Distractions members from failures

We also believe the church uses testimonies to distract members from failures. After our son’s death from meningitis became publicized, many testimonies were published with healings of meningitis. We believe if the testifiers or their children really had meningitis at all, it was the viral form, which is not treated with medicine and is usually self-limiting, rather than the bacterial form, which is usually fatal without antibiotics.

After toddler Robyn Twitchell died of a bowel obstruction, an adult woman testified that she didn’t have a bowel movement for three months and then her collapsed lung. The lung may reinflate on its own, usually fatal without antibiotics.

The church has a harder time finding healings of diabetes to talk about, but the front cover of the Christian Science Sentinel for July 26, 1999, proclaims “diabetes healed” in big letters. The church has a zap strategy: one healing cancels one failure.

One healing proves system scientific

What continues to be disturbing about the modern testimonies is that church members believe one anecdotal healing is evidence that Christian Science is a scientific system for healing everything. One James Heiland testifies that he went to a Christian Science Sunday school as a child even though his parents were not Christian Scientists. At eight years old he woke up one morning unable to move, so his parents took him to a hospital, where he was diagnosed with pneumonia and a collapsed lung. They were told “the collapsed lung had to be removed so surgery was scheduled for two days later.” The child prayed during the night and was healed. The healing was confirmed by x-rays and the boy was sent home.

“After this healing I knew that Christian Science was the best way to follow,” Heiland writes. “I became a church-accredited practitioner promoting Christian Science as the best way to follow.”

The church has raised his four children in the faith and has written about his son’s healing. He has raised his four children in the faith and has written about his son’s healing. He has raised his four children in the faith and has written about his son’s healing. He has raised his four children in the faith and has written about his son’s healing.

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Withholding information prevents free and rational choice

As ethics professor Margaret Battin points out, the Christian Science church has no controlled studies to indicate the probability of its healing anything. It does not report or keep track of its failures; the testimonies are full of “false positives” giving the faith credit for healing self-limiting conditions. The church “compromises the possibility of autonomous choice” by withholding information and base-rate data. “The basis on which a Christian Scientist makes a choice [for spiritual treatment] is not rationally defendable,” she concludes.

To an outsider with critical thinking abilities the testimonies do not prove that Christian Science heals disease and certainly not that it is safe to rely on when a child is sick. Church members, however, are predisposed to believe that God heals and those testimonies are how God becomes real to them. Their power is also enhanced by the fervent sincerity of the testifiers and the veneer of science.

Gifts from Atheists for Human Rights

CHILD gratefully acknowledges gifts from the Minnesota-based Atheists for Human Rights. For the past two years this organization has chosen CHILD to receive the offering it takes up at its winter solstice gathering.

Children’s Healthcare Is a Legal Duty, Inc.

136 Blue Heron Place, Lexington KY 40511
Phone 859-255-2200
Web page: www.childrenshealthcare.org

Equal rights for children under the law

hydrocephalus. Sara is Christina’s sister and Wenona’s aunt.

CHILD has information on 89 Church of the Firstborn children who have died since January 1, 1975, nationwide. Anointing with oil, laying on of hands, and fervent prayer by many fellow church members are the families’ preferred way to heal disease.

At Hays’s trial their attorneys reported that the denomination had about 100 U.S. churches with between 16,000 and 20,000 members. Most are west of the Mississippi River.

The defense attorneys also reported that Firstborn members refuse military service “because the Bible forbids killing.”

Does church tell members to notify state agencies?

The website www.firstborn.info states, “If you choose not to take your child to a doctor, then we urge you to immediately notify the county health department and the state department of human services using our [sick child notification forms].”

The rationale apparently is that the state can then intervene and get the child medical care and the parents’ status with God won’t be tainted by making their own decisions.

Following that directive would save lives of some children though not all, given the limited abilities of state agencies. If the parents know their child is sick, they should be the grownups and take the child to a doctor themselves.

