

Research

Spirituality and healing: Results of a ten year study of spiritual healers

Russell Sawa^{*}, Ian Winchester, Nancy Doetzel and Hugo Meynell

Faculty of Medicine, The University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

***Corresponding author**

Russell Sawa, MD, PhD, CCFP, FCFP, BA
Faculty of Medicine
The University of Calgary
Calgary, Alberta, Canada
Tel. +1 (403) 220-5561
E-mail: sawa@ucalgary.ca

Received: December 7th, 2017

Accepted: January 12th, 2018

Published: January 24th, 2018

Citation

Sawa R, Winchester I, Doetzel N, Meynell H. Spirituality and Healing: Results of a ten year study of spiritual healers. *Med Clin Press*. 2018; 2(1): 71-82. doi: 10.28964/MedClinPress-2-113

Copyright

©2018 Sawa R. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

INTRODUCTION

This research demonstrates through the narratives of healers from the widest possible assortments of cultures and religions, that our 21st century scientific world view is deficient. People and cultures whose ancestors come from the far corners of the earth testify to a world view that includes spiritual phenomena in our everyday existence. Spiritual healing is one feature of this world view. The reality of these phenomena is attested to by healing shrines such as Lourdes, and indeed throughout the entire history of mankind. It also demonstrates that paranormal phenomena are real. While the conclusions of this research are not backed by scientific inquiry, the common testimony from diverse cultures over millennia has its own weight of argument. They cannot be dismissed out of hand.

This paper is based on a research study of spiritual healers involving interviews with spiritual healers from the widest possible assortment of cultures.

The research used Lonergan's method.

Lonergan's Method

Lonergan demonstrates that objectivity is the result of authentic subjectivity.¹ He guides his reader to reflect on their own experience of coming to know. In so doing, the reader becomes aware of levels of consciousness which, in the end, result in knowing the 'facts'. His method is based on cognitional process itself.

When a person has followed this exercise with Lonergan, she appropriates Lonergan's method. This means that they have verified that it is correct, that the real world can be known through careful attention to all the data of experience, intelligent derivation of the possible answers to the questions which arise from the data, and a reasonable selection of the hypothesis or answer which most fits the data. This is a judgment of fact.

Unlike our postmodern thinkers, his method allows the thinker to move beyond subjective experience. The same method is used in Western science, but Lonergan, unlike science, does not restrict the data to the measurable, and does not use experiments to confirm the results. The steps in his method are as follows:

Research

This involves looking at data from the literature to see what has already been done and what facts have been arrived at up to the present. This involves doing a review of the literature on the topic. For instance, my early studies on spirituality and health involved a review of the literature regarding the meaning of spirituality.² This involves surveying the literature to find out what healers in a given culture believed about spirit, spiritual healing, and shamanistic practices

1. Lonergan's method distinguishes what he calls levels of consciousness. Research involves an empirical or experiential level of consciousness.

2. The second step is to try to understand what the author meant by his text at the time the text was created. This involves what Lonergan calls an ‘intellectual’ level of consciousness, in which we try to discern possible meanings in the data.

3. History: This involves describing what was going on in the culture of the the person or persons being studied and how the or she fits into the context of his or her time. What did the author think about this topic? For instance, in our study of spiritual healers, our native healer was both a West Coast aboriginal and a Christian.³ So, we have two sources of history coming into play in his world, that of native shaman, and that of Christian. What are the different interpretations that have evolved in both of these cultures over time? He displays paranormal skills. Weisinger⁴ provides an excellent overview of the history of the paranormal in Thomistic terms). What is the contemporary interpretation of paranormal events? There is a large literature on this topic. What interpretations have come forward to this point in history?

4. Dialogue: This step involves figuring out which of the interpretations is likely the correct one. It involves discussion with others and other texts which also present opposing views. At this point we determine what conditions should be met in the correct answer. Then we determine which hypothesis most fulfills these conditions. This involves reason, as it weighs the evidence regarding the hypotheses which have evolved during the first three steps, and determines which hypothesis best provides understanding of the data. At this point, but not before, values play a part.

In our research on spiritual healers, this step happened very quickly. I read the interviewee’s statement. Gave my interpretation. Then we discussed the interpretation as a group of researchers until a mutually acceptable interpretation was found, or, we came to a consensus through dialogue among the group.

5. At this stage the propositions (statements) arising from the data was examined for themes. In effect, I used grounded theory to find the themes among the propositions of all the interviewees. These organized themes represent the first level analysis of our data as to what our interviewees were telling us.⁵ Another sort of analysis involves the actual narratives themselves. The stories of the healers are the most poignant data revealing what spirituality is. Our conclusion is similar to the spiritual model of Wilber, in that spirituality has different meanings depending on the context in question.⁶ By context we mean the distinct cultures of the healers we studied.

Application to our lives: This is the first step in applying the above to our present circumstances as researchers. The result of this application is foundational to our knowledge, and thus called foundations by Lonergan.

At this step, the moral, intellectual, religious and psychic healthiness of each researcher comes into play. Persons who are not converted in each of these domains may suffer from a distortion

in their perceptions and understandings.

We ask, “How does the above knowledge apply to our experience at this time? In order to answer this question, we must free our perceptions of bias and distortion so that we can perceive things as they are. We attempt to make judgments of which facts are correct from the point of view of a transformed or converted subject. In theology these are called doctrines.

In order to express our views of what the data means in our lives, I asked the researchers to write a narrative expressing their views. I also interviewed each of them in order to ascertain their assumptions, both conscious and hidden.

This is where the use of Lonergan’s method really bogs down. This is because each researcher has her own assumptions about reality, and these may differ. I found that rather than an open discussion, differences and defenses began to emerge. One researcher, a Lonergan scholar, refused to entertain the possibility that there could be other viewpoints than Lonergan’s. He had to withdraw from our research team. Another researcher identified her assumptions with the assumptions of her discipline. She felt threatened and left the group rather than dialogue about her positions.

Coherent integration of these judgments: Since our use of Lonergan’s method broke down at the fifth step, we have not yet been able to move on to this step. Ideally, we would discuss the propositions which we have collectively agreed upon as being the beliefs of our interviewees. We would in this step discuss each of these propositions as to whether or not we accept them as valid or true. This would be dialogical, and likely involve heated discussions because they challenge some of the core beliefs and assumptions of some of the research team.

