One of the members of our church claims to be able to sense electrical disturbances in the body "energy fields" and by "therapeutic touch" regulates them so as to bring internal harmony to the organs. Have you any comments?

The most basic assumption of therapeutic touch practitioners is that there is an "energy field" around the body that can be sensed and favorably altered by the practitioner. This belief is reminiscent of the "animal magnetism" that was very popular in the nineteenth century.

Interestingly, an 11-year-old Emily Rosa, who was the youngest person to ever have an article published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA, April 1998: 279: 1005-1010), was the one who caused enormous embarrassment to the "therapeutic touch" group. It is like the biblical text that says "A little child shall lead them."

Emily heard her mother talking about therapeutic touch (TT) and decided to do a little study for a science project at school.

Her experiment tested 21 experienced TT practitioners by asking them to sense an energy field in situations in which they could not see whether there was a person present or not. The 21 practitioners were unable to discern whether a person was present or not, thereby showing conclusively that they could not detect the "energy fields" they were supposed to be able to sense and manipulate.

Obviously, these people are deluding themselves. What has made the matter unfortunate is that many of the practitioners of TT are registered nurses who, by reason of their nursing credentials, bring an aura of respectability to the practice.

The story of the emperor's clothes illustrates the delusion that these practitioners are working under. Obviously, just as it was a child who yelled "the emperor has no clothes," Emily Rosa has yelled "the TT practitioners can't feel energy fields."

It is about time we adults wise up to the nonsense of this type of "quackery."

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