The press has reported this statement as the denomination’s directive to members. However, the Church of the Firstborn has no central denomi-
national authority and does not put out an official webpage. We’ve been told by a former COF member that the author of the website is Norman Retherford, who is not considered an orthodox spokesman by most church members. He has been a pastor of two tiny breakaway groups. He was “odd” and “never seemed to quite fit in” with “mainstream” Church of the Firstborn attitudes, we were told.

Oregon: from worst to among best

As CHILD members know, we are very proud and grateful for what we accomplished in Oregon. Both in 1999 and 2011 CHILD was the entity that initiated the bills to repeal Oregon’s religious exemptions from providing medical care for sick children. Oregon went from being the worst state in the country—with religious exemptions from homicide by abuse or neglect, manslaughter, criminal mistreatment, criminal non-support, neglect and failure to provide—to being one of six states with absolutely no religious exemptions from a duty to provide medical care to sick and injured children.

We fervently hope no more Oregon children would die from religion-based medical neglect after Governor Kitzhaber signed the second repeal bill into law in June, 2011.

2009—last child death among Oregon Followers

Oregon’s last Followers of Christ child fatality was prematurely born infant David Hickman, who died in September, 2009. Given that two Oregon FOC children died in 2008 and a third was neglected for months while a tumor was displacing her eyeball, we feel that the new laws have changed the behavior of the Followers and saved lives of children.

Another likely reason for the change in their behavior is the stiff six-year prison sentence given to the Hickmans.

Some Followers have reportedly reacted to the new laws by moving to Idaho where twelve FOC children (that we know of) have died without medical care between 2011 and 2013 and authorities do nothing about them.

However, while the Followers of Christ remaining in Oregon are reportedly getting medical care for their children now, two Oregon children have died in another faith-healing sect since the new laws were enacted. Austin Sprout, 16, died of peritonitis after his appendix ruptured in December, 2011. His family belonged to a Church of the Firstborn in Linn County.

Syble Rossiter has died of untreated diabetes. Her family belonged to a Church of the Firstborn in Lane County.

My husband and I are deeply saddened by these deaths. The Firstborners have computers and televisions. Surely they knew about the recent prosecutions of four sets of Followers of Christ parents and the six-year prison sentence given to the Hickmans. They can read the scores of comments in the media by Oregonians incensed at their injuries to children.

Prosecutor worked to educate Firstborners

In 2012, Erik Hasselman, Lane County Asst. Dist. Atty., met with leaders of Austin Sprout’s Church of the Firstborn and explained the laws passed the year before that clearly required all parents to obtain medical care for their children regardless of their religious beliefs. He also sent a letter that church leaders told him they had distributed to all members who had minor children or were of childbearing age. The leaders said they believed the members would obey the law.

So Austin’s parents were allowed to plead to a lesser crime and were sentenced to five years probation with strict conditions on getting medical care for surviving children.

Hasselman told the press that the congregation was “very receptive” to complying with the law and that, hopefully, with the “public education” his office accomplished, such a death was “unlikely to ever happen again.”

Yet only fifty miles away and less than a year later, 12-year-old Syble Rossiter has died of untreated diabetes in another Church of the Firstborn congregation.

For the next nine years, there were no credible reports of faith-healing abuse in Oregon. But in 2008, children in an Oregon City church again began to suffer and die. This time, though, our state laws held the perpetrators responsible.

Even so, nothing could bring back the lost lives of three of our state’s children—Ava Worthington, Neil Beagley, and David Hickman—or fully relieve the blindness of little Alanya Wyland. These are children that most people in Oregon public life still remember, and that remembrance is due to you.

When these crimes occurred, you left your home and moved here with your husband and colleague Dr. Doug Swan, working once again to ensure that Oregon’s laws fully protect our children. In 2011, it was my privilege to sign into law the complete repeal of Oregon’s religious shield law. The bill was passed unanimously by both houses of our Legislature, a rare occurrence for an important law, and a remarkable achievement for any law dealing with religion. Oregon progressed from having the worst religious shield law in America to one of only six states that have none at all.