The Whole Person

We adopt a ‘whole person’ point of view when researching spirituality.^{2,7-10} This is because spirituality has multiple meanings, some of which involve feelings, others the paranormal, physical, emotional, and spiritual healing. I (Sawa) pointed this out in 2004² and Wilber Supported this with his Integral Spirituality.⁶ The key to understanding the spiritual dimension of a human person is to recognize that the spiritual, psychological, and physical dimension form a unity in the person. Each must be understood as being a part of the whole, not in isolation.

Similarly, the psychological and spiritual also express themselves in the body, as emphasized in psychosomatic medicine. The body cannot be ignored when assessing spiritual issues.

Paranormal or psychic events also occur as part of the whole person. They must be considered when evaluating a person’s spiritual health. Paranormal or psychic skills appear to be manifestations of sanctity, whether the person is Christian, Hindu, Buddhist or of other faiths.¹¹ It has been suggested that human consciousness includes a ‘super-conscious’ aspect, which is in

touch with the spiritual domain

An important phenomenon in Easter Theology is an aspect of the soul, which is not bound to the body.

This is called the noetic aspect of the soul.¹² In Western theology (Aquinas) this aspect of the soul is viewed as ‘partially in and partially outside’ the soul.⁴ This aspect of the soul is believed to have spiritual power.

In Biblical times St. Paul refers to these ‘powers’ as the gifts of the Holy Spirit

The healers in our narratives demonstrate these gifts and other psychic skills.^{13,14} Hinduism also discusses psychic skills which develop in the Yogi.¹⁵ The same is true in Christianity, as demonstrated by those who are mystics or nominated to be saints in the Catholic Church.

The tripartite deiform soul possesses two aspects, the one noetic and the other passible. The noetic aspect, being in the image of the soul’s Creator, is not conditioned by the senses, is invisible to them and is not limited by them, since it is both outside them and within them.^{12(p.141)}

While we are not God or gods, divinity is believed to reside within us. This becomes more apparent as people grow in sanctity.

If then, tested in the labors of virtue and purified by tears, we come forward and eat of the bread and drink of this cup, the divine-human logos in His gentleness is commixed with our two natural faculties, with our soul and body, and as God incarnate, one with us in essence as regards our human nature, He totally refashions us in Himself, wholly deifying us through divine knowledge and uniting us with Himself as His brothers, conformed to us who is God co-existential with the Father.¹⁶

Healing

Spiritual healing is real. All spiritual healers in our study⁵ (aside from Buddhists) attribute the power of healing to God, not themselves. Belief that it is real is essential for spiritual healers. But one cannot predict in advance who will be healed and who will not be healed. From our study we are told:

Healing does not occur every time you pray for healing, but it is important that you believe it can happen; that it is real.¹⁷

The tool (healer) is God, and respect, belief, and faith.³

Sometimes you have people who call and they are so eager to be healed, and you pray and nothing happens. And somebody else comes and they certainly don’t have that eagerness and the faith, and yet, something very significant does happen.¹⁷

Jesus heals (through us) to get our attention and to proclaim His

kingdom. Healing is part of the good news. Jesus intends that spiritual healing continues until the end of time.

But little by little it came to be believed that all those miracles and signs and wonders are wonderful, but they’re just out of the apostolic age, never to be seen again. Somehow, we got duped into believing that. It’s very unscriptural, but that’s a fact.¹⁷

Healing requires forgiveness

No significant healing can take place unless there is forgiveness. And that’s why Matthew harps so much on forgiveness. And many of us are sick, I believe, because of our lack of forgiveness.¹⁷

Evil: Demonic Activity

In Demonic possession there is complete loss of control of the person to the Demon.

Possession is when another entity or spirit or persons take over the functioning of basically, sometimes the body, the emotional system or a person, so they no longer are in control. They no longer have any command over their own being.¹⁷

There is a spectrum of giving authority to Satan in our lives. At the far end Satan is in control. We are helpless and need an exorcism. Possession is to be distinguished from obsession or demonic oppression. In demonic oppression there is not a complete loss of control to the demon(s). It is an attack from outside the person.

He was doing a full blown exorcism of a young woman and I was just there to pray through the experience. But there was a real battle. This spiritual force had somehow taken her body. Again it was the situation where she wanted something. But she invited this power, this spirit into her. After this creature had used her voice to chew him out in Spanish (a language she had never learned) and mocked him and laugh and tell all kinds of things about him that only he would know. But it was all in Spanish. And she didn’t speak Spanish!¹⁸

It can be difficult to distinguish possession from obsession.

And then, where do possession and obsession, one end and the other begin? I mean a very powerful obsession could appear to have some, you know, reflect some influences like possession, that could mask it.¹⁸

Evil is personal. In any things that I’ve experienced in dealing with evil, evil is personal. It is not some kind of a vague “something” out there. It is usually in confrontations. With deliverances, exorcisms, you confront a spirit person. You talk to them as a person; you deal with them as a person. Spirits respond to the authority of Jesus. You command them under the authority of Jesus as a person, and they react and respond to me as a person.¹⁹ Psychological and spiritual problems can be difficult to dis-

tinguish. It can be nearly impossible to separate out what's a spiritual problem and what is psychological. For this reason psychiatrists are part of a spirit discernment team (appointed by the Bishop) which investigates the situation. Evil spirits may disguise themselves as good spirits.

For exorcism you need a priest especially trained for this, and a group, including a physician, a psychiatrist, and at least four or five people who have a life of prayer. You need a priest especially trained for exorcism and at least four or five people who have a life of prayer. Spirits will usually give their name when commanded.

When you ask them, command them to identify themselves in the name of Lord Jesus, you will get a name. And often, if you come against them with that name, they're gone.¹⁹

Manifestations of possession

Below are some comments from an exorcist. Not all manifestations may occur. Note how the manifestations he notes could also be from physical illness.

