

SPIRITUAL HEALING

There has recently been much interest in the relationship between science and religion, and how they combine to give us a 'binocular' perspective on things. One important phenomenon which has been neglected in recent work is the concept of spiritual healing. This edited collection explores a variety of approaches to spiritual healing from different religious points of view, identifying both what it is and how it works. The authors also explore the biological and psychological processes, open to scientific enquiry, through which healing may be mediated. As such, this book indicates the central proposition that religious and scientific perspectives answer different questions about healing, and there is not necessarily any conflict between them.

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SPIRITUAL HEALING

Scientific and Religious Perspectives

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FRASER WATTS has a background in clinical and experimental psychology. He has been a Senior Scientist at the UK Medical Research Council's Applied Psychology Unit, and has also served as President of the British Psychological Society. In 1994 he became Starbridge Lecturer in Theology and Natural Science in the University of Cambridge, and is now Reader in Theology and Science. His research focuses on the dialogue between theology and psychology, and on the psychological study of religion. He is Director of the Psychology and Religion Research Group, and a Fellow of Queens' College Cambridge. He is also an ordained minister in the Church of England and Vicar-Chaplain of St Edward's Church in Cambridge. His most recent books are *Theology and Psychology* (2002) and *Forgiveness in Context* (2004; both edited with Liz Gulliford), *Jesus and Psychology* (2007), and *Creation: Law and Probability* (2008).

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Preface

Spiritual healing is a topic that has been strangely neglected in the academic literature. Most books on spiritual healing are written by enthusiasts, and make no attempt to advance our understanding of it in a dispassionate way. Spiritual healing is being increasingly widely practised, in both religious and non-religious contexts, and there is an urgent need to understand it better.

The present book is a contribution from the joint perspectives of science and religion. The dialogue between science and religion has become a rich field of interdisciplinary enquiry in recent years. However, rather surprisingly, spiritual healing is a topic that has so far been completely neglected in that literature. That is all the more surprising as the related topic of divine action has attracted particular attention. I hope that the chapters of this book advance our understanding of spiritual healing from the perspectives of both science and religious studies. The basic assumption is that, if spiritual healing is to be understood, it is important not to neglect the perspectives of either science or religion. It is implicit that neither science nor religion can provide a complete account of spiritual healing on their own. Some of the most interesting issues about spiritual healing arise at the point where these two perspectives intersect.

This book had its origins in a three-day symposium, jointly chaired by Sarah Coakley and me, which took place under the aegis of the John Templeton Foundation's Humble Approach Initiative. Thirteen medical and social scientists, philosophers, and theologians met at Queens' College, Cambridge in January 2004 to consider a broad range of issues raised about the concept of 'spiritual healing' and its relation to conventional medicine. The discussion was sufficiently fruitful to produce two books: this one, which focuses mainly on spiritual healing as divine action; and a companion volume edited by Sarah Coakley, *Spiritual Healing: Science, Meaning and Discernment* (Grand Rapids,

Eerdmans, forthcoming), which focuses on healing as hermeneutics and secondary causation.

Both editors are grateful to everyone who met at Queens' College for beginning to frame the issues. Many of the original participants have contributed to one or other volume, but we are also pleased to have been able to attract other authors who were willing to wrestle, from the perspective of a variety of different disciplines, with the key issues that spiritual healing raises. We are also grateful to the John Templeton Foundation for its generosity in facilitating the exploration of the big questions raised by a topic like spiritual healing, and helping to making the fruits of that discussion available to a wider public.

I am grateful to the many people who have helped me to clarify my thoughts about spiritual healing, and to three in particular. Conversations with Sarah Coakley surrounding the Cambridge colloquium were enormously helpful in sharpening the approach to spiritual healing that I wished to take. Philip Clayton helped me to clarify things further during his very fruitful sabbatical stay in Cambridge, from which I benefited greatly. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my friend and local colleague, Bruce Kinsey, for many helpful conversations about spiritual healing over an extended period. Of course, none of them should be held responsible for the approach to spiritual healing that I have taken here.

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