This is a source of great satisfaction and enduring peace of mind to all of us who were involved.

Fifty years ago this summer, President Kennedy made one of his most heartfelt proclamations when he said, “For the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children’s futures. And we are all mortal.”

Of these most shared human traits, the only one that brings universal joy is our love for our children. The state of Oregon, therefore, thanks you for helping us to manifest this love in a way that will last, generation to generation, long after our children become parents, and their children do, too.

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September 18, 2013
John A. Kitzhaber, M.D.
Governor

Rita Swan, Ph.D.
President and Co-founder
Children’s Healthcare is a Legal Duty

Dear Dr. Swan,

It is my pleasure and honor to congratulate you and thank you today on behalf of the State of Oregon, for your important and honorable work—done mostly alone, against powerful forces—that now protects Oregon’s children from crimes committed against them under the guise of religion. Because of you, more than any other person, today all of Oregon’s children, regardless of their parents’ beliefs, can go to sleep at night feeling safe, and awaken to healthier, happier lives. They are protected, finally, by not just the love of their own parents, but by the laws of this state.

This was not always the case. In 1998, during my first term as Governor, Oregon was one of forty states that let child abusers hide behind religion, and was one of only six states that allowed a religious shield against homicide. Oregon had the most damaging religious shield law in America, and more than seventy children had died in one Oregon City church alone.

Within one year, your work with the Oregon Legislature and the Governor’s Office resulted in a law that made massive improvements in Oregon’s protection of its children.

Your work, as always, quickly had a ripple effect throughout America, inspiring important changes that you helped guide in the religious shield laws of Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, Hawaii, Rhode Island, Delaware, Arizona, Minnesota, and North Carolina.
The mom walked the floor holding the baby and declaring the Truth until she felt “a little quiver, and life returned to the small body. The practitioner came and spent the night with [them]. The child was in a semiconscious state.” During the night he was healed. CSJ Aug. 1969:442.

**Severe pain, protracted illness, symptoms ignored**

Testimonies describe children being in severe pain or sick for weeks. They brag about “looking away from the body” and ignoring the child’s symptoms. When a baby has psoriasis, the heater tells a Montana mother not to watch the baby’s “body for material improvements.” CSJ Jan. 1973:44

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**Parents’ concern for child is wrong**

A St. Louis mother writes that her daughter “had a high fever that left her listless for days,” but “it was a time of great spiritual growth for the whole family.” The practitioner “treating” the girl “told us to free her by freeing ourselves of any false sense of responsibility for her well-being.” CSJ Sept. 1974:552

A New York woman writes that her daughter “had been suffering for days from a very high fever and pain throughout her body. After much praying and purification of self, and at the very time when the illness seemed to be at its worst, I humbly asked God what to do. The answer came almost audibly, ‘Rebuke the evil spirit.’ This I did, silently and purification of self, and at the very time when she became unable to retain her food, and there was a strong fear that she would not recover. The great question I faced was whether I would still love the truth and work for the cause of Christian Science if the child should not live. At last I was able to answer, ‘I shall only study the harder to be better able to help others in the future.’ Then I went to bed and slept peacefully. In the morning the baby was as well as ever.

Less reckless behavior seen in testimonies today

Testimonies about children’s healings in Christian Science periodicals today are less dramatic. They do not describe suffering or dire symptoms. They certainly don’t have testimonies saying that their child’s death would not bother them. Some parents write that they intend to go to a doctor if their child does not get a Christian Science healing quickly. And some even admit that they did go to a doctor of their own free will though of course in the published testimony they don’t credit the doctor with getting the child healed. In pre-1980 testimonies children who had medical care usually got it because of pressure from a non-Christian Science relative.