Can I just go down a list of manifestations that I have experienced? Somebody, for example, that during the time of attack against the spirit, they throw up.¹⁹

Physical manifestations

Now another thing, I've seen the tongue stick a way, way out. It's almost unbelievable that the human tongue could stick out that far.¹⁹

Choking and nothing to bring up. They just go choking. You think they were gonna vomit but they just, it's almost like a dry heave, so to speak.¹⁹

One of the things that often happen is what I call the plastic face. Sometime when they do speak to you, the mouth draws itself all up and the teeth all show. And that's a key. As soon as I see the distortion on the face I immediately know that there is a manifestation of a spirit.¹⁹

I've seen people lift off the ground, in a healing service. A person said, "I looked down [and] I thought something was wrong and I realized my feet were seven or eight inches off the ground."¹⁹

Putrid smells, very common, that's where our terminology [comes from a way back: "before he left, he created a 'stink'". Not everybody in the group will smell it. Somehow I have a feeling that whatever it is puts a puff of stench in the presence of one or two people maybe. The others will wonder what they're talking about. Someone would say, "You mean you didn't smell it?" And they usually say, and my experience is, it's the last protest of the spirit before it goes.¹⁹

Sometimes people are in a trance. They literally do not hear.

When you go near their ear and you start to speak, they will say, "Didn't hear a word you guys were saying." Ears, sometimes, under certain conditions, turn just bright, bright red. Just like the red of blood, or dark, dark purple. You know how a person sometimes after death their ears turn purple? That kind of purple, even a little deeper.¹⁹

People will curl up in a ball and scream when you sprinkle them with blessed water.¹⁹

Well, trying to hold him down. Doing violence to themselves or the people around them. Cause they seem to go into some kind of a trance. And uh wow, they're so powerful!¹⁷

Exorcism can be dangerous. In Catholicism, it is only undertaken by the authority of the Bishop. Cases requiring exorcism often come to the attention of the priest, however, and it is important to be able to recognize manifestations of the devil.

For exorcism you need a priest especially trained for this, and a group, including a physician, preferably a psychiatrist, and at least four or five people who have a life of prayer.²⁰

One clergyman, one time, who was invited to assist in one that went a long time, he said, "I never confronted as much raw evil in my life." He said, "I think it was 4-5 nights that I didn't even have one wink of sleep. I could not sleep. My whole being was so traumatized by my looking evil in the eyes," he called it.¹⁹

Prayer is essential. But, People may not know that they can be prayed with in the Catholic Church.

*You also have people who are supposed to be Catholic and who don't know that that possibility of being prayed with, within the Catholic Church, is even there. They would just go to some Pentecostal church.*¹⁷

Witchcraft, Wicca, Sorcery, and Occult Phenomena

Witchcraft and sorcery have been popularized with the Harry Potter novels of J.K. Rowling.^{21,22} However, these phenomena, which originate in West Africa and were imported to Haiti and the Southern United States, have a very dark history. Anthropologists, who study these phenomena first hand, speak to their experience.

Witchcraft

Witchcraft is made light of in the novels of J.K. Rowling.^{21,22} There is confusion in the popular mind as to exactly what a witch is.

The modern witch is difficult to define as there is no centralized authority or agreed upon definition.^{23,24}

Witchcraft, unlike sorcery...is unambiguously malevolent and death-dealing, and highly immoral rather than amoral; amorality

being an aspect of sorcery's ambiguity.^{25,26}

Witches are held to have nocturnal meetings with evil demons.²⁷

Witches can instantly change themselves into animals! This is called shape shifting.

Each member of the coven is bound by a ghastly oath not to reveal anything about it. But in return (he or she) is vested with supernatural strength and the power to transform herself – a witch can assume the shape of any animal she wants. A secret poisonous powder, which they take, gives them this magic ability. They hold dreadful orgies, at which they kill and eat their own children.²⁷

While witch doctors, the legitimate professional magicians, use medicines having magical powers only for beneficial purposes, the witches use theirs only for black and evil deeds. These witches may be in possession of great magical power. They can eat the soul of their fellow men. They can kill them directly or by means of lethal magic, but only at night. If the legitimate magicians point out a witch, he or she must die a painful death. In the old days they were burned bit by bit, the limbs being cut off one by one and thrown onto a fire. Or the guilty one would be laid between two fires and charred gradually.²⁷

There is distinction between “witchcraft-for-harm” (using black magic) and “witchcraft-for-healing” (using white magic).²⁸

Wicca

The Wiccan whom I (Sawa) interviewed discusses the White Witch.²⁹

*The concept of White Witch drives me nuts because to do it properly, that's all you get is Wicca. If you do it properly it's only about good things. There are people who will abuse it and give it a bad name. But the first rule is, “do no harm.” You're never supposed to do a spell for someone without his or her permission. So all this nonsense about casting love spells and turning people into stuff and you know anything that you put out you get back three times if you do nasty's to somebody. Anyway, yeah it's witchcraft but it's meant to be only positive.*²⁹

Wicca is a popular pagan religion which can be confused with witchcraft. However, its origins are quite recent, and the two are not related.

Wicca (Neopagan) is a religion that was invented by Gerald Gardner in 1950-1951 p.164.^{23,24} It is one of three types of witches. Historically the three types of witches are: the sorcerer, who practices the simple magic found worldwide the heretic, who allegedly practiced diabolism and was prosecuted during witch hunts the Neopagan, who has little in common with the other two other than the name ‘witch’.^{23,24}

Witchcraft has an ancient origin and is quite different from

Wicca. Witchcraft originated in Africa, and relies on the power of demons. Current popularizations, such as Rowling's works, likely confuse Wicca and Witchcraft.²²

Spells

The characters in Harry Potter have books of spells which they have to memorize. But this quote from the Wiccan correctly alludes to the fact that the power of a spell comes from some source which has the power to preform them. And this power comes either from God or from the devil. In mythical understanding, words have power. Power comes from personal evil.

