. "Ask the Lord Jesus to affirm and bless the person."

Smith's theory and method arise out of the inner healing-healing of memories rootstock.

Elliot Miller, in his [paper](#), says Theophostic "is perhaps the fastest-growing approach to inner healing or healing of memories in evangelical churches today." (p. 4) In his appendix A endnote, he goes on to say: "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'" (p. 28). I agree with Miller that Theophostic is an inner healing-healing of the memories counseling movement.

Agnes Sanford, who lived from 1887 to 1982, is considered the founder of the healing memories movement. She advocated healing of the memories through mystical prayer. Over time, Sanford, a daughter of Presbyterian missionaries, dramatically departed from the basic doctrines of orthodox Christian faith. She eventually came to believe that God "made everything out of Himself," and "He put a part of Himself into everything."

Sanford believed 'experience comes before theology.' Visualization was key to Sanford's teachings, and she advocated that one should visualize a past situation then envision Jesus coming into the memory to solve the problem. (From *Abusing Memory: The Healing Theology of Agnes Sanford*, by Jane Gumprecht.)

Miller, in his [evaluation](#) of Theophostic, claims Theophostic has distinctions from other inner healing ministries: Says Miller: "CRI finds nothing unbiblical with the premise that emotional problems rooted in the past can be dealt with effectively through a prayer ministry that invokes the healing presence of Christ. CRI finds many problems, however, with the teachings and approaches to such ministry usually associated with the movement... These problems include an unbiblical and potentially occult use of visualization and guided imagery... an overemphasis on victimization and an underemphasis on the role of personal responsibility and sin in one's emotional problems, and an undiscerning use of secular and New Age psychotherapeutic concepts and practices such as Freudianism and Jungianism." (p. 28)

Smith works hard to distance himself from the terms inner healing, and healing of the memories in an effort to divorce his method and teaching from all the inner-healing proponents that have preceded him.

His predecessors were up front about their use of visualization and guided imagery.

Smith says in his revised manual: "Theophostic does not see 'healing of memories' as a goal in the Theophostic process since the memory is not understood to be the problem but rather the interpretation given the event." (BSM p. 12)

Theophostic IS an offshoot of Agnes Sanford's teachings. Smith's previous manual recommended John Sandford's books as a reference for further study, and Sandford is the most influential disciple of Agnes Sanford, according to Jane Gumprecht. But, Smith's concepts have been continually repackaged to stay ahead of critics who know what the roots are, and also to have strong appeal to Southern Baptists and other conservative churches. In his new training manual he says the previous training manual no longer reflects his teaching. (p. 1) However, the following illustration will include quotes from both the earlier training manual, and the new one, as I will demonstrate that Smith's concepts and methods are nothing new to Southern Baptists. In fact, another Southern Baptist and his wife promoted the same ideas in 1975.

I will read a series of alternating statements, some published in 1975 and others published in the last five years, some as recently as three months ago. Two Southern Baptist ministers, both Dr. Eds, have an amazing similarity in teachings connected to their names. Dr. Ed and Betty Tapscott published *Inner Healing Through Healing of the Memories* in 1975. Betty Tapscott, who wrote the book, described inner healing as "psychotherapy, plus God." (ITHM p. 16)

On mind renewal:

"Romans 12:2 (KJV) says, 'And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...' Inner healing is the renewing of your mind." (p. 13 *Inner Healing Through Healing of the Memories*)

"Romans 12:2, Paul declares that changed behavior/transformation is a natural outcome of mind renewal when he writes, 'be transformed by the renewing of your mind.' Mind renewal is the expected outcome of a ministry session when Christ's transforming truth is received." (p. 12 *Basic Seminar Manual*)

The first statement was published 30 years ago. The second one is from Smith's newest training manual.

In distancing himself from the roots of his methodology, Smith now says: "The term *healing*, when used in regard to Theophostic Prayer Ministry, describes the outcome of mind renewal. For clarity, I have chosen to deliberately avoid the term healing for the most part and replace this term with mind renewal." (p. 15) Notice how Smith keeps the term mind

renewal from a previous inner-healing proponent, but jettisons the term healing. He's also replaced recovery, with renewal in the newly revised training manual, and dropped the word recovery from the book's title.

On shining God's light:

"It's having Jesus shine His divine light in all those dark places where Satan has hidden those hurts and painful memories. It's having Jesus walk hand-in-hand through every second of our lives, of being right there with us during those unpleasant situations." (p. 15 IHTHM)

"Theophostic Ministry is God's true Light, the Lord Jesus bringing Divine truth experientially into one's historical life experiences." (*Beyond Tolerable Recovery* p. 13) "I continually see the Lord Jesus walk through the terribly traumatic memory and then calm the sea with His healing words and they never have to go there again ..." (BTR p. 67)

The first statement was published 30 years ago. The second one is from Smith's previous training manual, published five years ago.

By the way, Theophostic, the term coined and trademarked by Smith, consists of two Greek words: theos (God) and phos (light). – Divine light – same concept Tapscott used thirty years ago. Smith just translated it into Greek words.