“**No hierarchy**

Several recent testimonies also depprofessionalize the practitioner. The writers say they called a practitioner to “pray with me.” The parent and the practitioner are just a couple of friends both doing the same thing: praying. The church’s public relations manager, Phil Davis, said in 2010 that the practitioner and the patient are “equals. There’s no hierarchy in Christian Science.” CSJ Feb. 2010: 38

This is, in our view, a strategy to protect the church and practitioner from civil liability. (In legislatures, meanwhile, the church claims to have a health-care system with professional providers and an excellent track record that should be reimbursed by government and the insurance industry.) Continued on page 8
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Although this “metaphysical work” is inspirational to Christian Scientists, it looks mechanistic to me now. It is easy to think up the doings of abstract spiritual forces.

**Daughter’s death does not faze parents**

The reason this testimony offends and disturbs me, however, is that I know that eleven months before it was published Mr. Maas’s 12-year-old daughter Christine Elise was taken to a hospital dead on arrival. She had had no medical care, but over a year despite earnest Christian Science work the healing was not complete while half of our son’s ankle, and she commanded him to walk on it. She walked all over again. The practitioner and the patient are “equals. There’s no hierarchy.”

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Classic Christian Science methodology

Among the most disturbing to me was the testi-monies of Albert J. Van Luttenberg Maas in St. Louis. He tells of his young son’s sitting his head on a concrete floor. Over three weeks Mr. Maas re-jected all the “false claims” of the symptoms. For example, “material sense tried to convince us that the healing was not complete while half of our son’s face was expressionless and immobile,” but the family knew that “nothing could paralyze our joy and gratitude to God. Then the little boy’s healing was “complete.” CSJ Feb. 1973:102

The testimony is boilerplate Christian Science: handle guilt/parental responsibility, handle fear, take each symptom and “prove” its falsity by rever-sing it with an opposing spiritual truth. Be joyful and grateful all the time.

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My husband and I are deeply saddened by these deaths. The Firstborners have computers and televisions. Surely they knew about the recent prosecutions of four sets of Followers of Christ parents and the six-year prison sentence given to the Hickmans. They can read the scores of comments in the media by Oregonians incensed at their injuries to children.

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What continues to be disturbing about the modern testimonies is that church members believe one anecdotal healing is evidence that Christian Science is a scientific system for healing everything. One James Heiland testifies that he went to a Christian Science Sunday school as a child even though Christian Science is a scientific system for healing everyone. He has raised his four children in the faith and has the boy was sent home.

“After this healing I knew that Christian Science was the best way to follow,” Heiland writes. “We believe that the state can then intervene and get the child medical care and the parents’ status with God won’t be tainted by making their own decision.

Following that directive would save lives of many other members of the Church of the Firstborn have done.

Wenona is the daughter of Christina and Loyd Rossiter of Albany, provided no medical care and presumably relied on prayer and ritual instead as many other members of the Church of the Firstborn have done.

Wenona is the daughter of Christina and Loyd Hays, who were charged with manslaughter and criminally negligent homicide for letting their 7-year-old son Anthony die of acute lymphocytic leukemia without medical care. Loyd was convicted of negligent homicide in 1996 and sentenced to five years probation. Jurors said they acquitted Christina because she was dominated by her husband.

Wenona was 18 when her brother died. She surely was aware of his illness and death and the criminal proceedings afterward.

In 1981 the Hays family was also in court during a seven-month losing battle to keep infant Sara Jensen from getting medical treatment for hydrocephalus. Sara is Christina’s sister and Wenona’s aunt.

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The website www.firstborn.info states, “If you choose not to take your child to a doctor, then we urge you to immediately notify the county health department and the state department of human services using our [sic] child notification forms.”

The rationale apparently is that the state can then intervene and get the child medical care and the parents’ status with God won’t be tainted by making their own decision.

CHILD gratefully acknowledges gifts from the Minnesota-based Atheists for Human Rights. For the past two years this organization has chosen CHILD to receive the offering it takes up at its winter solstice gathering.