*So you have to be very careful too when you construct a spell. So when I was doing spells for this purpose you have to be certain that you protect the house and the property. Protect the people in it.... It's a little bit of a trick. I had little packets of herbs that are said to have good exorcising properties and torched those in my cauldron while saying spells and had T and F, who were in the circle, saying them with me. And after one of them, the one where I was really getting serious about making this thing go away, I said it through once and then I could feel that it was starting to rebel. It was angry; I could feel this kind of ...it was just not happy... It was ugly! * It finally went. And so, when I was finished, it was black salt. I went outside and around the house three times. You could feel the difference. I went into the rooms and it all felt really good. I came home; I said I had done my thing. She went through the house and she couldn't feel any of this negative energy anymore.*²⁹

Editorial note: The unhappiness, anger, and ugliness being referred to might well be attributed to a demon.

Sorcery

Sorcery is destructive magic. It is defined as one of three types of witchcraft.^{23,24[p.193]} The ability to enter the body of victims is salient since Voodoo is believed to get its power from dead relatives of those practicing the Voodoo ritual. The following quote makes it clear that what is purported to be a dead relative may well be a demon!

All of this seems to be associated with the kind of sorcery that is practised; frequently highly ritualised, involving shape-changing and (the) capacity of the sorcerer to act simultaneously in more than one place at once, entering the bodies of his victims unbeknownst to them. Remarkable in this sorcery is its extreme transgressive character, with sorcerers describing the terrible physical-sexual destruction they visit on the victims they kill.^{25,26}

Sorcery is not studied by science, since it is outside of the methodology of science, which studies only physical and measurable phenomena. Nonetheless, it is very common. The world view of the scientist is not the world view in the cultures which use magic and sorcery.

Critical events that an empirical methodology ignores because

they cannot be replicated and empirically verified may be assumed to be significant in a magical world view.^{23,24}

Sorcery is destructive magic, and magic itself is morally neutral, as it can be practiced for legitimate or illegitimate purposes.³⁰ It involves ritual and spells which are addressed towards impersonal influencing forces (spirits), which govern the course of events.^{30,31[p. 68]}

Sorcery occurs in almost every society in the world. It is also the oldest and deepest element in the historical concept of European witchcraft, which was formed out of pagan religion, folklore, Christian heresy, and theology.^{23,24}

Sorcerers...are persons who have hardened, bounded selves, who are not easily permeated and who intentionally and by magical means invade and destroy others.

There are some astonishing phenomena reported in the magical world view, such as found in West and East Africa. One of these is called shape-shifting or shape changing, and bilocation.

All of this seems to be associated with the kind of sorcery that is practised; frequently highly ritualised, involving shape-changing and capacity of the sorcerer to act simultaneously in more than one place at once, entering the bodies of his victims unbeknownst to them. Remarkable in this sorcery is its extreme transgressive character, with sorcerers describing the terrible physical-sexual destruction they visit on the victims they kill.^{25,26} Shape shifting occurs in the Anthropological literature in many places. Without reference to theology, as done here, science has no categories with which to understand or explain it. This shows the value of interdisciplinary studies, as exhibited in this work and the volume of research referred to in a number of places in this work.^{13,14}

This research on spirituality opens up a world view that certainly challenges that of our modern scientific world view. The anthropologist Mary Douglas believes that sorcery, which is excluded as being non-existent, may influence our governments. As Mary Douglas's work suggests, sorcery builds its force in the gaps, exclusions and marginalisations of social processes. These have potency: they are the positive of the negative. In this sense, sorcery is a thoroughgoing force of the social and political. It is there in what is excluded, in remainders, in what is cast out, in dirt, in what social and cultural energies generate as disgust, as the terrible infraction of the moral code and personal conduct. Pursuing such observations further, extreme forms of sorcery and the demonic are likely to be highly apparent in context of state power.^{25,26}

The malevolence and association with the Devil became evident with witchcraft practiced in Europe, as documented by Luther. Luther argued with his typical violence that all witches should be burned as heretics for having made a pact with the devil.^{23,24}

Occult Phenomena

Hauntings

As we know, hauntings are very popular subjects in literature and the movies. But, are they real? What is the entity involved?

Demons can obsess people and or their homes

I do get calls from time to time from people who claim that their house is haunted. And the pattern is pretty consistent. The lights keep going on and off and the table keeps moving and they hear noises at night. These are regular occurrences in hauntings. My method usually is as follows: "I come and bless your house from top to bottom. If I can, I'll bring a group with me and we'll pray through the house, bless it literally. Go from room to room. Holy water, and the works. And most of the time, I never hear from them again. So I presume it takes care of the problem."¹⁷

The spirits of the dead may be active in a place. Telekinetic activity, such as objects flying around a room, illustrate that paranormal phenomena can be used by both good and perhaps evil or ill-intentioned spirits.

It opened the door for other spirits, like we mentioned, to attack her. Pans were flying through the room! They wanted to take her. They can discern any weakness in the person."³

In this research the dead are known to inhabit the same spaces as the living.^{3,20,32} For Catholics, spirits of the dead form the Communion of the Saints, which is a belief that we can pray for those who have died and they can pray for us.

Well, in the Catholic Church we believe in the communion of saints. We believe that when human beings die, that doesn't mean they break off all relationships with us. People (who) have died and are with God, can intercede for us with God."^{13,14}

We call on the non-living spirits. They come. My father, my mother, my grandfather. Anyone that did this before. We call upon them to assist us."³

He'd always come to (name of place) and tell us what to do... And if we were working late, we'd hear the typewriter going in the back. And we'd hear people walking around. But they were friendly."³

Not being aware of the connection between the spiritual and psychological, modern physicians, spiritual directors, ordained priest or pastors often don't recognize the spiritual aspect of the symptoms.

Going back to the beginning, when you were talking about those spirits. It wasn't too long ago, seems a few years ago, people got sent to the crazy house because these two spirits were always bothering them. They were diagnosed as being crazy. And it cost

*us two people. And they weren't crazy. They just got off balance. It was all spiritual.*³

Poltergeists may need to be cleared from a house.

*This praying for the poltergeist in a house. If after blessing a house, they still have problems, I'll try to go back and offer the Eucharist, with a little group again.*¹⁷

VOODOO

Medicine men and sorcerers were brought to the new world as slaves. The medicine men found plants similar to those in West Africa. Sorcerers were able to blend in with the rest of the slaves.

