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THEOPHOSTICS: UNBIBLICAL TEACHING WEDDED TO MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

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“Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.” (2Peter 1:3)

A few weeks ago my wife and I were driving to the house of some close friends, listening to a tape of Dr. Ed Smith, the founder of Theophostic counseling, who was preaching at a large evangelical church in our city.¹ As we listened, my wife asked, “what kind of sermon is this?” The sermon was filled with psychological terminology, a sprinkling of Scripture giving 21st century psychological meanings to 1st century concepts, and many anecdotes to convince the listeners that every one of them needed “Theophostic” ministry. After some time my wife looked at me and said, “Why are these people listening to this? We heard this 25 years ago.”

As we continued to listen we heard about “performance based spirituality,” “lie-based pain,” “first memory interpretation,” and other concepts that have nothing to do with anything Christ or the Apostles teach in scriptures. Smith claims that our negative emotional responses are caused by memories of the first time something similar happened earlier in life. As I listened I had a very negative response, so maybe Smith was onto something. I felt angered that heresy dressed as therapy was being pushed on well meaning Christians under the guise of God’s word in a “sermon.” I was distressed that people were being put under bondage by his suggesting that if they feel upset about losing their job then they have no genuine faith that “God will supply” all their needs. I was dismayed at his claim that if they behave more cheerfully in

church than they do in their car on the way there, then they are guilty of practicing “performance based spirituality.” I was outraged at the suggestion that every negative emotion is proof that we need counseling and that if we say we do not need the counseling we are just “putting on a performance” and are like Martha and not Mary. Sure enough I was experiencing the same emotions now as I did 25 years ago listening to similar false teaching.

THEOPHOSTICS AND ITS KEY PREMISE

Theophostics is false teaching dressed in psychological garb: that is the point of this article and the premise I will defend for the rest of this paper.

Dr. Edward M. Smith, the inventor/founder of Theophostics Ministry (formerly TheoPhostics Counseling) claims that through Theophostics, people are delivered from emotional pain, totally and permanently.² Once free from emotional pain, these individuals can break free from sin habits supposedly caused by their “lie-based thinking,” and live free from emotional pain without effort of maintenance.

These results cannot be obtained through what Smith calls “cognitive truth” (understood by the mind), but can be obtained through “experiential truth” (found in subjective experience) in which a person is brought back to the first memory of a similar emotionally painful experience and receives personal revelation from the Spirit of

Christ about that experience.

According to Smith, people who repent and obey God without having this experience are guilty of “performance based spirituality,” and are merely masking their “lie-based pain.” So the former alcoholic who quits drinking, but who still has temptations to drink, is merely “performing” and is guilty of “works salvation” unless he has a mystical experience that heals the true cause of why he or she started drinking (a childhood memory and a lie based on it) and thus never has a desire to drink again, without maintenance. Then the person is truly free. Here is how Smith describes it:

Often victory is falsely equated with the cessation of a particular behavior and its replacement with a more acceptable one. For example, we may stop compulsive eating or not eating by replacing it with daily jogging . . . We might quit drinking and overcompensate with religious behavior. Any attempt to overcome our lie-based pain by adjusting our behavior is works salvation (Smith: 164).

By Smith’s definition, what used to be called “repentance” or “faithful obedience” is now “works salvation.”

A key category in Theophostics is “lie-based thinking.” Smith defines lie-based thinking as thinking based on how one interpreted his or her first memory of an event that caused pain. For example, if a woman was sexually abused in childhood and then began to believe, “I am a shameful person and this is my fault,” that is “lie-based thinking.” Smith supplies dozens of examples like this. The point of Theophostic ministry is to have the Holy Spirit cause the memory to come back in a vivid, emotional way, and then subjectively reveal to the person what the truth is. For, example, the person might hear

in his or her mind (not from the counselor), "it was not your fault, you are not shameful." That revelation cures the person of lie-based thinking and the negative emotions go away instantly and permanently. Though this is supposedly a work of the Holy Spirit, it is evidently dangerous because Smith warns his readers that they need his training before they can be involved with it (Smith: 20).