On Satan implanting thoughts into the minds of children:

"In both instances, the children were not physically harmed, but Satan used these situations to put fears into the hearts of young, innocent children. Those fears followed them into adulthood. In all of us is an inner child of the past." (IHTHM p. 21)

"If I were Satan and wanted to destroy a person's life, I would not plan on spending day after day, year after year tempting, harassing and criticizing him. No, it would be much easier to influence an adult to act out evil on a little child and then in the midst of the traumatic event drop a seed of untruth into the child's heart ..." (BTR p. 33)

Again, the first statement was published 30 years ago. The second one is from Smith's previous training manual.

On visualization:

"If you have an abnormal fear concerning something, ask Jesus to reveal when that fear entered. Then, visualize Jesus in that situation. Ask Him to relive that situation with you, to take away the fear associated with it, and to heal your memory of that traumatic experience." (p. 21 IHTHM)

"However, if a person cannot visualize Jesus in the memory, I ask

them to sense His presence... some may think this visualization is some glorified form of guided imagery. This is not so. I had used guided imagery before Theophostic Ministry, but it is no longer a part of what I do." (BTR. P. 141)

The first statement was published 30 years ago. The second one is from Smith's previous training manual published five years ago.

Smith now admits, in his revised training manual, that he continued to guide people into visualization after he warn others not to:

"Sometimes it is hard to break old habits in this area of ministry. I came from a background where I was more directive in my counseling approach. I have tried hard to adhere to the now established guidelines that govern this process. Some of the people who have offered criticism of this ministry helped point out some of my shortcomings found in former editions of this manual. In a few cases what they pointed out was valid and I have since cleaned it up." (BSM p. 72) He says, "Today I strive hard to avoid all forms of guided imagery..." (BSM p. 2)

Elliot Miller takes critics to task who claim Smith encourages people to visualize during Theophostic sessions. "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," he says. Miller notes that official TPM guidelines state: "I will avoid all forms of guided imagery and or directed visualization and seek to allow you to have a genuine healing experience prayerfully directed by the Holy Spirit without information input on my part." (p. 8. "An Evaluation of Theophostic Prayer Ministry") That's all well and good. However, Smith's critics are looking at not only what Smith **says** he does, but also at what Smith **actually** describes in the examples he has offered in his training materials. (For Jan Fletcher's response to Miller's allegation that she has an "inexplicable anti-TPM agenda," please see her [letter](#) to Miller.)

Even Smith now admits that he **has used** guided imagery, and in doing, so, he broke his own promise he made in the 2000 edition of his training manual not to do so. In BTR, p. 141, Smith says: "Some may think this visualization is some glorified form of guided imagery. This is not so. I had used guided imagery **before** Theophostic Ministry, but it is no longer a part of what I do." Yet, he says in BSM (p. 279): [Theophostic facilitators] should not ask the question, 'Do you see Jesus?' or make the statement, 'Look for Jesus.' Such directives would be 'guided imagery.' (This is an example of the former teaching that is no longer promoted.)" If Smith himself cannot follow his own ministry guidelines, how can we expect his disciples to do so, consistently?

He says he has now cleaned up his act. In the face of Smith's own failure to follow his own guidelines, it's legitimate to wonder if other facilitators will resist the temptation to guide their clients' visualization.

This temptation is a natural outflow of using a mystical model with roots in the occultic inner-healing movement. Disclaimers have little meaning when Theophostics's own founder can't stop doing it himself!

On prayer:

"Then through the prayer for healing of memories, Jesus walks back into our past and heals every hurt ... He cleanses us and gives us peace." (IHTHM p. 14)

"As soon as the person identifies his present emotion, the minister asks him to allow the Spirit of Christ to help him find the memory that contains the same feelings. The process is much like meditative prayer in that the person takes a position of spiritual receptivity and focuses on what God has for him". (BSM p. 72)

The first statement was published 30 years ago. The second one is from Smith's newest training manual, published three months ago.

On repressed memories:

"Psychologists have estimated we spend fifty percent of our mental and emotional energy repressing painful memories." (IHTHM p. 19)

"One of the root problems buried in my subconscious mind was revealed by the Holy Spirit as we prayed. At approximately eight years of age I was molested by a neighbor man. This **was** so harrowing that I hid the memory in the deepest recesses of my subconscious. But Praise Jesus, I now can write about it in complete peace and forgiveness." (IHTHM p. 88)

"Most survivors of sexual abuse who come to me for help do not come presenting sexual abuse as their problem or concern. If you take the 35 percent of reported cases and add the others who have not reported it, plus those who have repressed it beyond access, the percentage is staggering." (BTR p. 25)

The first statement was published 30 years ago. The second one is from Smith's previous training manual, published five years ago.

On the premise that our present problems are the result of trauma of the past:

"Psychologists tell us that what happens to us in the first few years of our life forms the basis for the way we act or react to situations for the rest of our life." (INTHM p. 19)

"Principle One: Our present situation is rarely the true cause of our ongoing emotional pain." (BSM p. 31)

The first statement was published 30 years ago. The second one is

from Smith's newest training manual, published three months ago.

On universal need for everyone to have this therapy:

"All of us need inner healing in some way or another. Jesus is waiting for us to let Him heal all our painful memories, hurts, fears, disappointments. (IHTHM p. 35)

"Most people have not suffered a severe trauma, but everyone has been wounded at some level – all of us have memories that are imbedded with lies. We all need our minds renewed." (HLDH p. 19)

The first statement was published 30 years ago. The second one is from Smith's book *Healing Life's Deepest Hurts*, published three years ago.

