

## HERBOLOGY AND CHRISTIANITY

### THE OLD HERBOLOGIST

Let your mind wander back a thousand years or so to medieval Europe. Picture this scene somewhere in the great forests of Germany...

A woman and her teenage daughter are finding their way through the woods. A sheet of paper with a hand-drawn map is held by the mother, and they seem somewhat nervous. Finally the mother speaks to the daughter.

"This must be the place. Back a long path to a little stone house is the final direction. And this seems to be it."

As they approach a big cat stretches himself on the stone wall beside the walk. They approach the old wooden door and the mother hesitantly knocks. A shuffle is heard inside and soon the door is opened with an old, friendly-looking man inside.

"Hello, may I help you?", he smiles out.

"Uh, are you Mr. Bechler?" the mother asks.

"Oh yes, that's me. What can I do for you?"

"We, uh, came for help. Uh, we have been told that you could heal my daughter. Are you the man that has, uh, the potions and stuff to heal."

"Well, that's me. Come on inside."

His friendly smile and the smell of his wife's lunch cooking give the place a homey atmosphere which begins to calm both visitor's anxious feelings.

"We have walked since 6:00 this morning to get here. A neighbor has told us you helped heal her warts and my daughter has had indigestion now for about a year. Is there anything you can do for her?"

"Well, well. I suppose so. The gods have given powers within all the trees and plants in this woods. And if a man knows how to use them, there's not much that cannot be healed."

"Really! Oh I hope you can find something for my daughter. We have tried different things ourselves, but nothing seems to work. Is there anything for indigestion?"

"Oh sure," chuckles the old man "I've had lots of those cases already. In fact, there are many plants that have powers for that. Tell me more about your daughter's problem and I'll see which ones will be best for her. Also I'll need one of her hairs from her head."

After a short discussion of details, the old man opens a door to the side in which can be seen rows of bottles, mixing bowls, a chart of the stars, a few old hand-made books, and other utensils; all showing signs of persistent use. The man enters the room, ponders at the chart a few minutes, then selects several bottles. With the girl's hair in hand he grabs an arrowhead-shaped stone tied on a string, which he hangs over each substance for a bit. Nodding his head and murmuring to himself, he returns shortly with a selection of powders and an oily substance in a small crock.

"These should do you. Actually you wouldn't need all these. These two here are the strongest. This is real good also. And this one may be a help too. It is up to you. I recommend the first two, the other two are up to you."

"Well, uh, just how much will these cost?"

The old man figures a little and names a price. A month's supply of all four will equal about four day's wages. The mother decides to take all four. What is left of her money that she returns to her purse seems to be skimpy.

"Oh, how we thank you! I can hardly wait to see her better. I'm so glad you could help. It's so nice to have people like you around to help. How did you learn all these mysteries, anyway?"

With another grandfatherly chuckle the old man replies, "Well, I have in my study some old papers from way back. The ancients studied the stars and wrote down their mysteries and how to interpret them. And the gods that made the forest have shared their secrets with men at times. With the proper stone one can measure the power in each product. The gods have put powers in the plants, and all we have to do is know how to use them. Rightly used they can make a man live a long time. I am still learning more all the time."

Another knock on the door and the old man says, "Well, well. Probably another customer. I don't want to rush you off, but I need to take care of this next person. If your daughter is not well within a month, come again. It may take a little time to fully recover. The powers in the plants have to push out all the evil matter in her."

With this the mother and daughter leave for the six hour walk home.

## THE NEW HERBOLOGIST

Bring yourself now to America in the 21st century. The story is similar in many ways. A few details have changed. Instead of walking six hours, they drive six hours. A Rand-McNally atlas guides them most of the way. A business sign by the house reads "*Nature's Marvels Herbal Remedies* sold here. Grown organically!"

Instead of crediting the gods with putting "powers" in the plant, the old man will say "God (meaning the Christian God) has put vitamins and minerals in the plants. The Bible even says that He made the herbs for medicine." Had the old man looked, he would not find that in the Bible, unless he included the Book of Mormon as scripture. (One could possibly come to this conclusion from the apocryphal book Sirach (Chapter 38), but even this does not specifically make this statement. More on this later...)

Instead of claiming special powers by being grown "in this woods", much merit is placed on the fact that it is grown "organically".

Other details that have changed is that the old man probably does not make his own concoctions any more, but buys them ready-made and brightly bottled from brand-name companies. The astrology chart is likely gone, but amongst his many shiny hardback books one might find a book that uses the same information. Also, the pendulum may not be around, but again, perusing through his books you would likely find similar veins of thought.