It is important to understand that "lie-based thinking" as defined by Smith is not addressed in the Bible. This category has nothing to do with what the Bible teaches about "the lie" which is in opposition to the gospel. When Jesus said, "you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free," he was referring to His objective teachings, not a mystical experience that changes one's response to a childhood memory. There is no record anywhere in the Scriptures of a ministry that brings subjective revelations to a person's past memory and then changes how they interpret the memory.

Smith gives examples of what such lies are like: "Lies such as, 'I am bad, no good, not lovable, rejected, abandoned, shameful, evil, and so on' cause us to feel bad, not what happened to us" (Smith 86). Such "lies" cause the damage, not the event. The truth, however, is that the Bible itself says that we are bad, shameful, rejected and evil, if we are ashamed of the gospel and reject it (**Luke 9:26**). The person who had these thoughts before meeting Christ did not believe lies, but understood the Biblical truth about all who are unregenerate. We should realize how evil we really are and come to Christ through the gospel for forgiveness and freedom. The Bible never once rebukes a sinner for considering himself "evil."

When Jesus offered to set people free, the religious leaders became offended and claimed they had never been in bondage. In fact they (like all of us) have been in bondage to sin because of believing "the lie." The lie, as first taught by the Serpent in the Garden, is the idea that we can be like God through receiving forbidden knowledge. The lie is embraced by all who reject the gospel and will be taught by antichrist at the

end of the age (**2Thessalonians 2:11** in the Greek references "the lie.")³ The lie in its simplest form is that we can trust man. The truth of the gospel says we must trust God on His terms. If we believe the lie we are in bondage and headed for hell; if we believe the truth through the gospel we are free and headed for heaven. Smith's mysticism tells Christians that if they have negative emotions it proves they are not free.

This citation will show how brazen Smith's claims are: "Once the lies are removed from our experiential knowledge and we find perfect peace, we are in a place where we can appropriate the Word of God in our lives" (Smith: 113). This means that we need Theophostics or the equivalent **first** then we can understand and live out the teachings of the Bible. If this is right, then it is impossible for one to be a Berean and search the Scriptures to see if Smith's claims are true. A person would have to first blindly submit to Theophostic counseling, get rid of his or her emotional pain stemming from first memory experiences and the resultant lie-based pain and then when sufficiently free from "lie-based thinking," one could get something out of the Bible.

Elsewhere Smith bristles at the fact that some people have written warnings about his teachings without first having gone through all the training (of course paying for it) and then watching the results (Smith: 138). He seeks to Teflon coat himself from correction by implying that all who disagree simply have not had Theophostic ministry or asked his permission to disagree (Smith: 137). That is like saying you would have to become a Mormon and experience what the Mormon church prescribes before you could discern if it is wrong or not. The Bible then cannot correct Theophostic teaching because those of us who study the Bible without having had Theophostic ministry are simply stuck in our cognitive "data base of truth" and cannot understand the Bible experientially.

The key premise of Theophostic teaching is repeated over a dozen times in Smith's book. It is this: "Everything we know, feel, or are mentally aware of has its roots in a first-time experience"

(Smith: 31). He further explains, "For emotional healing, we need to identify three basic elements: the present emotional pain, the original memory containers; and the original lie(s)" (Smith: 32). He repeats this later like this:

Once the original experience is recorded, with its emotional response and belief interpretation, it changes very little over time, even with the accumulation of additional data that is contrary. This original experience becomes the grid from which all similar additional life experiences are measured, interpreted, and emotionally experienced (Smith: 70).

For Theophostics to have any validity, this premise must be true. If it cannot be proven, then Theophostics has no point because finding the first memory and invoking a subjective revelation to reinterpret it is what this ministry is all about. At the end of this article we will return to this premise and discuss its validity.

BILLIONS AND BILLIONS OF CLIENTS

The key idea in marketing is to create a need for your product in the mind of a potential client, the more clients the better. Smith has made the whole world population potential clients by claiming that any "lie-based thinking" is proof of our need for Theophostic healing (or something of the same ilk under another name). He asks, "Think over the last few weeks. Were there any moments in which you were frustrated, stressed, angered, worried, anxious, taxed, upset, fearful, hateful, argumentative, defeated, or pressured? If so, there was probably a lie at the source of these emotions" (Smith 95).

