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**SPIRITUAL HEALING AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO
CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS LIFE AND ALTERNATIVE
MEDICINE IN AOTEAROA-NEW ZEALAND**

**A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Philosophy in Religious Studies at Massey University.**

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ABSTRACT

Spiritual healing spans many centuries, cultures, and health professions, yet the scientific study of spiritual healing is lacking from the literature of religious studies. There is no doubt that spiritual healing is very much a part of many religions; healing was in fact a practical foundation for the Christian religion as taught by Jesus Christ and his disciples. As a result of breakdown in religious organisations spiritual healing has become the foundation from which many movements away from conventional religions has occurred and consequently sects, cults, and practitioners of alternative medicine have gathered followers and flourished as they practise their mode of spiritual healing.

The ultimate purpose of this study was to discover new knowledge about the phenomenon of spiritual healing from the viewpoint of both healer and healee, i.e., those who recognise or have experienced spiritual healing as a distinct process of healing. Phenomenology provided the philosophy and the basis for the overall design of the study which sought to discover the contribution of spiritual healing to contemporary religious life and alternative medicine in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Triangulation was the method of choice to explore the essence of spiritual healing in a primary research survey carried out in the **Manawatu** region of Aotearoa-New Zealand.

The strength of phenomenology lies in the lived experience and understandings of people, therefore a more accurate account of the phenomenon of spiritual healing was established from experiential data acquired from the primary research study. The results from the primary research study enabled the researcher to demonstrate knowledge which was context specific and relevant

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to the literature about spiritual healing within the domain of religious studies. It also described the contemporary position of spiritual healing in religious life, and alternative medicine in Aotearoa-New Zealand today.

One of the major procedures many healers use to effectively heal the physical, energetic or etheric levels is a hands-on approach to the patient (healee) in treatment, either through actually touching the body or holding the hands a short distance off the body. The results of my primary research demonstrates that these methods of healing confirm the literature and are practised today. Illustrated experiences of healers and healees during spiritual healing interactions, as described in chapter four, indicate that through spiritual healing physical changes occur during healing interactions. Results of biophysical changes in pulse rate, blood pressure, and cranial rhythm, as well as experiential findings, show evidence for an energy ('e') exchange between the healer ('s') and healee ('s') during the act of healing with both people being affected and indications of a higher spiritual source ('S') at work during the interaction. From this study an equation for spiritual healing is proposed as follows:

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} 's' & + & 'S' & + & 'e' & = & 'H' \\ \text{(spirit of healer)} & & \text{(higher Spiritual source)} & & \text{(energy)} & & \text{(healing)} \end{array}$$

In Aotearoa-New Zealand, conventional medicine, nursing and religion have failed to treat the whole person, i.e., body, mind and spirit. Although their philosophies encourage the holistic approach evidence indicates that there is limited knowledge available within the professions and some role confusion for the provision of spiritual healing. However, a 'holistic' philosophy has always been part of alternative medicine and in both Britain and America alternatives

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are becoming an accepted and established part of their health care systems. There is currently a growing interest in alternative medicine and natural therapies within the health professions in Aotearoa-New Zealand and units of learning are being developed for the New Zealand Qualifications 'Framework'. Indications are that spiritual healing will become a major aspect of religious life and alternative medicine over the next decade in Aotearoa-New Zealand.

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