Despite all the transformations that have taken place in these parts over the last century—the weakening of ancient institutions and the partial replacement of traditional beliefs by Christianity and Islam – the cults of *Orisha* and *Vodun* have, in certain of the villages, retained much of their former vitality. A great part of the population of these communities still participate in their rites, whose aim is the periodic re-actualization of the ties that bind living people with their ancestors. Possession trances form only a part of the typical festival celebrated for *Orisha* and *Vodun*. They are the culmination of an elaborate ritual sequence. Seen from the participant's point of view, such trances are the reincarnations of family deities in the bodies of their descendants – reincarnations which have taken place in response to the offerings, prayers and wishes of their worshipers.³³

Wisely, in Latin-held areas they (conjurers) couched their activities in the guise of the religious traditions that the slaves were able to adapt to Catholicism. They and the priests (West African animists), who knew the techniques of sorcery and used them to gain greater acceptability among the other slaves themselves, gradually blended into one. After a few generations, then, the distinctions between the two once radically different professions blurred. Out of this blurring came voodoo, a term that can be related to the Dahomean word for spirit, *vodun*, and to the more generalized West African *juju*, which is best translated to mean conjure. It became a fairly systematized body of mystical-magical practice and lore, the basis for the system being the amalgamation made possible by the nature of the Catholic religion and its philosophy, backed by action, of proselytism.³⁴

The 'primitive' cultures from which Voodoo or Vodun come, are animists. This means that they believe spiritual beings inhabit nature, such as rivers, rocks and mountains. These spiritual beings are not the same as ancestors, which are believed to inhabit bodies of the living in voodoo rituals.

They are habited by spirits that never knew human form. They share spirit-space with the ghosts of departed ancestors.³⁴

These cultures also believe that the spirits of the dead are present to them in everyday life.

Aquinas tells us that "the demons often pretend to be the souls of the dead, in order to confirm the error of the Gentiles who believed this. It is therefore credible that Simon Magus was deceived by some demon who pretended to be the soul of the child whom Simon Magus had slain."³⁵⁻³⁷

Because the voodoo culture interacts with the spirits of their dead ancestors, they may be deceived by demons that masquerade as an ancestor. Voodoo practice is thus wide open to consorting with demons.

For these cultures everything is interconnected. This interconnection is the basis of their religion and magic. It could also be a basis for some paranormal phenomena.³⁴

In 'primitive' cultures, Religion and magic are not separate. They are both deeply embedded in nearly every aspect of their daily life.³⁸ This is the case of West Africa, especially at the time of the slave trade.³⁹

The religious systems of these cultures were pyramidal, with the supreme and creator being at its apex. Below this were deities who did the bidding of the creator. These were gods of rivers and mountains and nature. Below this were ancestor spirits, who insured that earthbound ancestors fulfilled the moral precepts handed down to them. Ancestors, if they had lived good or esteemed lives, were revered, but not worshiped.

Ancestors were seen as a part of the family, a plane of existence removed, perhaps, but not dead. An ancestor was not dead until he was no longer remembered by the living.³⁴

Memory of ancestors was maintained by oral tradition. Many of these beliefs have survived in one form or another in the Southern states, in the Caribbean, West Indies, and some areas of the northern states.³⁴

A child of a missionary who was brought up in Haiti speaks of her experience.

*Voodoo is the official religion of Haiti, whether you're Catholic or Protestant; Voodoo is still very much a part of it um, leaving people in a lot of fear.*⁴⁰

*They had made a pact with the Devil that if the Devil would help them to get their independence from France they would dedicate Haiti to the Devil for 200 years.*⁴⁰

Magic

Aquinas argues that the power of magic must come from some intelligent agent, and that this agent is in fact evil.

Some people are of the opinion that there is a kind of spirit whose function is to hear the requests of the magicians, spirits who are false by nature, having every form, taking on the appearance of gods and demons and the souls of the dead. And this is the

kind that produces all these apparitions, whether good or bad... Indeed, these words of Porphyry quite plainly express the evil character of the demons whose help the magic arts employ.³⁵⁻³⁷

Magic is also believed by some to be a power which belongs to words in early language.

Lonergan adds that such early language also offered an account of the world's shape and destiny and the result was myth. Again, he adds, that early language itself was endowed with a power of its own and not just employed to direct human action, and the result was magic.⁴¹

Curses

A curse is an appeal to supernatural powers for injury or harm to another.⁴²

In some cultures some people have mystical power to deliver curses. This may emanate from God or the devil or devils.⁴³

While such power includes sorcery, we cannot exclude evil as the power behind a curse.

Satanism

Satanism is alive and well and operating in Canada.⁴⁴ The Book, Michelle Remembers tells the recollections of a woman who was introduced to a Satanic cult in Victoria by her mother. It is deeply disturbing. It documents the involvement of the Bishop of Victoria at the time (1980), Bishop Remi DE Roo. Anyone interested in this topic should read this book.

The Paranormal

Footnote: This topic is well covered in: Douglas A⁴⁵ Extra Sensory Powers: A Century of Psychological Research. Woodstock, New York, The Overlook Press.

Background

Because the paranormal is spiritual and not physical, it is beyond or outside of the purview of science. Science simply does not have the tools to judge or verify occult phenomena. For this reason, many people assume that it is not true.

theists, such as Tonkov⁴⁶, categorize it as originating in the psyche. However, the psyche, according to Lonergan¹, is based on neurological function. This is biological. However, both Eastern and Western theologians recognize paranormal phenomena as spiritual, with the power of spirit. A whole person (holistic) approach considers the psyche as psycho-spiritual (both acting together).

Eastern theology offers metaphysical explanation with its teaching about the Noetic aspect of the soul, which exists both inside and outside of a person. This might help support a theory of such phenomena as telepathy and clairvoyance, as spirit (noetic aspect of the soul) can be present anywhere including the minds of

others. It also might help explain telekinesis, which is action of the mind affecting physical objects, including healing.