Keep in mind that mind renewal is Smith's nomenclature for inner healing.

One prenatal memory:

"Some trauma comes before birth or prior to conscious memory... I was praying for another woman, and as I asked Jesus to heal her even as she was in her mother's womb, I felt such an overwhelming sense of rejection, loneliness, and sadness." (IHTHM p. 22-23)

"I am open to knowing more ... For me this is no longer a stretch... I personally have no real problem believing that this is a true reality that is being spiritually revealed ... Concerning the woman mentioned earlier, I believe she had feelings of rejection in the womb, but did not have the cognitive ability as a fetus to interpret them as such. However, later in life this emotional experience would become a platform for interpretation anytime anyone rejected her." (BSM p. 112-113)

The first statement was published 30 years ago. The second one is from Smith's newest training manual, published three months ago.

On demonology:

"Also, remember Christians can not be **possessed**, but they can be **oppressed** by Satan." (IHTHM p. 57)

"It is also important to differentiate between possession (complete control over the person) and oppression (harassing, attacking, bothering, etc.) Many people report being oppressed from demons for one reason or the other, but I have never encountered a person completely overtaken and under the control of a demon." (BSM p. 213)

And again, the first statement was published 30 years ago. The second one is from Smith's newest training manual, published three months ago.

On evaluating sanctification by feelings of inner peace:

“If we were to use one word describing the results of inner healing it would be PEACE.” (IHTHM p. 16) “Without inner peace, without healing of the soul (**mind**), we cannot be in perfect harmony with our Lord.” (IHTHM p. 43)

“The Apostle Paul instructed the Colossians to, “Let the perfect peace of Christ rule in your hearts (Col. 3:15) Peace always follows the Holy Spirit’s message of truth. Lies steal our peace, while truth bestows peace.” (BSM p. 165)

The first statement was published 30 years ago. The second one is also from Smith’s newest training manual, published three months ago.

There are two differences between Tapscott and Smith:

One promoted the hunt for repressed memories in a much different, pre-litigious atmosphere that preceded the disastrous and now well-known unintended side effects of such memory regression therapy. This is why Smith’s latest book is chock full of warnings about possible litigation.

The other difference is that Tapscott was honest in her terminology in describing her method. In contrast, Smith has consistently shifted his terminology in an effort to cut the moorings from the same inner healing dock – Agnes Sanford’s concept – where Tapscott launched her method 30 years before.

Thirty years later, we now live in a time where people have been so readily primed by the entertainment media and New Age writers for entering self-induced trance states, Smith can now rename Tapscott’s therapy “meditative prayer,” and he’ll achieve the same result. The trance-inducing pump has been culturally primed. For those who know the dangers of [contemplative, meditative prayer](#), you know what I am speaking about. For those who do not, I recommend you check out Ray Yungens’ excellent report on this growing phenomenon, in his book, [A Time of Departing](#).

How Smith’s teaching has evolved

Here’s an example of Smith’s shifting terminology in response to critics:

From BTR, page 22: “Genuine **recovery** is divine and relapse is not **possible** unless the person deliberately goes against the implanted truth in their souls, which is unlikely.”

From BSM, page 42: “If genuine **renewal** has occurred in a person’s thinking, relapse is not **probable** unless people deliberately go against

the truth that God plants in their souls.”

Notice the substitution of renewal for recovery and probable for possible. The first change is an attempt to distance Theophostic from the recovery movement.

As Bob DeWaay, a pastor from the Twin Cities, so insightfully noted in his presentation: [“Theophostic Ministry: Examining the Claims”](#) (May, 11, 2004), Smith’s Theophostic theory has captured the essential basis of the recovery movement in its advocacy of the need to recover the pristine inner child, only with a new twist. In Smiths’ view, said DeWaay, “the spirit is pristine, perfect and beautiful and holy, only the problem is your mind doesn’t know it, so you’ve got to keep going back and getting these lie-based thinkings out of your mind until the perfect, pristine holy inner person can come out... Theophostic recovery is recovering the pristine self... that can’t be Christian because if you believe in a sin nature, you’re just recovering a sinner. You’re recovering a dirty, nasty, rebellious child. So you can’t believe in the recovery movement unless you believe that man is sinless. Well, he has his own version of it. Your sinlessness starts when you become a Christian and what you’re recovering is that pristine spirit person inside.... So it’s sort of a first cousin of the recovery movement with a twist. It took me a month of reading this to figure out that’s what’s going on. It’s so buried in there.”

Elliot Miller notes in his [paper](#), “Ed Smith has a rather unique view of the relation of sin to born-again believers,” which he says is rooted in Smith’s version of trichotomy – the belief that humans are composed of three separate elements: spirit, soul, and body. “Smith views the spirit of the Christian as his (or her) true self, which perfectly reflects the moral nature of Christ,” says Elliot. (P. 14-15 Eval. of TPM)

Smith’s belief in the sinless nature of the “spirit man’ is exactly what prompted Philip Monroe and Bryan Maier to warn that Smith’s theology was not consistent with Reformed teaching on the issue of a sinless nature versus a sin nature post conversion. Smith said, “*Sin-based theology* believes that the root of my problem is my sin.” He said he has “come to realize this is a misconception and a grave error.” Once a person becomes a believer, Smith said, “the source of my sin problem is no longer in my heart since I now share the very heart of Jesus ... my trouble with sin is now in my mind or lie-based thinking.” Smith calls this new insight lie-based theology. (This is from BTR p. 224-225)

I believe Smith embraced this teaching as a convenient way to justify his recovery method. Once a person understands the theological twisting that is going on in Smith’s view of sanctification, the whole underlying foundation for the Theophostic process crumbles. That’s why he’s removed his “sin-based vs. lie-based” theology from the revised manual. This teaching is gone. Apparently Elliot Miller helped Smith craft a more suitable theological camouflage for Theophostic. I suspect this is because

Miller finds Smith's psychotherapeutic inner-healing theory "elegant in its profound simplicity."