Other proofs are used to show that we are in bondage to "lie-based thinking" and need Theophostics: 1) if we do well 2) if we do badly. Those who do well are performance-based people trying to cover their pain. Those who sin overtly are acting out in their pain in an attempt to dull or escape it. If you are human and have emotions, you need Theophostics! If you say you do not, you are in denial. Smith writes, "Some of us deny and hide our lie-based thinking

better than others, but we all need God's truth to find healing" (Smith: 64 – remember that "God's truth" in Theophostics is a subjective experience that reinterprets a memory; it is not the objective teaching of the Bible).

If you are a kind and caring person who is polite to others no matter what personal difficulties you have, according to Smith, you are likely "pretending." Smith writes, "Everywhere I go, I find the church is basically the same: a building filled with deeply wounded people trying hard to pretend that everything is well" (Smith 95). In his thinking, we are so hypocritical that we even sing, "It is well with my soul," when our minds are in pain (Smith 95, 96). How shameful! Since, "All of us need emotional healing" (translate – Theophostics), we are performance-based persons for doing well, praying, smiling, being kind, singing hymns, and doing any other normal Christian activity. Smith writes, "Every person in every church everywhere (in pews and especially behind the pulpit) carries emotional pain at some level." In Smith's therapeutic world, "having emotional pain" is evidence of a lack of freedom. So we either submit to Smith's unbiblical, subjective, mystical experiences so we can be healed, or we go on "pretending."

In the "sermon" my wife and I listened to, Smith had the whole congregation raise their hands. He then declared that all those with raised hands needed healing. From his books and preaching, it is clear that Smith declares all people everywhere to need the sort of healing he is prescribing. For example, "Every person on the face of this earth is carrying some level of pain. We have all been infested with lie-based thinking" (Smith: 29). Keep in mind that lie-based thinking is from first memories of events that invoked the pain (according to Theophostic theory). Smith declares this a universal human condition. For example, he writes, "We are all lie-infested and in need of release" (Smith: 98). The release in Theophostics comes through a subjective experience that reinterprets first memory experiences.

So the release in this theory is not through the gospel, it comes through Theophostic ministry. He writes, "We

are told to nail it to the cross and claim our victory. The sad truth is that it does not work, never has, and never will. This teaching has simply left many wounded hurting people in bondage to their lie-based pain and in a perpetual cycle of defeat" (Smith: 64). How can he say this? He explains: "The cross of Jesus was sufficient for all our sins and emotional wounds, but sins and wounds must be dealt with differently" (Smith: 65). He teaches that "lie-based" thinking keeps us from freedom and causes additional sin. Again, the solution for "lie-based" thinking is Theophostics. So we cannot look to the cross which dealt with our sin or even have victory over sin until we get free from the universal human condition of having lie-based thinking caused by childhood memories. "Until we find freedom from these lie-based wounds, we will struggle with the consequential sins these wounds manifest" (Smith: 65). Smith makes sins the result of our wounds, not result of our lusts and our actions. We should not expect victory through the cross unless we have gone back and had a subjective revelation about first incident memories and replaced our false interpretations of the memories with God's revelation about what they really mean. According to the claims of the founder of Theophostics, the need for this is universal.

Let us consider the ramifications of the claim that everyone needs release from a condition that only Theophostics defines and cures. If indeed this condition is universal, then Smith has diagnosed nothing but "humanness." He has not distinguished a particular category of people from others, just humans in general. Now if he is speaking of "humans in general," then either he is describing the sin nature, or something innately human and not sinful. If not sinful we do not need a "cure" for it. If he is describing the sin nature and claiming that his particular process is the "cure for it," he is preaching a different gospel. Theophostics cannot "cure" the sin nature. The only plan God has for sin is the gospel and the only plan He has for Christians to live out their lives is through the Biblical means of grace.⁴ So Theophostics either is a false gospel, a false "means of grace," or it is useless because it obviously cannot

cure us from being "human." I believe it is a replacement for what the Bible provides for us. Smith has defined the entire population of the world as "clients" that need his product.

