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Reiki and the Holy Spirit

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NCR Today

Tell me it's not so. A group of men, with considerable intellectual gifts, toiled away to produce a six-page document condemning a non-invasive healing technique practiced primarily by women. I'm talking about a **declaration issued by the U.S. Catholic Bishops Committee on Doctrine** which admonishes Christians to refrain from practicing Reiki—a method of laying hands on or above an ill or injured person to help stimulate the body's own healing mechanisms.

Catholic health care practitioners I'm in touch with are still reeling from the declaration, which was approved for publication in late March. It charges that those who put their trust in Reiki are operating in the "realm of superstition," which "corrupts one's worship of God by turning one's religious feeling and practice in a false direction."

"I fear we won't be able to offer Reiki at our retreats—or that the practice will be pushed underground," said one friend. A hospital chaplain who is a nun told me, "It's a witch hunt."

I'm a practitioner of Reiki. I got interested because I read that Reiki is a means of drawing life energy into an ill person. To my Catholic ears life energy sounded like the Holy Spirit. The placement of one's hands on or above a body was something I'd read about all my life: According to the Bible, the laying on of hands was a healing modality used by Jesus, who told us we should do likewise.

My interest was piqued by the work of nursing professor Dolores Krieger, author of *The Therapeutic Touch: How to Use Your Hands to Help or to Heal* (Prentice Hall Press). The book developed out of years of research on healing, and the use of therapeutic touch—which closely resembles Reiki—in Krieger's clinical practice. Krieger went on to train thousands of health care professions in universities in the technique.

A good deal of my work (I do not charge any fee, for this is a ministry) is with those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. I've done Reiki for Vietnam veterans, their bodies riddled with shrapnel; domestic violence survivors; a Guatemalan torture survivor; and a former Sandinista, a woman who helped bring down the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua. I've also worked with ovarian and breast cancer patients, and people suffering from depression. I should add that many of my Mexican and Chicana sisters also practice Reiki or variations on it because so many of our people cannot afford doctors.

Do I channel universal life energy? Or am I a channel of the Holy Spirit? God only knows: God is wiser than I so I shall let him or her worry about the difference. What I do know is that Reiki induces a profoundly restful state ? a condition doctors tell me is conducive to healing. Reiki also creates a safe space where painful memories can surface and be dissipated without re-traumatizing the patient. Most sessions end with smiles and sighs of relief?or better, my Reiki recipient falls into a dead sleep then wakes up feeling refreshed and even hopeful about his or her condition.

We must scrutinize the doctrinal commission's declaration in light of our Catholic faith. In doing so let us set aside abstract theological concepts and get real. Picture a scene in which two Reiki practitioners are in the same room, each ministering to an individual suffering from illness or injuries. One believes she is channeling universal life energy to help a sick person. Another thinks she is a channel for the healing powers of the Holy Spirit. God, being omnipresent, is in that room too, an ever-loving and all merciful presence. I cannot for a moment imagine that the Holy One would be dismayed with the woman who believes in universal life energy. Our God is bigger than that. If you have any doubts, go read the Bible.

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