Maybe Miller wants to keep the mystical baby he finds so elegant, and throw out the theological bathwater that astute believers have found is soiled with false teaching. Smith, in his enthusiastic sales pitch for selling his universal cure for emotional pain, was just too telling in his earlier, more honest descriptions of his personal beliefs. Smith just needed the touch of a master wordsmith to help him disguise the non sequitur, and contradictory supports for his elegant deception, cluttered, to Miller's mind no doubt, by Smith's actual and very confused theology. In essence, it seems as if Miller is saying "it works, Pal, but let us Christian counselors describe it for you."

According to Miller, Smith demonstrated integrity in being so ready and willing to make the changes Miller wanted. I believe an equally valid opinion on the matter is that Smith has no integrity to any systematic theology of any kind. He will change his professions to suit what "works," because the man's entire focus is on the experiential, just like his inner-healing predecessors before him. Remember, Agnes Sanford believed experience comes before theology. Gumprecht noted Sanford's constantly shifting methods, and said, "her 'criteria for religious 'truth' was, 'Does it work?'" (p. 88, *Abusing Memory*) Well, Smith has constantly shifting **theology** and **methodology**.

However, even in his own schemes to build the Theophostic process on recovering the pristine inner spirit man, Smith runs into serious contradictions in theology. This is why those who want to hang onto the "elegant ... simplicity" of Theophostic say, as Miller does, "it is possible to practice TPM without agreeing with Smith's views on the sin nature, sanctification, and so forth." Of course! When the theology is wrong, just ignore that – who needs that anyway? – Keep the method, because it works!

Here's another example: In the revised training manual, Smith lists 14 basic principles of Theophostic Prayer Ministry. In *Beyond Tolerable Recovery*, he lists 9. Some have been broken up into two principles but there are three very interesting differences. First, one of the original nine principles has quietly disappeared, and that's Smith's assertion that "God heals the lost and saved equally with no preference over either." (BTR p. 116) In another place in BTR, Smith says of Theophostic: "People consistently say it was from God. This is even the case with those who do not profess any relationship with God." (p. 136) And, later he says, "God does not seem to require confession of sin from a nonbeliever." (p. 147)

In the new 14 basic principles, this basic Theophostic principle has quietly slipped away, and I found no evidence of repentance for teaching it in the past in his newest book. But, note the serious contradiction it revealed in the very core of his Theophostic process. How can a lost person

have the “peace of Christ” – that which Smith defines as the end result of Theophostic healing? If a lost person can have it, and claims God showed it to him, then it’s not the peace of Christ: it’s a false gospel! If a lost person gets a word of truth from Jesus without repentance, it’s a false Jesus!

In response, Smith will say, as he does in *Healing Life’s Deepest Hurts*: “It is important to note that mind renewal does not constitute salvation. A person can have renewing of the mind and still be eternally separated from God.” (p. 169) But, if mind renewal comes through God’s divine light in the form of the Spirit of Jesus, how can that be? Smith wants to call it mind renewal instead of recovery because it sells better with Christians, but, it can’t be mind renewal, in the Romans 12:2 sense, if you are talking about the lost! Smith can’t have it both ways, so he’s quietly dropped the basic principle that Theophostic works equally well with Christians and non-Christians. My guess is that Miller told him to ditch it, for how could Miller, an accomplished theologian, write a 30-page paper and miss this foundational error in Smith’s theology?

If Theophostic is **recovery** (pardon me, **renewal**) of the pristine inner spirit man, what is being recovered/renewed in these unsaved people from whom God does not seem to require confession of sin? Answer: it’s the inner pristine child of Agnes Sanford.

Secondly, he’s added a new principle: “People are in emotional bondage due to two basic factors: belief and choice.” (BSM p. 33) This was in response, again to Monroe and Maier’s criticism. They expressed concern that Smith’s theological position was weighted too heavily on the victim side of the pendulum. This new principle is an attempt by Smith to correct his previous teachings.

Another new principle was also added: “Mind renewal is a lifelong process.” (BSM p. 37) This is an attempt to clarify previous statements from Smith’s earlier training manual, which described Theophostic in terms of “drastic remarkable change,” and; of “most every method of treatment available,” “none brought the depth of recovery we now see;” and “most people undergo complete recovery of their primary pain in only a few sessions ... nothing like what was common with other more traditional methods of counseling.” (BTR p. 10,11,13) His use of the term “maintenance-free victory,” is another example. (Back cover BTR)

Let’s look at another change in the new training manual. Here’s an example of where Smith changes his instructions for doing Theophostic on yourself using different wording:

From BTR, p. 272: “Close your eyes and focus on your **breathing** and the tension in your body.”