THEOPHOSTICS AND SUBJECTIVISM

A major claim that underlies Theophostic ministry is as follows, "Yet what we feel reveals the truth about what we truly believe. Our emotions expose our core beliefs" (Smith: 52). This means that if one believes that he or she is secure in Christ based on the cross, the blood atonement, and what God has done for him by grace through faith, yet has feelings of insecurity for whatever reason, then that person does not really believe the gospel. One's cognitive belief is proven invalid by his own feelings. Thus no Christian can be secure without the appropriate feelings. Smith says:

We can choose to embrace logical truth in times of crisis, but generally we will submit to that which we "feel" is true rather than we "know" to be true. This is why people who administer Theophostic Ministry ask the person undergoing ministry what "feels" true, as opposed to what is true. What we feel is an indication of what we truly believe" (Smith: 82).

He teaches that feelings are the ultimate test of reality and that they trump any of our beliefs that are based on the objective teachings of Scripture. Smith states, "We feel what we believe" (Smith: 112). He makes some amazing statements: "Christians today have more truth than any generation in the history of the church, yet many do not walk in peace. A lack of peace indicates that there is a lie held in experiential memory" (Smith 107).

He defines peace differently than the Bible does. He is speaking of a lack of emotional pain as he makes clear throughout his book. The Bible defines peace more in terms of being right with God than a lack of emotional pain. He puts little stock in a "logical database of truth" (i.e. what a person learns from the Bible and believes). Writes Smith, "Again, the truth has to be experientially

provided by the Holy Spirit to bring about genuine release of lie-based thinking” (Smith: 107). Keep in mind that “release of lie-based thinking” is what one gets through Theophostics and that “lie-based thinking” as defined by Smith is not a Biblical category but a modern psychological one.

If this is the case, that feelings are a true indication of our beliefs, then what about those who “feel” they are right with God when they are not? Those in Matthew 7 who said “Lord, Lord” had no self-doubts and felt that they were secure in Christ. But He said, “I never knew you” (Matthew 7:21-23). Conversely there are those who had no idea they had pleased Christ who are commended at the judgment. They say, “When did we ever feed You?” (Matthew 25:37). Our feelings can delude us every day. If we were to believe what Smith says how could we ever know what we truly believe? Our feelings would be upsetting our hope and confidence daily.

Does the Bible ever teach that we have to feel forgiven to be forgiven, or feel loved to be loved, or feel secure to be secure? No it does not! Conversely does the Bible teach that we can have security outside of our feelings? Yes:

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him, in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. (1John 3:18-20)

John teaches the opposite of Theophostic principles. He does not ask his readers if they “feel loving” and tell others so. He tells them to love objectively, “in deed and truth.” He gives an objective test that will give his readers assurance. In John’s teaching the objective takes priority over the subjective — “in whatever our heart condemns us.” We may wonder if we are as loving as God wants us to be and even feel unloving at times. However, if we love in deed and truth, we have assurance. If we are still lacking inner (subjective) assurance, John assures us that God is greater than our hearts and knows the truth. We can find

assurance in spite of our feelings. Smith teaches the opposite of Scripture: that if our heart condemns us (i.e. we feel insecure) but we believe the truth objectively, our true condition is revealed by our feelings not the objective truth. This is a direct denial of the teachings of the Bible.

When people asked Jesus about their neighbor who ought to be loved (one of the two key commands of the Law), He answered by giving the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10). He gave objective evidence of what loving one’s neighbor looks like. He never asked them if they felt loving.

The subjectivism of Theophostics would put Christ and the Biblical writers in need of Theophostic ministry. For example, when Jesus said, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me” (Mark 15:34), according to Theophostics Jesus feeling the wrath of the Father against sin was revealing His true belief, i.e. that He was indeed forsaken by the Father. Jesus did not ask why the Father rejected the sins of the world (which the Son was bearing), he asked “why have you forsaken Me.” In His humanity Jesus felt forsaken and cited the first verse of Psalm 22. In quoting that verse He identified with human sufferers through history who felt forsaken by God though they believed in Him. David trusted God yet felt forsaken.