He still charges what seems exorbitant prices, and has the same confidence that he can heal about anything that comes along. And instead of evil powers being pushed out, he may claim that "body toxins" need to be cleansed out. And he still may claim he has obtained his knowledge from the old times-way back, perhaps even from ancient Indian medicine or medieval medicine; maybe from an old German herbalist that lived hundreds of years ago in the black forest that knew a lot about ancient herbal medicine!!!

Welcome to "pharmakeia 2000 A.D."!

For those who are not familiar with the title, an explanation is due. 'Pharmakeia' is a Greek word used in the Bible. Galations 5:22 is one place, Revelation 9:21 and 18:23 are some others. Also Revelation 21:8 and 22:15 contain similar words. Our English word 'pharmacy' is a derivative from this. But for a clear definition, let's look at a few dictionaries and other research sources.

## DEFINING THE TERM

Biblically (KJV) we have sorcery and witchcraft.

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon gives this info-"1. The use or the administering of drugs. 2. Poisoning 3. Sorcery, magical arts." Under the word 'pharmakeus' the following is contained- "One who prepares or uses magical remedies; a sorcerer" "Pharmakon- a drug; an enchantment" "Pharmokos- pertaining to magical arts"

Vine's Dictionary gives this- "primarily signified "the use of medicine, drugs, spells"; then, "poisoning" then, "sorcery," He goes on to say that the use of drugs was generally accompanied by incantations etc.

Webster's Dictionary includes these words in the origin of the Greek word pharmakon,-"to practice witch-craft or use medicine, -poison or medicine, -drug,"

From these sources it seems we can deduce the following-

1. Pharmakeia in a broad sense includes many different types of witchcraft; casting spells, water divining, iridology, astral projection and on and on...
2. Pharmakeia in a stricter sense is the use of magic with potions, drugs, medicines, or other substances.
3. Pharmakeia in it's strictest and original sense was using potions, drugs, medicines, or other substances without magical incantations etc.

## WHAT ABOUT ALL THIS?

For Christians, we need to discern in what sense God means when He uses the word "pharmakeia" in scripture. When does using a drug or herb become sin? Never? Always? Only with incantations?

The scope of this article is not to cover all the diverse forms of sorcery. Many books have been written on that subject already. The use of "magic" has infested so many areas, and taken so many forms, it would take a long time to describe it all. The particular focus of this article is on medicine, particularly herbology, and its connection to the occult world.

It's a touchy area. Just mentioning a possible connection between herbology and sorcery is enough to raise eyebrows and blood pressure in some. As medical costs spiral upward, more and more people are looking for other sources of help besides the established modern physician. Vitamin supplements and herbal remedies are a multi-billion dollar business anymore. But with its particularly close connection to the sin of witchcraft, herbology definitely needs an investigation. So, here we go!

## USING OUR DISCERNMENT AND COMMON SENSE

So what is the difference between eating a carrot, and healing cancer with a carrot?

Perhaps that sums up the issue. The Bible and common sense tell us that we need to eat to stay alive, and that God gave the plants and animals for mankind to eat. And a carrot has proven itself to not be poisonous- therefore men use carrots for food. An old wife's tale says carrots are good for your eyes, but another one says that this is not true. Another present promoter of eating herbs claims that all sicknesses could be eradicated if everyone ate only herbs. He evens says the Bible backs him up! WHERE DOES COMMON SENSE AND SCIENCE END, AND SORCERY (or fables) BEGIN?

Back to our word study: it seems we can picture in our minds what happened. Men began to eat and use herbs. In turning from the one true God to polytheism, man also began to believe such things like trees, rocks, and the stars were gods. And if you ate a portion of god, would you not then be like that god? Such thinking naturally led them to believe some plants had mysterious powers. In the Orient, the yin/yang theology would naturally lead to the thinking that some plants had positive powers and others had negative powers. Depending upon which one a person ate, he boosted his negative or positive powers. The variations of this thinking are numerous. Thus the idea of "pharmakons" came into being.

Was there any scientific value to all this? Did their idolatry stumble across reality at times? We'll leave that as a possibility for now, and continue with the evolution of "pharmakeia".

As these 'drugs' or 'potions' became more standardized and prescribed by healers, it was natural for it to be mixed with other occultic practices. The use of divining pendulums to find which potion would be best, or consulting the stars for guidance which would be best, or chanting over the medicines, or who knows what else...it was all mixed together. And so, as time went on, the word "pharmakeia" was used as a description of the whole thing.