From BSM, p. 269: “Close your eyes and focus on the **emotions** that have surfaced and the tension in your body.”

Notice how he now directs a focus on emotions instead of breathing. Rhythmic breathing is a well-known method to induce an altered state

of consciousness. I believe this is further evidence of Smith's efforts to distance Theophostic from its inner-healing roots.

Continuing ethical concerns with Theophostic

This is an area that caused the most concern for me, as a journalist, in that people were, and probably still are, running wild with Smith's ideas about repressed memories. I say probably still are, because, according to Smith, 100,000 people have been trained with materials that had few disclaimers about the dangers of false memories occurring during Theophostic sessions. These materials, to my knowledge, have not been recalled.

Of even greater concern to me, Smith continues to express a belief in satanic ritual abuse, based on recovered memories. Although Miller says "Smith's approach to dealing with SRA claims is among the most restrained and least sensational we have seen with SRA believers," Miller admits my concern in this area is valid, and the "consequences" to people unjustly accused of being secret Satanists, following recovered memory "would be severe." (p. 23)

In his new manual, Smith says he has reports that Satanists are possibly "programming" women to fake Theophostic healing and "accepting the role of speaking for Jesus," and that facilitators "may need to go to the memory where the person agreed to the programming." (BSM p. 139) And, of even more concern, is Smith's advice to Theophostic facilitators to: "Connect with your local law enforcement agency and find out what they desire you do in relationship to them concerning this type of ministry [SRA]. Find out what they want you to do concerning reporting crimes, identities of potential perpetrators, etc." (BSM p. 327)

This statement, I believe, may cause others to do great damage in their zeal to unmask Satanists disguised, to their way of thinking, as a client's parents, or innocent bystanders.

At least Smith's newest book has many disclaimers on the danger of changing people's memories, and performing psychotherapy without a license. I suspect this was merely a response to fears of litigation, as I believe his underlying attitude remains hard-hearted towards those who voice concern in this area. For example, in his new manual, he paints his opposition as extremists by claiming that some people suggest all repressed or forgotten memory is false. In my research, I did not find people who were concerned about the generation of false memories, in general, making this claim, although there may well be fanatics on the other side of this debate, too. What I did find, and what I said, is that it is possible to generate false memories during memory regression therapy, and there is no scientific method yet in place that can accurately differentiate a false memory from a real memory event, without some objective

proof.

Furthermore, he describes as “absurd” the applicability of scientific studies proving the unreliability of memory. (BSM p. 86)

However, Ed Smith’s frequent, bold, highlighted warnings of facilitator practices that may incur litigation will hopefully have a beneficial side effect. In light of all these legal disclaimers I suspect some pastors, as well as some churches’ liability policy insurers, will view Theophostic with more caution. Obviously, if one has to sign a “hold harmless” agreement before engaging in it, this is not just some profoundly simple elegant theory, as Miller insists. It carries significant risk for legal liability.

Smith also continues to promote the concept of body memories, which he says is the abreaction (BSM p. 215). Abreaction is a painfully intense hysteria induced when a person supposedly re-experiences a traumatic memory. A belief in body memories places Smith solidly in the metaphysical pseudoscientific camp with other recovered memory inner-healers. (BSM p. 80)

In [“Body Memories: And Other Pseudo-Scientific Notions of ‘Survivor Psychology’”](#) published by the Institute for Psychological Therapies Journal, vol. 5, 1003, author Susan E. Smith says, the belief in body memories, “appears to be related to scientific illiteracy, gullibility, and a lack of critical thinking skills and reasoning abilities in both the mental health community and in society at large.” Ms. Smith also points out that this “notion of body memories has been recycled many times as a foundational or supportive theory in many quack counseling systems, eccentric philosophical systems, and pseudo-scientific or metaphysical health and healing cults.” Ms. Smith cites one example of an exploitive body memory theory in L. Ron Hubbard’s [Scientology](#) or Dianetics. She said, “The foundational theory of L. Ron Hubbard’s self-proclaimed ‘mathematically precise, exact science’ of Dianetics is ‘engrams’... According to Hubbard’s theories — which bear striking similarities to ‘body memory’ notions and the ‘memory retrieval’ practices of current sexual abuse recovery therapies — the subconscious mind, or ‘reactive mind’ is completely literal and all uncomfortable sensations, painful experiences, or words heard in the womb and in early childhood are imprinted in the cells and literally interpreted and manifested as neuroses, psychosomatic disorders, and diseases by the body throughout life unless they are ‘audited out.’ Auditing is merely a process of hypnosis, which is called a ‘dianetic reverie.’ The client is regressed and aggressively questioned and coerced to make connections between current problems and diseases to early memories or pre-birth traumas.”

I’m not saying here that Smith is a follower of Scientology. What I am saying is that Smith has bought into a bogus philosophy of body memories. like others before him. This is another telling commonality he shares with other inner-healing proponents, and he has preserved

this idea in his revised training manual. The theory of body memories did not come from the Bible, and did not come from credible scientists. It arises out of metaphysics. It is a worldly philosophy with no benefit to Christians, and it has the potential to lead people into self-delusion.