However, Smith claims, “As much as we would like to believe otherwise, our emotions will always expose what we truly believe” (Smith: 52). This is contrary to Biblical fact. Job had many negative emotions, but still believed that God would vindicate Him. Consider this lament Psalm: “How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?” (Psalm 13:2). The Psalmist was filled with anxiety and negative emotions. However, consider how the Psalm ends: “But I have trusted in Thy lovingkindness; My heart shall rejoice in Thy salvation. I will sing to the Lord, Because He has dealt bountifully with me” (Psalm 13:5, 6). David’s faith gave him hope despite his feelings.

Smith repeatedly denies that this is appropriate and chides those who do so. He rebukes those who trust God’s prom-

ises in the midst of sorrows, saying, “We stand and proclaim ‘Victory in Jesus’ and ‘Standing on the Promises,’ while we live in secret defeat and emotional bondage. We call abstinence from sinning victory, when it is not” (Smith: 96). So, if we are in emotional pain (which Smith treats as if it were sin itself), yet stand on God’s promises and even abstain from sinning while doing so, we are nevertheless defeated! What a horrid disservice to all the righteous sufferers throughout history, including the Biblical ones. Paul said, “I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart” (Romans 9:2). He fails Smith’s test miserably. Does the Bible promise to take away all emotional pain now, before the return of Christ? No!

Smith teaches that if we feel emotional pain we cannot forgive: “If we try to forgive while we are still feeling the pain of the offense, forgiveness will be impossible” (Smith: 126). This means that we have to be cured of all emotional pain first before we can obey God and forgive. The subjective (our feelings) trumps the objective (the command to obey). This is the case with nearly everything in Theophostic ministry. We have to get Theophostic ministry first before we can do what is pleasing to God. When Jesus was in the midst of the pain (both physical and emotional) of Calvary, He said “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). He forgave while feeling the pain of rejection and hatred. Stephen did the same (Acts 7:60).

BAD THEOLOGY WED TO POP PSYCHOLOGY

Dr. Smith’s Theophostic training manual is entitled, “Beyond Tolerable Recovery.”⁵ I have always wondered how Christians could be involved in the “recovery” movement given its presuppositions. The idea of “recovery” is that people come into the world in a pristine state, as their true “self.” This “self” is eventually despoiled by abuses, hurts, lies, learned behaviors, and survival mechanisms that cause a false “self” to be put forth, hiding the true “inner self or higher self” depending on the particular theory or terminology. Some use the terminology “inner child.” Recovery in most cases is

about reclaiming the true pristine “self” that was who we were before all the hurts and abuses. John Bradshaw, a New Age teacher, is a popular proponent of this theory.

Though Smith uses the term “recovery,” he does not teach that we come into the world pristine, but affirms that we are born with a “fallen nature” (Smith: 9). This confused me until I read his book through for the third time. I had to read it several times because it is such a confusing mixture of Biblical ideas and psychological terminology, but these are often given definitions that are not in the same category as the ideas of the Bible.

For example consider the word “truth.” In the Bible believing “the truth” so as to be saved means to respond to the gospel in repentance and faith. Those who reject “the truth” (the word truth with a definite article points to the objective content of the faith as taught by Christ and His apostles) are deluded and believe “the lie.”

Smith on the other hand relegates objective truth (the meaning of “the truth”) to “data and logical information” (Smith: 108) that is of little value. His “truth” is subjective: “All I am saying is that it is the Holy Spirit who ‘leads us into all truth’” (Smith: 108). He misquotes the Scripture. It says this: “*But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come*” (John 16:13). The promise was given to Christ’s apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all “the truth.” Here it does not mean “everything that is factual” but everything that is in accordance with the doctrine of Christ. The passage that Smith cites has nothing to do with getting personal, subjective revelations about the meaning of one’s first memory experience and how one interprets it. But that is exactly what Theophostics is all about. He uses Scripture about “the truth” to justify getting subjective revelations supposedly from the Holy Spirit that may or may not be true. He writes, “Theophostic Ministry is a systematic means of helping people to position themselves at

the feet of Jesus so He might do He has promised” (i.e. lead them into “all truth”), (Smith: 108). This does not mean searching the Scriptures for what Jesus and His apostles objectively taught, but gaining personal revelations. John 16:13 does not justify this practice. It says, “*He will disclose to you what is to come.*” This He did and the apostles wrote this down in the New Testament. In Theophostics the Holy Spirit does not reveal “what is to come,” but the supposedly true meaning and interpretation of past memories. Smith continually confuses his readers by category shifts like this.