Mixed in with this is the old wife's fables that arise naturally. Some man lies sick in bed with the flu. His wife finds some blackberries that day and he drinks some of the juice for supper. Next morning he is a lot better. The news goes out- Blackberry juice will heal your flu! He tells all his grandchildren about the time the blackberry juice healed his flu. And five generations later you have people who drink blackberry juice whenever they get the flu! Simply an old wife's fable. And 1 Timothy 4:7 instructs what to do with such.

And along the way, mankind occasionally stumbled upon scientific fact. Not enough greens on a sea voyage and you get scurvy. Wash a cut in water and it does not get infected as easy. A broken bone splinted back in place grows back together again.

As time went on the 1800's AD came about. Knowledge increased rapidly. And then the 1900's. A new branch of medicine grew that hitherto was almost non-existent. This is chemical medicine. For a drug to be accepted, it had to be thoroughly tested and proven. Double-blind tests made sure that the medicines were not placebos. The chemical make-up of each drug was standardized and measured for each pill or shot. Many of the chemicals came directly from plants used for centuries as medicine, but were made a 1000 times stronger (for example, Reserpine, which was discovered in Snakeroot, is 1000 times stronger than the whole root) so as to be potent enough to actually change body chemistry.

And the old medicine began to fall away as quackery. The old and the new were at odds. The old began to accuse the new of poisoning people because

the new medicine was strong enough to produce side effects. The new scorned the old for not being strong enough to do anything.

As the new medicine took the monopoly (in the US anyway), rising costs began to cause some to look for alternatives. Add to that a return to paganism and pantheism, and a new interest in the old medicine has come about. Just look at the attention acupuncture has recently gotten, for an example. But more predominant is the interest in "natural" herbal remedies. It's booming business these days!

But wait a minute! Is it real science, or a revival of old-time "pharmakeia"? Let's at least take a look.

## DRAWING A LINE

It seems the line between eating a carrot and healing cancer with a carrot can be drawn partially by separating established, proven science from pagan philosophies and old wives tales. This, of course, is not an easy task sometimes. However, it may be easier than we think. Let's consider a few examples from a local public library.

Of the dozen or so books on herbology available at my local library, only one was based upon what I deemed to be pure science. It told of the author's studies with certain plants, and how he tested the effectiveness of them in double-blind studies (double blind studies give some of the recipients a valueless remedy, to make sure that the recipients do not respond in a placebo effect. A placebo effect is when people respond to a medicine in their mind, and the medicine actually does nothing). This particular book gave the percentage of the desired chemical that the average plant contained. By figuring the weight of each plant, multiplied by the average percentage (the amounts vary from plant to plant even of the same specie) contained of the desired chemical, one could tell how much plant was needed to receive the needed amount of the desired chemical. The author was honest enough to say you need to take a scales with you when you buy your herbs, if you want a standardized dose each day.

Now let's look at some of the other 90% of the herbals.

1. Medicine of the Earth- This book contains the following quote:

"I often feel nearer to understanding a plant through a story or name rather than through a scientific listing of its chemical makeup or a precise botanical description". In the books contents, it supports the "Doctrines of Signatures" (a belief that a plant will help the part it looks like. Such as if a plant has a leaf that looks like a heart, it is good for the heart.), astrology, Yin/yang theology, homeopathy, and aroma therapy.

2. Herbs for Health and Healing- This book contains this quote in the introduction, "Opening ourselves to Nature's Wisdom" (Notice not God's wisdom!)

"Another difference between herbalism and conventional medicine is that herbalists almost always recommend other complementary therapies, including acupuncture and massage..."

On the front flap, this is found:

"Some herbs that regulate the body almost seem to have inner intelligence, with the ability to perform many different functions."

3. The Good Herb-Recipes and Remedies From Nature- On the back flap it says this: "...'The Good Herb' is the only guide to put us all back in harmony with Mother Earth." (Biblically, as new-born Christians, the earth is not our mother. The Heavenly Jerusalem- the New Testament Church has this honor!)

4. Herbal Medicine-The Natural Way to Get Well tells us this:

"You should be striving to rebalance the body, to restore your native energy level so that the body can cure itself..." and "you might need pressure or manipulation techniques".<sup>7</sup>

These types of statements I have seen in many herbals in the homes of Christians. Where is the discernment? Perhaps you are thinking "What's so wrong with these quotes?" Notice the shift from faith in God, to subversive (and even blatant) suggestions to pagan philosophies and practices.