Theophostic and the local church

In Smith's previous writings, he advocated sneaking Theophostic past local church leadership by avoiding the name, Theophostic, until people in the church have experienced it through miracle healings, thereby building credibility for the method. (BTR p. 252-253) Smith has now changed his advice. He now advocates Theophostic ministers "avoid moving ahead of the assigned shepherd of the flock." (BSM p. 309)

Smith also gives some concrete advice for making the climate more favorable to receive these "new seeds of ministry by first preaching and teaching on the principles of Theophostic Prayer Ministry." (BSM p. 317)

He portrays those who question Theophostic as "wounded." This encourages others in The Body to view Theophostic resisters in disparaging terms. (BSM p. 318) Such people, in Smith's lingo, have hindered others from getting their healing. They are also people of little faith who do not believe in miracles (p. 319). These resisters to Theophostic, in Smith's words, "revert to cognitively scrutinizing the renewal and subsequent peace that others say they have experienced." (BSM p. 319)

Smith warns: "Be assured that someone in the congregation is going to print out the criticism posted on the Internet and cry 'heresy!' Move ahead of this before it occurs." (p. 320) One of his chapter discussion questions asks: "What will you do if 'Deacon George' brings a negative printout from the Internet and declares that Theophostic Prayer Ministry is of the devil and New Age? Can you see how this could trigger people's lie-based thinking? How would you approach such a situation?" (p. 332)

At this point, Smith now suggests ways of getting Theophostic past skeptical parishioners and those pesky "Deacon Georges." He compares a church's rejection of Theophostic to a body's rejection of an organ transplant. (p. 317) He says, "bringing in a new approach may trigger people in their own lie-based thinking. For these reasons, it is wise for both pastors and laypersons ... to contain their own excitement about setting people free, and to move ahead slowly, deliberately, and strategically." (p. 317) So what is Smith's immunosuppressive treatment to avoid rejection of Theophostic's organ transplant? It's to compromise the local Body's immune system from the pulpit. Smith recommends the "preaching pastor ... gradually move a congregation in the direction of embracing the principles taught in this manual ... Many people have never been exposed to this type of thinking and, as a result, may need some time to process it." (p. 309-310) Apparently, God's lambs will now hear sermons

straight out of Smith's manual without even knowing they are being prepared for a Theophostic invasion in their congregation.

He also tells supporters to head off the critics and have the pastor invalidate the Internet critics, using of course, Smith's false accusations of plagiarism, sinister agendas, and fabricating falsehoods. This truly saddens me: seeing pastors unknowingly using lies to invalidate critics whose only concern is the love they have for fellow believers who may be seduced by false teaching.

The continuing seductive nature of Theophostic

In Smith's previous manual, he sees one room — the logical part of the mind — as lit. The other room — the experiential part of the mind — as dark. The forgotten memory, and the lies embedded within it are in the dark room. (BTR p. 35-36) According to Smith, the knowledge is hidden from the logical mind and is not accessible through the normal, everyday means of understanding oneself. He says, in his new manual that this includes using Bible study, or engaging in conversations with other Christians pursuing reciprocal discipleship, which Smith labels as cognitive approaches. (BSM p. 13) The person seeking God should initiate that encounter through a Theophostic Ministry session and should expect God to speak to him in a "Divine moment," asserts Smith. (BTR p. 14.)

The person and/or facilitator accepts the validity of this hidden information, revealed during a spiritual encounter, based on how it feels. The truth is true because it feels true. It is experiential truth.

Not only is truth defined by how it feels, but also Smith makes it clear in his newest book that the mystical is elevated over teaching and discipleship. He says, "During the actual ministry setting where the goal is to lead the person to connect with Christ, the facilitator is careful to stay out of the way and allow the Lord to do this connecting. When the ministry session is concluded, teaching and discipleship can be offered by the facilitator to the one who has received ministry. It is not a question of one method over the other, but is rather a matter of timing." (BSM p. 13)

I would add timing AND prominence. In other words, the mystical method must take place before teaching, insight, and encouragement can have any effect on the person's emotional distress. Smith says: "As Christians are released from their lie-based thinking, they will be better able to appropriate the biblical instruction they receive through other cognitive venues. So it isn't a case of needing just one or the other — that is, *ministry* or *discipleship*. We need to experience the freeing presence of Christ in our lives so that we can absorb the Word of God and be changed by it." (BSM p. 288)

In Smith's view, the time-honored, historical methods of discipleship

bow to the mystical/therapeutic model, to what he calls: “ongoing authentic encounters with the person of Jesus” (BSM p. 12) in the person’s memories. And, what is the authenticating test for this encounter: “I want the ‘peace of Christ to rule in his heart,’” says Smith. (BSM p. 158) quoting Col. 3:15.

Let’s take a closer look at how Smith defines the peace of Christ. This is very important to examine. Smith claims this feeling of peace validates the entire mystical experience as being from God. He says asking Jesus for answers through memory work has a “built-in ‘check and balance’ system, and the “validity of what is received is evident because the immediate result is freedom and peace.” (BSM p. 193)

Smith also affirms that this “peace rarely, if ever, comes via the cognitive instruction of the facilitator/counselor. If cognitive truth resulted in peace, our churches would be full of peace-filled people.” Cognitive just means thinking, reasoning and perceiving. Just reword Smith’s statement to say: “If thinking, reasoning and perceiving truth resulted in peace, our churches would be full of peace-filled people.” Smith also asserts that “Christ ALWAYS wants to grant us peace at all times and in every circumstance,” and “if there is an absence of peace, there are lies present.” (BSM p. 291-292)

In Smith’s view, believers are denied God’s peace through cognitive means. Preaching, teaching, discipleship – in short any non-mystical means of receiving God’s truth, doesn’t fulfill Col. 3:15 to “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.” However, this verse follows Paul’s commands in the previous verses to “set your minds on things above;” to “put to death” the thoughts and deeds that pertain to our sinful nature and to put on the clothing of kindness, humility, patience; to bear with each other; and to not lie, or use evil language. This is cognitive activity, folks! And Smith says it’s useless in achieving the peace that Paul says is a part of cognitive activity.