Confusion results when we try to grasp Smith’s meanings because he moves back and forth between Biblical terms that mean one thing in their context and his psychological use of the terms that mean something else entirely. However, I think I understand what he means by “recovery.” It is found in his defective theology about the Christian life. Smith believes that Christians are so completely new that they no longer have a sin nature. He teaches that we are already “holy and blameless” (Smith: 162), making no distinction between what we are legally and what we are practically (as the Bible does).

Therefore, in his view, now that we are Christians we are no longer sinners struggling with a sin nature. We already have a divine nature states Smith (misusing 1Peter 1:4) and we must be righteous or God would not live in our heart (Smith: 162). Thus being righteous should flow effortlessly out of our new nature, since sin has no power over us (Smith: 116, 117). So why do Christians still sin? Theophostic theory says, “However, when our pain is stirred, we will look for a means of dealing with what is stirred up which often means sinful choices and behavior” (Smith: 116).

Smith explains further that we do not have sin within that is stirred up, just pain from lie-based thinking:

Some would suggest that sin is rooted in the heart of the true Christian just as in the lost person. It is then from the sinful heart that the thought emerges

which results in behavior. If this is true then there is no hope of present victory. If my heart is evil and sin-filled then the cross did not make me new (Smith: 162).

This is confused theology. If Smith is right, what was Paul talking about in Galatians 5, Romans 6 and many other passages about the Christian’s struggle against sin?

Smith goes so far as to cite James 1:14-15 which directly contradicts what he teaches as support for his unbiblical theory:

[A]ccording to James 1:14-15 the sin process flows in a predictable fashion. First the enemy provides a temptation or life situation, which is tailored to trigger an original thought or experiential lie. The experiential lie is a belief, which was received during the life experience. We may or may not consciously think the original lie/thought in our current situation, but nevertheless it is aroused (Smith: 163).

James says we are drawn aside by our own “lusts.” Smith says we do not have sinful hearts, but “experiential lies.” What are these? He illustrates: “For example, if we are raised in an alcoholic home, we might learn a belief such as, ‘Life is out of control and I am responsible to do something to remove the chaos’” (Smith: 163). Smith has done another category switch to make James speak in 21st century psychological categories rather than in 1st century Biblical ones. James was not speaking about interpreting memories and forming beliefs from memories. He was speaking of “lust” which leads us to sin.

What does this all have to do with “recovery”? I will explain what appears to be the case based on the evidence in his book. Rather than recovering the pristine inner child like other versions of recovery, Smith posits a perfect, sinless new creation in Christ. This new creation still sins because of lie-based pain. Rather than having a sin nature that lusts against the Spirit (Galatians 5), he says we have a perfectly new heart but we just do not know it. As one works

through his or her memories and has the Holy Spirit reinterpret the meaning of each memory with personal revelations, the lie-based pain is removed and, consequently, the motivation to sin. As this happens “memory by memory” (Smith: 44), the emotional pain leaves and the person “recovers” the perfect new creature they are in Christ (but do not know it experientially). This is a clever twist on the recovery movement that is laced with Biblical sounding ideas. It sounds wonderful since there will be no more “struggle” against sin and healing will be “maintenance-free” (Smith: 114, 115). If one does have emotional pain or react with a negative emotion, that is merely proof that there is another lie-based memory to be uncovered and reinterpreted by special revelation.

Smith says, “True victory is the absence of battle and struggle” (Smith: 43). That is what he offers us through Theophostics. Unfortunately the Biblical writers did not know about this marvelous struggle free life: “*For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin*” (Hebrews 12:3, 4).