As Christians we are taught that God is divinizing us as we grow spiritually.^{47,48} In holy people, like saints, this divinization is more or less fully actualized. So, in some sense, this noetic aspect of the soul may be 'mixed with' the divine.⁴⁹⁻⁵¹

These phenomena are widely discussed in the literature.⁵²⁻⁵⁵

Psychic abilities can exist from a young age

As a kid I had psychic abilities. I'd tell my family everything, and I'm right. Or I can see the pictures. When accidents happen to my uncles (in a distant city in India), at the same time I told my mom what was happening. She called and the exact thing happened at the same time.^{3,20,32}

The psychic and spiritual may be closely linked.

I meditate every night 2 to 3 hours.^{3,20,32}

Phenomena which are outside of the parameters of physics are also found in the lives of the saints as documented in the investigations of people who are being considered for recognition as saints by the Catholic Church (which uses very strict criteria and requires good evidence). This includes the appearance of protecting spirits, levitation, clairvoyance, prescience (foretelling the future), ability to live without food, and telekinesis. These are common occurrences in the churches' documents.^{11,56} Catholic philosophers and theologians have speculated on the metaphysics of out-of-the-body experiences and other paranormal phenomena.⁴

Paranormal or Psychic Skills Include the Following

Seeing spirits of the dead.

Yes. In my house there are three spirits. One is sitting here. It is a female spirit, it's the mother of my husband.^{3,20,32}

*Well it's kind of, it's like they're everywhere. I mean the spirits are around us anyway. I think spirits; people who are departed are, around us. They kind of come and go. And I always say, it's sort of like when you have a family living in a house and you've got a few people home, some of them are out. These two come home, a couple of those ones leave, these ones come back.*²⁹

*We opened the "Portal to the Other Side" and invited our ancestors, Spirit guides, ascended Masters and loved ones, etc. to our circle.*³¹

Visiting the underworld (in a person's consciousness). The Shaman is able to visit the interior of a person's psyche

When we visit the underworld, we are not there to hang out or be a part of that world, we are simply there to confront and battle with our individual demons and to release ourselves from any

*karmic contracts we may have agreed upon in whatever lifetime.*³¹

Clairvoyance: Perception at a distance without use of senses⁴⁵

So it was in a vision that I can see in different places. I can go to different places while I'm sleeping or meditating.^{3,20,32}

Telekinesis

The ability of the mind to affect matter. I have experienced this myself, thus making for me paranormal phenomena a matter of fact, not just conjecture. I experienced this when I was in Russia at a conference on Psychic Power and Health.⁵⁶ At a workshop I and others used our minds to cause movement of an object. A spherical or helical object was tied to the top of a large glass cylinder and I was asked to, and did, make it start and stop spinning!

The following are taken from my interview with a professional psychic.

*It started actually with my books and my art ending on the BBC radio. I did a couple of interviews about that and then was invited onto another presenters show doing psychic things. So that started every six weeks and then it went really well. After a couple of appearances they have me on every three or four weeks now. Its people phoning in or they send text or emails asking questions and I do a little psychic reading. Those are loads of fun because I never get it wrong. So that's always fun. I can point things out and it blows them away! I love doing that to skeptics.*²⁹

She describes her experience

*Whether it's on the BBC or whether it's with my work, because I do phone readings. It's just a question of trying to tune in and just focus. I just kind of close my eyes. I don't even have to close my eyes but often do. Sometimes it is images. Sometimes I'll see pictures. I get feelings. I'm very clairsentient. I really get a lot of feelings. Sometimes I'll hear words or I'll see words written so it can be seeing, hearing, and feeling. It's everything!*²⁹

*I've been given some kind of a gift that I can use to access that healing and it goes through me but it isn't me doing it.*²⁹

Visions and prophetic dreams

*My first experience was dreaming that my two best friends were dead. I woke up and was getting ready for school and telling my parents about this awful dream. I just couldn't shake the feeling, and they gave each other a sort of funny look. While my dad went to get the morning paper and showed me an article there, they were dead. They'd been in a car accident.*²⁹

A Hindu intuitive describes some of her experience

For example, my sister is living in England. I called her and she

*said, "I'm busy right now. Can I call you back?" And I said, "You are folding your laundry. You're not that busy." She says, "No," and I said, "You're wearing something black and orange. You are folding your laundry." And she says, "Oh my God! Okay."*²⁹

Spirit guides

Spirit guides often dictate what to do to healers. (i.e. Chinese healer)

*I think that there are; well, I really don't like the use of the phrase spirit guides, but people understand what that is. I just sort of think it's mine talking to that person's. They're communicating. They're giving me the information so then I spit it back and they "Yes that's right".*²⁹

Power or Energy

In the narratives in our research,^{5,13,14} things happen, such as healing and paranormal phenomena. As we know, action requires power or energy. The possible sources of this action are:

- God. Who is pure act and present to everything that exists.
- Nature, which is the purview of science.
- Words. (Some believe that language contains power.)
- Magic,
- Satan or his demons.
- Fabrication.

In each example, something moves from potential to act, in Aquinas' and Aristotle's terms. Both God and Satan possess power that is beyond nature. Let us discuss each possible source through the testimony of respected authors.

Divine Power

Now, since God not only gave being to things when they first began to exist, but also causes being in them as long as they exist, by preserving them in being, as we have proved, so not only did He give them active powers when he first made them, but is always causing these powers in them. Consequently, if the divine influence were to cease, all operation would come to an end. Therefore every operation of a thing is reduced to Him as to its cause.³⁵⁻³⁷ ...God is the first cause.³⁵⁻³⁷

Nature

Strict investigation by physicians and scientists occur both at possible miracles and in the canonization process.¹¹

Words

But one indication of the limited scope of our progress is the persistence that at least some words are sometimes felt inherent meaning and independent causal power...If we do not believe more commonly than in fact we do that words have magic effi-

cacy, perhaps the influence of several centuries of scientific and other forms of rationalism is part of the reason. But probably yet more effective has been the still more ancient and protracted opposition of Christianity to all forms of unauthorized magic, on the grounds that superstitious beliefs detracted from the power of God. According to Christianity, only the words of sacramental formulae have an inherent efficacy to produce their effects automatically and independently of the dispositions of the speaker – or *ex opera operato* as the Council of Trent put it.²⁷

Magic

On the contrary, Augustine says: *Often by means of the magic are miracles wrought, like those which are wrought by the servants of God (Pseudo-Augustine, Viginti unius Sent., IV (PL, 41, 575)).*