Everything is defined through Smith’s mystical-feeling based paradigm, and so peace is a feeling, not a state of being in Smith’s mind. So if the peace must come through a mystical encounter with Christ, and is also the proof that the spiritual being encountered is indeed the Spirit of Christ, what is this peace Smith promotes?

Is the peace of Christ something we must gain, mystical session, by mystical session, one memory at a time, for the rest of our lives, as Smith asserts? (BSM p. 18) Is this peace the removal of emotional pain through exposing one lie at a time?

Theophostic is the most dangerous of all the inner healing methods seen until now. I say this because it’s cloaked so well, in such biblical terminology, and its mystical methods are so streamlined and elegantly simple, it will undoubtedly fool even mature Christians. Smith has wrapped Sanford’s wolf in about the best-looking sheepskin I’ve ever

seen. And, let me tell you what that fake sheepskin is stitched together with: It's the word: peace. He has crafted a subtle, but important difference in meaning for the word, peace, than what scripture teaches. And, it's such a good counterfeit, only a very discerning look will reveal the sheep costume for the cheap imitation it is.

Now, I get to bring you the good news, as I describe God's genuine peace.

The peace of Colossians 3:15, and Phil. 4:7 is, in the original Greek, "eirene." This word is from the verb eiro – to join or bind together that which has been separated. According to a word study on Precept Ministries International's website "eirene includes both the concept of an agreement, pact, treaty or bond and of an attitude of rest or security."

In order to understand the concept of this word, eirene, we must understand that the entire scripture from Genesis to Revelation is the full expression of this word! Why? Because this word describes what God has done in binding us back to our Maker through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ!

Look at the Hebrew equivalent to eirene, the word "shalom," and the first place this word is used in scripture in Gen. 15:15: "You, however, will go to your fathers in **peace** [shalom] and be buried at a good old age."

This is an extremely important promise that we Christians can quickly pass over. The Lord spoke this to Abram, while Abram was in a deep sleep. The Lord spoke this to Abram in the very midst of making the Abrahamic covenant, made with righteous Abram. "What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'" (Rom. 4:3)

People tend to get so focused on the promise of the land given to Abram in this covenant they miss the bigger promise. Abraham was promised reconciliation with God – shalom – that would be fulfilled in all its glorious restoration at the resurrection. This peace was nothing less than the promise of the resurrection.

This peace is a promise we take by faith in God's Word. That's why Jesus is the prince of peace, the prince of shalom. (Isa. 9:6) For without his atoning sacrifice, we would have no peace with God. We would remain at enmity with Him. This is God's promise! This is why Hebrews 11:19 says: "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death." (NIV) Look at the word, "reasoned," is transliterated in Greek: it's **logizomai**! Logic. Cognitive. Reasoning. This promise of peace is gained in no other way, people! It's not gained through emotional means.

Remember what I [said earlier](#), when sharing my testimony, about the peace I had while on the hospital gurney? That's the peace that passes understanding because it's all about the **mystery** of godliness, in that

God was incarnated in flesh and blood to restore His creation! Who can truly fathom the depths of such peace? Yet Smith, as have Gnostics before him, steals the word that is the descriptive fulfillment of all that ensued when Jesus came in the flesh, and, instead claims a spirit Jesus alone fulfills this peace. Impossible!

This peace is a fact that one logically, and willfully embraces, or illogically and willfully dismisses. This peace is impossible for unbelievers, which is why Theophostic's peace for unbelievers is not the peace of scripture. It is a false peace. One of the things I found very disturbing in reading Smith's personal accounts of using Theophostic ministry on individuals was the rapid shifting individuals experienced between episodes of vomiting, gagging, cursing, and other extreme forms of behavior during abreaction, and entering "perfect peace." I ask in my e-book, "Is this a faux peace?" Yes, I believe it is a false peace. People may feel better, but this feeling is not what scripture is talking about.

You know what Theophostic's peace really is? It's more closely aligned to the Buddhist's concept of Nirvana – a passionless peace, a detached serenity, a cessation of desire, and freedom from pain that comes through meditative prayer – than to the dynamic nature of God's restorative reconciliation through Jesus Christ that guards our minds through a rational belief in God's Word. Sanford searched for this peace through meditation and in Eastern religious concepts. Smith is passing Sanford's peace off as the real thing, dressed in the clothing of biblical Christianity, but Smith's fake sheep is walking on Sanford's experiential legs. Christian Information Ministries' description of an Eastern worldview is telling: "knowledge is personal; experience is everything." (From: <http://www.fni.com/cim/briefing/bud.html>)

Biblical peace is peace with God through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord. The deposit of the Holy Spirit is God's guarantee of "what is to come" – the restoration. (2 Co. 1:22). It is belief in this promise of shalom with God – that Christ came in the flesh to reconcile us, and rose from the dead as proof of God's promise – this is what guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. The peace of Christ in Col. 3:15 rules our hearts when we reason that God raises the dead. The peace of God guards our hearts and minds when we reason that God raises the dead. When we understand we are reconciled to God, we experience the rest that is possible even under the most emotionally taxing of circumstances. That's why discipleship is key to achieving it, because we need to press emotionally hurting people who are looking for peace of mind to remember, remember, remember, what? Past memories? No. God's promise of the resurrection. Stop looking back people and look forward to our hope!