Since Smith does assert faith in the cross and the gospel, what he is providing is a substitute for the Biblical means of grace. We start the Christian life through faith in the finished work of Christ and are perfected through Theophostics. The first pages of his book deny the efficacy of what God has provided for living the Christian life as revealed in Acts 2:42: “*And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*” Smith begins his book telling of “Shari” who had anxiety and tried prayer, Bible study, and Christian fellowship, none of which worked. But lucky for her, her pastor had Theophostic training. He used this training to discover “early childhood experiences” and help her feel the terror and pain of a particular memory. She ended up having personal revelation from Jesus. Jesus told her that she was not “bad or shameful.” This removed her pain, something that God’s ordained

means (prayer, Bible teaching, and fellowship – along with baptism and the Lord’s supper) failed to do (Smith: 11-13). So the book begins by using a story to discredit the Biblical means of grace and replace them with personal revelations invoked by the Theophostic process.

What is “recovered” through Theophostic ministry is the holy, perfect person that we are as Christians. We do not enjoy the feelings and experience of being this pristine new creation because of “lie-based pain,” not because of a sin nature. Removing the pain memory by memory uncovers the holy new creation person. This is what “recovery” apparently means.

EXAMINING THE PREMISE

I said earlier that we would return to the key premise of Theophostics. I cited it from page 31 of his book. He restates it many times. For example, “In like manner, when emotionally charged events occurred in our childhood, we interpreted them from the emotions we felt. These interpretations became our basic and guiding source of information for any future situation that was even remotely similar” (Smith: 81). I lost count of how many times Dr. Smith asserts this premise. Here is another one: “Whenever something painful happens to a child, the child will interpret that event and store the interpretation in the memory of the event. Even when the child becomes an adult, his or her interpretation of the painful event becomes the source of his or her present pain every time something or someone triggers the memory” (Smith: 50). He also includes “repressed memories” (Smith: 50). So if a person is having emotional pain and has no memory of an event that was the first cause, it is still there to be discovered through Theophostics.

This premise is reinforced through anecdotal evidence of the success of Theophostics — case after case where people who were healed of “lie-based pain” that was caused by a wrong interpretation of a childhood memory. Since he first published his counselor’s manual in 1996, Smith has come under criticism. His 2002 book that I am citing in this article, is a “cleaned up” version that has removed some of the controversial

claims and includes replies to critics. However, the basic premise has never changed: that our present pain has its roots in childhood memories and their interpretation. Theophostics corrects these by offering a mystical experience where the person receives a revelation supposedly from the Holy Spirit about the memory and the correct interpretation of it.

Theophostics is utterly dependent on this premise. If it is not true that one’s interpretation of a childhood memory causes “lie-based” pain, then Theophostics has no point. Here then is a key question, how do we know that the premise is true? We have two possibilities; either it is known through specific revelation or general revelation. Specific revelation is found only in the Bible. God has spoken in full and final revelation in the Bible (Hebrews 1:1, 2). According to Martin and Deidre Bobgan, Dr. Smith once claimed that he got Theophostics by special revelation from God.⁶ Smith now denies that Theophostics is a revelation from God (Smith: 145). Since claims of special revelations beyond the Scripture are occultic and forbidden, he is right to give up such a claim if he ever made it.

The other possible category of knowledge is general revelation. This is the realm of what can be legitimately learned through the senses and human reason. We often call this “scientific” knowledge. The way we prove something to be known through specific revelation is through Biblical exegesis. The way we prove something to be known through general revelation is through controlled experimentation and valid scientific inquiry. This inquiry is subject to verification and requires scrutiny by experts in the field before it is accepted as “fact” and endorsed as a valid. Thus those making scientific claims are expected to cite their sources and leave a paper trail of evidence for their claims.

Smith’s premise about “first memories” and their interpretation being the present cause of emotional pain is asserted throughout his book. Yet not once is a Scripture given to support the idea nor a scientific journal, study, or scholarly source cited to support the idea as science. The **only** evidence offered is

anecdotal. This is not valid evidence. Anecdotal "evidence" can be found to "prove" everything from rosary beads to crystals, to grapefruit pills that will make you skinny no matter how much you eat. Someone will claim that nearly anything "worked for me." Infomercials continually exploit gullible, afflicted people citing anecdotal evidence for validation.

