



Physician, Heal Thyself

John Allegro

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Many people believe faith healing to be the orphan child of mainline Christianity, adopted by bible-thumping fundamentalists and the electronic evangelists, practiced under tents and at religious road shows. In John Allegro's book, he explores the history of faith healing, finding literary richness and religious antecedents that are generally unknown to most readers.

Faith healing has a long history in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Its practice was first ascribed to the Jewish Essenes, or Physicians, who believed that through powers granted them by their God they could lead men from the shadow of death to new life, both physical and spiritual. From the Essenes, faith healing took root in the emergent Christian religion, where it is found today, practiced by members of its more fundamental and evangelical sects.

It is interesting to note that the split between "high" and "low" church practice also signalled the beginning of faith healing's exile from mainline church practice. However, it was very much a part of church practice during the early inception of Christianity. The Dead Sea Scrolls are the main source of this information. They illustrate the primary importance of faith healing to the early church.

Today, despite dramatic advances in medical and scientific knowledge, to a significant group of people faith healing is of more interest than ever before. Faith healing seems to be twentieth century man's response to the increasing complexity of the modern world. Through exotic and often dramatic ritual, modern faith healers seek to confer to their followers the serenity the earliest faith healers sought.

Physician, Heal Thyself is not an attack on the many forms faith healing has assumed today. The author stresses that no part of his study seeks to confirm or cast doubt on either the religious validity or the therapeutic efficacy of modern faith healing. Tracing the evolution of faith healing from its earliest appearances in religious literature and practice to the colorful and sometimes bizarre forms it has assumed today, John Allegro has produced an incisive work of interest to religious scholars and to students of religion.

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