But, this cognitive embrace of God's truth is the very thing Smith despises in his writings: "With discipline and self-effort, we can (with

difficulty) choose to override the emotion that is stirred and act contrary to our feelings and obey the logical truth we hold. This is, in fact, what people in Christian circles are often urged to do: believe God, act contrary to their feelings, and get the victory. I don't call this real victory." (BSM p. 53)

Well, I do! And, throughout history, orthodox Christians have embraced this same faith.

John Bunyan, author of *A Pilgrim's Progress*, was tested in this very way for years. He struggled with many painful doubts and what Smith would undoubtedly call lie-based feelings, yet he rested on the cognitive, logical truth of God's **promise** and he gained true victory that comes by faith, not by feeling. As a new believer, under conviction of sin, Bunyan made this telling observation in his testimony, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*:

*"Wherefore, if my guilt lay hard upon me, then I should cry that the blood of Christ might take it off; and if it was going off without it (for the sense of sin would be sometimes as if it would die, and go quite away), then I would also strive to fetch it upon my heart again, by bringing the punishment for sin in hell fire upon my spirit; and should cry, Lord, let it not go off my heart, **but the right way, but by the blood of Christ**, and by the application of Thy mercy, through Him, to my soul; for that scripture lay much upon me, 'without shedding of blood there is no remission (Heb. 9:22). And that which made me the more afraid of this was, because I had seen some who, though when they were under wounds of conscience, then they would cry and pray; but then seeking rather present ease from their trouble, than pardon for their sin, cared not how they lost their guilt, so they got it out of their mind; and, therefore, **having got it off the wrong way**, it was not sanctified unto them; but they grew harder and blinder, and more wicked after their trouble. This made me afraid, and made me cry to God the more, that it might not be so with me."*

Bunyan suffered agonizing doubts for several years, as to his salvation, because of his feelings and tempting thoughts that came from Satan to torment him. But, as a result of this testing, Bunyan eventually came to a place of such strong faith in the blood of Christ's sacrifice that he was able to withstand years of imprisonment and persecution for his faith.

Many years later, Bunyan describes the tempting nature of the easier path, in his classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

"Now I beheld in my dream that they had not journeyed far when the river and the path separated for a time; they were rather sad about this, but they dared not leave the path. Then the path away from the river became rough, and their feet became tender from walking; 'so the souls of he pilgrims were much discouraged because of the way.'"

"Therefore, they wished for a better pathway. Now a little ahead of them there was on the left-hand side of the road a meadow, and a set of

steps by which to cross over the fence into it; and that meadow is called By-path Meadow. Then Christian said to his friend, 'If this meadow lies alongside our pathway, let's go over into it.' Then he climbed the steps to see, and behold, there was a path running along the other side of the fence. 'It's just what I was wishing for,' said Christian. 'Here it is much easier going. Come, good, Hopeful, let's go over.'

"Hopeful: But what if this path should lead us out of the way?

"Christian: That's not likely. Look, doesn't it go along parallel to the pathway?" (From: *The New Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan)

One must peer deeply into the nature of the peace of Christ in order to spot the divergent path of Theophostic. At first, it appears very close to the original path of true pilgrim. So close, that even the most devout believer, like the pilgrim Christian in Bunyan's allegory, may succumb to this "easier" path that promises instant deliverance from a painful memory. But, beware, because you may end up chained in Doubting Castle to a never-ending method of memory work every time you have a painful feeling. You will no longer look to the Word, and walk in faith. Instead, you will perpetually explore your feelings. The path that looked "maintenance free" instead, will have you forever mining what Smith calls a "landfill of lies." (BSM 261)

In conclusion, Theophostic may use Bible verses and may offer prayers to Jesus, but the foundational ideas are not based on scripture, and, instead, are borrowed from the inner-healing proponents of the past. In response to critics, Smith continues to change the way he describes both his theology and his methodology. Recent changes in Smith's exposition of how Theophostic works create an even greater danger of deception now, because the sheepskin appears even closer to the real thing.

Smith has made an effort to warn people of the dangers of generating false memories, and of practicing psychotherapy without a license, but there are still ethical concerns, particularly in the area of Smith's beliefs about satanic ritual abuse. Smith's continuing hostility toward critics is also of concern, particularly his dismissal of valid concerns by labeling those who disagree with him as emotionally deficient or wounded.

Smith's stated methods of bringing Theophostic into churches, and advice on how to deal with resisters, should serve as a warning to godly shepherds. Pastors, elders and deacons should take careful note of what I believe have been, and continue to be, fundamental flaws in the theological foundation for Theophostic Ministry.

Lastly, I believe those who avidly pursue Theophostic's peace will be forever mining the mysterious darkness of past memories, and missing the true abiding peace of Christ. And, that would be a most tragic loss, indeed.