When challenged to prove that Theophostics is found in the Bible, Dr. Smith references the story of Peter's denial of Christ. He claims that, "Jesus exposed Peter's lie-based thinking" (Smith: 142). Take note once again, "lie-based" thinking is Smith's psychological terminology that finds its meaning in a childhood memory and its interpretation. He made that clear early in his book. Now he claims Jesus was using "Theophostic principles" (Smith: 142). The proof is Jesus' "exposing" Peter through what happened that revealed "performance-based spirituality." As I said earlier, do not make the mistake of thinking that terms like "exposing," "lie-based thinking," "performance-based spirituality," or "memory-based pain," etc. are Biblical categories; they are not. But Smith uses these to "shoe-horn" the story of Peter's denial into modern pop psychology. Here is how Smith characterizes Jesus' interactions with Peter: "He was triggering and stirring up Peter's memory-based pain by way of association" (Smith: 143). So Jesus was a Theophostic counselor it seems.

There is a **huge** flaw in this reasoning besides the fact that it is horrible Biblical exegesis. The key premise of Theophostic ministry is that a first, childhood memory that was interpreted a certain way is the key to adult emotional responses and "lie-based" pain. If Jesus confronting Peter was a case of Theophostic principles at work in the Bible, where is the revelation of the childhood memory event that made Peter react the way he did? There is none. So the supposed Biblical proof lacks the key component that makes Theophostics what it is. Therefore, it is no proof at all.

In fact there is no incident or teaching in the Bible that promotes the underlying premise of Theophostics. The premise is merely asserted over and over by Smith but never proven. We are just supposed to accept it on Smith's word that it is true. If the premise is false Theophostics is false.

CONCLUSION

Since neither Biblical nor scientific evidence is offered for the key premise of Theophostics, there is no reason to take it seriously. In my many years of writing articles about various teachings that come through the church, rarely have I come across a teaching as convoluted and unbiblical as this one. Frankly, there is good reason to doubt that the experiences that people are having in Theophostics are from God. In these experiences they gain special revelations supposedly from the Holy Spirit about the meaning of childhood memories. They may be real experiences, but they are invoked under such unbiblical auspices that they should be considered dangerous. Theophostics is a process for gaining mystical experiences that promise freedom from sorrows now. The Bible does not promise freedom from all emotional pain in this life. Theophostics does. The Bible gives us the gospel as the only way for salvation **and** the sanctifying process that occurs afterwards. Giving up the Biblical means of grace and the command to struggle against sin for the empty promise of a "struggle-free, maintenance free, pain free" life now is trading one's eternal hope through the gospel for a mystical experience that has nothing to do with the gospel or true sanctification. Such a trade is a very bad deal indeed.

END NOTES

1. Dr. Ed Smith, "The Performance Driven Church"; audio tape, Crystal Evangelical Free Church; New Hope MN; preached 11/09/2003.
2. Dr. Edward Smith, *Healing Life's Deepest*

Hurts, (Vine Books: Ann Arbor, 2002) Smith writes, "The healing will be permanent and will require no maintenance to sustain it." 117. Throughout the rest of this article I will use bracketed citations from this book in this manner (Smith: 117) within the text. That will make it easier for the reader to reference the book than would dozens of "ibid" endnotes.

3. The Greek New Testament mentions "the lie" four times: John 8:44; Romans 1:25; Ephesians 4:25; 2Thessalonians 2:11. John 8:44 directly links it to Satan's teaching. "The lie" is not just anything that is untrue, but a particular lie. It is directly apposed to "the truth," which is the gospel. The lie teaches us to trust man and seek forbidden knowledge, the truth teaches us to trust God and believe only what His Word teaches.
4. Besides the traditional "means of grace" as taught in Reformed Theology (Word and Sacrament), I would include the basics of the Christian life mentioned at the very birth of the church on Pentecost: "And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42).
5. Ed M. Smith, "Beyond Tolerable Recovery"; (Family Care Publishing: Campbellsville, Ky, 1996).
6. Martin and Deidre Bobgan, "Theophostic Counseling – Divine Revelation or PsychoHeresy"; (Eastgate Publishers: Santa Barbara, 1999). The Bobgans document Smith's previous claims and statements about Theophostic Counseling on pages 6, 7.

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