...If we take a miracle in the strict sense, the demons cannot work miracles, nor can any creature but God alone, for in the strict sense, a miracle is something outside the order of the entire created nature, under which order every power of a creature is contained. But sometimes miracle may be taken, in a wide sense, for whatever exceeds human power and experience, and thus demons can work miracles, that is, things which rouse man's astonishment, by reason of their being beyond his power and outside his sphere of knowledge. For even a man, by doing what is beyond the power and knowledge of another, leads him to marvel at what he has done, so that in a way he seems to that man to have worked a miracle.³⁵⁻³⁷

Demons

...on the contrary, those transformations of bodies which cannot be produced by the power of nature, cannot in reality be effected by the operation of the demons; for instance, that the human body may be changed into the body of a beast, or that the body of a dead man return to life. And if at times something of this sort seems to be effected by the operations of demons, it is not real but a semblance of reality. Now this can happen in two ways. First, from within. In this way a demon can work on man's imagination and even on his corporeal senses, so that something seems otherwise than it is...Secondly, from without. For just as from air he can form a body of any form and shape, and assume it so as to appear in it visibly, so in the same way he can clothe any corporeal thing with any corporeal form, so as to appear therein... As St. Augustine says: *When magicians do what holy men do, they do it for a different end and by a different law. The former do it for their own glory, the latter for the glory of God; the former, by certain private compacts, the latter by the evident assistance and command of Go, to Whom every creature is subject.*³⁵⁻³⁷

Analysis of Data by Themes

In addition to the analysis of narrative, we also analyzed the data of the 26 interviews into themes.^{5,9,10,56,58} This is similar to "grounded research." However, the above narrative which we

quoted as examples of theory illustrates how rich narrative data is. Following the selection of themes changes the data to abstractions. When we did this, the following themes emerged. Using thematic analysis with abstract themes follows the pattern of science, which also deals with abstractions, such as energy, volume, mass etc. We have found it very difficult to present the results of our research in medical journals to date. Some editors told us that the study belongs in a Theology journal. We do not agree. In researching this topic, we expand the horizon of medical research.^{2,6-8,59-63}

All of the spiritual healers but the two Buddhists attributed healing to divinity. The Buddhists attribute it to "focused compassion." Thus a relationship with Divinity (prayer) is central to spirituality. Spirituality involves power. In Catholic spirituality this is attributed to the Holy Spirit. All healers functioned with caring and compassion. This attribute can be practiced by any health care worker. Power can be either good or evil. Thus the forces of evil must be considered in spirituality.

Our world is "peopled" with spirits, which are invisible to most. This includes demons, angels, helpers, and spirits of the dead. Spirits can be involved in healing, which may be physical, emotional, or spiritual.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

REFERENCES

1. Lonergan B. Insight. Toronto, University of Toronto Press. 1997.
2. Sawa RJ. Spirituality & Health: Reflections upon clinical experience and the development of theory about whole person health care from a Lonergan perspective. *Reflective Practice*. 2004; 5(3): 409-423. doi: [10.1080/1462394042000270709](https://doi.org/10.1080/1462394042000270709)
3. Sawa RJ. Aboriginal Shaman) SPIRITUAL HEALING: Interviews with Spiritual Healers: A Multicultural Perspective, UNPUBLISHED. 2017.
4. Wiesinger A. *Occult Phenomena: In the Light of Theology*. Fort Collins, CO, USA: Roman Catholic Books; 1956.
5. Sawa RJ, Winchester I, Meynell H, Doetzel N, Zembal D, Motta R. Narratives of Spiritual Healers. Metanexus International Conference. Phoenix, Arizona, Metanexus Institute. 2009.
6. Wilber K. *Integral Spirituality*. Boston, MA, USA: Integral Books; 2006.
7. Sawa RJ. Integrative thinking in medicine: Underlying assumptions about reality needed to expand the horizons of medicine. *Ultimate Reality and Meaning: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Philosophy of Understanding*. 2001; 24(4): 305-323.