Which brings us to that point...

## **PAGANISM'S HERBALISM**

One of the Cherokee myths went something like this. The population of humans grew. As humans increased, they killed the animals. In revenge, the animals put diseases on man. And then:

"When the plants, who were friendly to man, heard what had been done by the animals, they determined to defeat the latter's evil design. Each tree, shrub, and herb, down even to the grasses and mosses, agreed to furnish a cure for one of the diseases named, and each said: 'I shall appear to help man...'. Thus came medicine, and the plants, every one which has its use if we only knew it, furnish the remedy to counteract the evil wrought by revengeful animals. Even weeds were made for some good purpose... When the doctor does not know what medicine to use for a sick man, the spirit of the plant tells him."

The same book tells how the oracle at Delphi (I think she was considered the prophet of the god Jupiter) would go into a trance, by the smoke of the slightly hallucinogenic laurel plant, and utter out remedies for the sick.

Herbal remedies are old. Practically all ancient societies had their "cures". Pliny taught that turnips provoked lust, and that a cucumber that had never touched the ground aided in a woman's conception. American Indians prayed to tobacco, and because of the psycho-active properties of peyote, it earned the reputation as strong medicine. A mystic nun, Hildegard of Dingen, (who had visions) of about 900 years back was told to "write what you see and hear". Her spirit teacher taught her that most illnesses were caused by the cardinal juice phlegm. Of course, we now know phlegm does not even exist... One of the popular claims for the patent medicines of the past was as a blood purifier, a term used for cleansing of toxic materials and evil spirits.

What does all this have to do with herbology? Well, plenty. Over the centuries, approximately 70,000 plants have been used for remedies. In modern medicine, only about 500 are used, and of these, very, very few are used in their whole form. A little mathematics show that this is less than 1%. Would you take your car to a mechanic with a 1% success rate?!?! In an article called "What will happen to Alternative Medicine" in Time magazine, Leon Jaroff goes as far as to say, " 'Alternative Medicine' is merely a politically correct term for what used to be called quackery."

More important than the low success rate of actually being proven science, is the high rate of herbal remedies being attached to pagan philosophies. As a Christian, would you go to the oracle of Delphi for an herbal remedy? What about a Cherokee medicine man that communicates with the spirits of the plants to find out which one you need? Or, perhaps would you consult your

local astrologer for advice about what the stars say which herb is good for you? Would you go to the Chinese herbologist that has come up with his list of herbs from his yin/yang paganism? What about the man that diagnoses their strength with a pendulum? Will you use willow bark to purify your blood of all toxins and evil spirits? Hopefully, as a Christian you would give a definite, unashamed NO to all the above questions. Now for the real stinger...

As a Christian, would you go to your local library or bookstore and consult a book that includes information derived from any of the above (or other paganistic) sources? This is where the wake-up call needs to sound loud and clear, fellow believer in Christ! Many professing Christians think nothing of consulting herbals, with little question of the source of the remedy. Take the popular book, "Back to Eden". In it the author himself admits that he has learned many valuable things from the American Indians. Of the hundreds of listed remedies in this book, how is one to know what the source was. Some old wive's tale? A pagan medicine man...who knows? Of the several books I looked through at the local public library, many openly admitted allegiance to other alternative practices, and most of them had comments like, "this is an ancient remedy", or "the Chinese have used this for centuries", or "the Indians have used this extensively". This connection is supposed to verify the validity of their use. In my mind, it makes for some mighty big question marks. Was that ancient Chinese remedy based on yin/yang? Did the old Indian use derive from the Cherokee medicine man consulting the spirits of the plants? Who knows? Sadly, the attitude of many Christians is "Who cares!"

## WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

It has been with amusement at times when I have heard a Christian say, "The Bible says God gave all the herbs for the healing of mankind!". Several times now I have asked such a one to please show me where. After a hurried flipping of their Bible, they usually respond like, "I can't find it now, I'll have to take more time later." As of yet none have shown me such a scripture. **It simply does not exist.** Yet, the idea persists amongst us. What the Bible does say about herbs is that they have been given for food, or for "use", but never does it directly say for healing. The only herb recommended to eat for healing was of the leaves of the trees of life that grow by the river of life

that flows from the throne of God! Where you will find the doctrine that God gave the herbs for healing is in the Apocrypha. Even in this section of writing, (Sirach 38:4) the phrase "The Lord hath created medicines out of the earth" is broader than just herbs. Protestants and Jews have generally rejected the Apocrypha because of its Greek influence. The idea of making reconciliation for the dead (See 2 Macabees 12:43-45) is also contained in its pages, as well as the idea that good deeds can purchase atonement (See Sirach 3:3,14, and especially 30). Another place one can find the doctrine that the herbs were made for the healing of mankind is in Mormon books. (Perhaps part of the reason that the idea persists that the Bible teaches that herbs are God-given remedies comes from the fact that I have seen a herbal (in a Christian home) that had some Mormon quotes boldly stating such a thought. The English of these quotes were of the KJV-type English, and the person not knowing his Bible would think it was a biblical quotation.) Mormonism is a big promoter of herbology, with around 90% of herbal companies based in mormonized Utah. Last, and not least, is that many pagan religions seem to promote the idea also.

With paganism's earth worship, sun worship, nature worship, and etc., it is easy to see why so many herbal remedies exist. In my perusal of several herbals, I found approximately 23 diseases or body organs that a common dandelion was supposed to help. Comfrey had over 15, and sweet clover had 13. Not a one that I can remember referred to scientific double-blind studies to support these claims. One book revealed that mothers would give dandelion to smell to their children and hope they would not wet the bed for the rest of the year! How is a reader supposed to sort through all the paganistic influence in these books?

The Bible gives instructions for the sick. James chapter 5 is a good place to start. Not one of the herbals I looked through suggested the prayer of faith, calling for the elders, or the anointing with oil in the name of Jesus. Which brings us to...

## **THE GREAT DECEPTION**

It is my concern that a great transfer of faith often occurs in herbology (and other alternative practices) when Christians begin to delve into it.

1. Herbology often states that God (or gods) put healing in the different plants. All we need is to find them out. This theology shifts faith from the Creator to the created, and has no biblical support.

2. The word "natural" appears in most herbals, which seems innocent and even good to the unsuspecting. However, again it can cause a shift in faith from the God that made nature, to nature itself. Old paganism and new paganism (New Age) worship nature, and "natural things".

3. The prayer of faith shall raise the sick. If a cure for everything is available just waiting for us to use it, who needs faith in God?

### DRAWING SOME LINES

1. Any herbal that openly acknowledges or promotes involvement in other witchcraft practices (iridology, acupuncture, "muscle testing", etc.) should be immediately discarded (and repented of if used indiscriminately).

2. Any herbal that gives broad and sweeping statements of what a certain herb can do is highly suspect. (Ex.- Dandelion is good for the liver.)

3. Any herb (or diet) promoted as a do-all, wonder herb is to be highly suspected. (Ex.- Comfrey heals cancer, AIDS, and mental disorders.)

4. Any herbologist connected with other occultic practices should be avoided.

5. Any herbal over about 20 years of age should be highly suspected. It is only in the last few years that accredited testing has started on herbs in their natural form. Although many herbals promote the idea that the older the better, the opposite is true. The older ones are more likely to be tainted by paganistic influence than a modern scientific, chemical-analysis type of herbal (the which are rare, when it comes to actual bona-fida studies).

6. God's procedure as what to do when sick has been outlined in the Bible. Read, obey, and put your confidence in what it has to say. If you do not believe in the prayer of faith, nothing will happen if you merely go through the form, because such praying is not a prayer of faith.

7. Any herbal or herbologist that draws away your faith in the Creator, and points it to the created should be avoided.

8. Only herbals with scientific, chemical-analysis, unbiased, double-blind studies, and honest assessment of what a certain herb can and cannot do should be accepted.

9. Do NOT believe it when someone tells you that the Bible says that God made the plants for medicine. The Bible does not say that!

Which, considering all the above, leaves one without a lot left in the realm of herbology. From my study of this subject, this would be less than 5% (I am being charitable with this figure. I really wonder if 1% is not more accurate) of the available published material. Popular Nutritional Practices: A Scientific Appraisal reports that "The majority of herbs (indeed the majority of all substances) are probably placebos and have minimal good and bad effects." [parenthesis theirs, speaking of their natural state]

But we have Christ. All power has been given to him in heaven and earth. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. You can trust him!

And go ahead and eat all you want of the tree of life, the leaves of which have been given for the healing of the nations. I do not think you can overdose on that one!

-Mike Atnip

(The sources for this study were found basically in the public library at Cambridge, Ohio.)