8. Sawa RJ. *Interviews with Spiritual Healers: The Case for a Spiritual Realm*. Calgary, Alberta, Canada: University of Calgary; 2008.
9. Sawa RJ. Three Ways of Thinking: a Holistic, Multidisciplinary Theory of Knowing." Submitted to: Family Systems and Health. 2001;
10. Sawa RJ. A Holistic Metaphysics. Sixteenth Biennial Meeting of the Society for Ultimate Reality and Meaning. Toronto, Canada. 2011.
11. Thurston H. *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism*. London, Burns Oats. 1952
12. St.Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St.Makarios of Corinth. *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*. Vol. Four. London, Faber and Faber Limited. 1995
13. Sawa RJ. SPIRITUAL HEALING. 2017.
14. Sawa RJ Ed. SPIRITUAL HEALING: Interviews with Spiritual Healers. Unpublished. 2017
15. Yoganandi P. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Thirteenth Edition. Los Angeles, Self Realization Fellowship. 1998.
16. Stithatos N. *On Spiritual Knowledge, Love and the Perfection of Living: One Hundred Texts*. The Philokalia. P. K. G.E.H. Palmer. London, Faber & Faber. IV. 1998.
17. Sawa RJ. Theologian/scripture scholar). SPIRITUAL HEALING: Interviews with Spiritual Healers: A Multicultural Perspective. Unpublished. 2017.
18. Sawa RJ. Jesuit Priest. SPIRITUAL HEALING: Interviews with Spiritual Healers: A multicultural Perspective, Unpublished. 2017.
19. Sawa RJ. Exorcist) SPIRITUAL HEALING: Interviews with Spiritual Healers: A Multicultural Perspective. 2017.
20. Sawa RJ. (Exorcist) SPIRITUAL HEALING: Interviews with Spiritual Healers A Multicultural Perspective, Unpublished. 2017.
21. Rowling JK. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London; Vancouver, BC, Canada: Raincoast Books; 1997.
22. Rowling JK. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. Vancouver, RAINCOAST BOOKS. 2000.
23. Russell JBAB. *A History of Witchcraft*. 2nd ed. London, UK: Thames & Hudson Ltd; 2007.
24. Russell JBAB. *A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics & Pagans*. London, Thames & Hudson. 2007.
25. Kapferer B. *Beyond Rationalism: Rethinking Magic, Witchcraft and Sorcery*. New York, USA: Berghahn Books; 2002
26. Kapferer B. Outside all reason: Magic, sorcery and epistemology in anthropology. In: Kapferer B, ed. *Beyond Rationalism: Rethinking Magic, Witchcraft and Sorcery*. Kapferer. New York, USA: Berghahn Books; 2002: 1-30.
27. Bolinder G. *Devilman's Jungle*. London: Dennis Dobson. 1954.
28. Luongo K. *Witchcraft and Colonial Rule in Kenya, 1900-1955*. New York, Cambridge University Press; 2011.
29. Sawa RJ. Wiccan) SPIRITUAL HEALING: Interviews with Spiritual Healers. A Multicultural Perspective. SPIRITUAL HEALING: Interviews with Spiritual Healers. A Multicultural Perspective, Unpublished. 2017.
30. Marwick MG. *Sorcery in its Social Setting*. Manchester, USA: Manchester University Press; 1970.
31. Sawa RJ. East Africa) SPIRITUAL HEALING: Interviews with Spiritual Healers. A Multicultural Perspective. Unpublished. 2017.
32. Sawa RJ. Hindu Intuitive) SPIRITUAL HEALING: Interviews with Spiritual Healers. A multicultural perspective. *Spiritual Healing: Interviews with Spiritual Healers*, Unpublished. 2017.
33. Verger P. Trance and convention in nago-yoruba spirit mediumship. In: Beattie JM, ed. *Spirit Mediumship and Society in Africa*. London, UK: Routledge & Kegan Palu; 1969.
34. Haskins J. *Voodoo & Hoodoo: Their Tradition and Craft as Revealed by Actual Practitioners*. Briarcliff Monor, NY, USA: Stein and Day. 1978.
35. Aquinas T. *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Q. 117. Art 3. Reply Obj. 2. New York, USA: Random House.
36. Aquinas T. *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas Volume Two*. Chapter LXV11. New York, USA: Random House; 1945.
37. Aquinas T. *Whether Demons Can Lead Men Astray by Means of Real Miracles?* New York, USA: Random House; 1945.
38. Sawa RJ. SPIRITUAL HEALING: Interviews with Spiritual Healers. A multicultural perspective. SPIRITUAL HEALING: Interviews with Spiritual Healers. A multicultural perspective. 2017.
39. Spaulding NLaJ, ed. *Medieval West Africa: Views from Arab Scholars and Merchants*. Princeton, NJ, USA: Markus Wiener Publishers; 2003.

40. Sawa RJ. SPIRITUAL HEALING: Interviews with Spiritual Healers. A multicultural perspective, Unpublished. 2017
41. O'Callaghan MC. Unity in Theology: Lonergan's Framework for Theology in its New Context. Lanhan, MD, USA: University Press of America, Ltd; 1980.
42. Russo S. What's the Deal with Wicca: A Deeper Look into the Dark Side of Today's Witchcraft. Minneapolis, Bethany House Publishers. 2005.
43. Lewis IM, ed. *Spirit Possession in Northern Somaliland*. London, UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul; 1969.
44. Smith MPL. *Michelle Remembers*. New York, USA: Pocket Books; 1980.
45. Douglas A. *Extra Sensory Powers: A Century of Psychical Research*. Woodstock, New York, USA: The Overlook Press; 1976.
46. Tonkov V. *Conversations of the Superconscious*. St. Petersburg, Russia: "Nestor" Publishing; 2005.
47. Maximos. First Century on Theology. The Philokalia. G. F. H. Palmer, Sherrard, P. & Warae, K. London, Faber & Faber. 1981; II: 114-136. .
48. Maximosthe Confessor. Third Century on Love. The Philokalia. G. E. H. Palmer, Sherrard, P., & Ware, K. London, Faber and Faber. 1990; II: 83-99.
49. Rahner K. "Nature and Grace." Theological Investigations iv: 165-168, 175-189.
50. Rahner K. Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity. London, Darton, Longman & Todd. 1978.
51. Rahner K. The Practice of Faith. New York, USA: Crossroad; 1983.
52. Green C. Out-Of-The-Body Experiences. Oxford: Institute of Psychophysical Research; 1968.
53. Ostrander S, Schroeder L. *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain*. New York, USA: Prentice Hall; 1970.
54. Motoyama H, Brown R. Science and the Evolution of Consciousness: Chakras, Ki, and Psi. Brookline, Mass, Autumn Press; 1978.
55. McKinnon M. The Exquisiteness of Being Human: The Mind, Spirit, Soul, Dominance Theory. Calgary, Alberta, Spark the Spirit Productions, Inc. & Spirit Seekers Publishing. 2006.
56. Ruffin CB. Padre Pio: The True Story. Huntington, Indiana, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division. 1991.
57. Sawa R, Doetzel N, Meynell H, Winchester I, Zembal D, Motta R, eds. *The Paranormal as an aspect of spirituality: A study of spiritual healers Psychotherapy and Yoga Traditions*. Shangar, India: Pranjal Prakashan; 2010.
58. Dewart L. *Evolution and Consciousness: The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: The University of Toronto Press; 1989.
59. Sawa RJ et al. *Spirituality and Healing: A study of Spiritual Healers/study in progress*. Calgary, University of Calgary; 2006.
60. Sawa RJ. Expanding our Horizons: Visions of the Future. Family Health Care. R. J. Sawa. Newbury Park CA, USA: Sage Publications; 1992: 239-257.
61. Sawa RJ. Three Ways of Thinking. Family Health Care. Sawa RJ, ed. Newbury Park, CA, USA: Sage: 1992: 149-166.
62. Sawa RJ. The Urgent Needs of Medicine: Addressing New Horizons of Meaning Between Patient and Provider. *Ultimate Reality and Meaning: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Philosophy of Understanding*. 2006; 29(1-2): 62-77.
63. Sawa R. Gaps in Teaching Spirituality in Undergraduate Medical Education. *The Journal of Educational Thought Fall*. 2016.