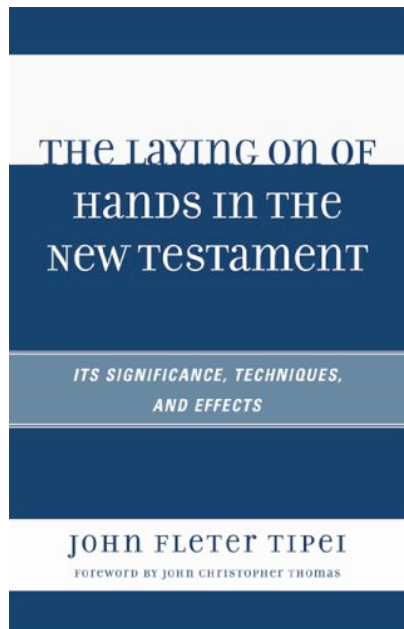


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Tipei, John Fleter

The Laying on of Hands in the New Testament: Its Significance, Techniques, and Effects

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John Fleter Tipei's book is a minor revision of his doctoral thesis, written under the supervision of Ralph P. Martin, Stephen D. Moore, and Loveday C. A. Alexander at the University of Sheffield, England. Tipei serves as associate professor of Biblical Theology and Rector of the Pentecostal Theological Seminary of Bucharest, Romania. He is also an ordained bishop with the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee. This book examines the practical techniques, implications, and definite effects of the laying on of hands in the New Testament period.

The introductory chapter reviews in a critical way earlier studies of the laying on of hands in the Bible and corroborates the purpose and delimitations of this book and the methodology used. According to Tipei, the laying on of hands (LH—Tipei's abbreviation) was performed on different occasions in the tradition of the church. It was a signal used in blessing (e.g., Mark 10:16 par.), for healing (Mark 5:23; 6:5; 8:23: 25; Luke 4:40; 13:13; Acts 28:28), in commissioning and ordination (Acts 6:6; 13:2; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6), and for the conveyance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17; 19:6; Heb 6:2) (2). The following two chapters are dedicated to a study of the setting (Old Testament, the first

century C.E. Judaism, Greco-Roman and Near-Eastern literature) of the laying on of hands as it was performed by the early church.

Chapters 4–7 are dedicated to an exegetical study, each discussing a specific use of LH in the New Testament. To understand the method of LH in healing, Tipei mentions that, in order to study the origin of the New Testament practice of LH, one should look in the Old Testament, given the fact that the LXX was the Bible used in primitive Christianity.

For example, the first incident of LH in the Old Testament describes a gesture of blessing: “And Israel stretched out his hand and laid it upon the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand upon the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the first-born” (18). The blessing and the gesture by Jacob, Daube argues, is not so relevant, and neither is the position of the hands (19).

Leviticus 9:22 illustrates another way of blessing, consisting in the lifting up of Aaron’s hands toward the people whom he blesses. Clearly, on this occasion LH would have been considered impossible. However, Tipei observes that LH “is not an indispensable gesture of blessing in the OT” (19). But the purpose of LH is known in a different way by scholars, even though for some the gesture means nothing more than a physical sign of the conferral of blessing.

In chapter 3 Tipei surveys the pagan writings of the Greco-Roman world, especially those of the first century C.E., looking for the situations in which LH took place and the importance known to the gesture in each case. The Greek and Roman thought that the power to heal by hand is not merely the special privilege of the deities but is also possessed by humans favored by the gods. Healing by the laying on of a deity’s hand was also known by ancient Egyptians. They thought that all the gods of their pantheon possessed an inner virtue that could be given through LH, particularly “on the nape of the neck and the spine” (93).

In the Hellenistic era, especially, kings and emperors were considered instruments of gods, selected by the latter as mediums of their powers. It is interesting to observe that LH was considered among the healing methods used by the miracle workers in the pagan world. However, at the beginning of the Christian period, Seneca (4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.) says: “If, therefore, a physician does nothing more than feel my pulse [*manum tangi*]....” It is difficult to evaluate here whether the touching or feeling was understood by Seneca as a means to transfer healing powers. It seems that touching with one or both hands may point to the gesture of LH. It is unquestionable that the idea of transmitting healing power by way of touching was well known in the Jewish and Hellenistic world.

Chapter 4 examines the function of the gesture in the process of healing. Particular consideration is given to the inner procedure of transfer of power through physical contact and healing. An appropriate analysis of the method of Jesus of healing with practices of his generation challenges the notion that the origin of the healing touch is Hellenistic. The LH relationship with the healing ministry of Jesus is mentioned in the Gospels in different sections. Jesus heals by pronouncing the healing, by using mud and saliva, by simply touching people, by laying hands on them, and occasionally by being touched by people. It is clear, according to Tipei, that there are only five occasions when it is reported that Jesus laid his hands on the sick (118).

The next chapters are dedicated to LH in the Gospels of Mark and Luke and the book of Acts. The custom of blessing someone by laying hands on the head is shown in the Old Testament (Gen 48:14, 17). There is no knowledge about the connection of this practice in the pre-Christian time. Tipei points out that the gesture is confirmed in the New Testament in the Ascension of Isaiah. The story of Jesus blessing the children is mentioned by all three synoptic Gospels. The Gospel of Mark mentions that the manner of touching the children was by laying hands on them.

According to Tipei, Mark makes use of touching and LH interchangeably in Mark 10:13 and 10:16. He adds that, "After Jesus hugs the children, he blessed them while laying hands on them" (176). Most scholars, however, take the verb *κατευλογέω* as nothing more than a clear form of *εὐλογέω*, telling how Jesus blessed the children. The author did not see the importance of Mark 10:16. It is clear that on this occasion Jesus did not just make the gesture of blessing the children but laid his hand on them; it is not a mere symbol of transferring of a blessing.

Among the various topics of Luke-Acts studies, the reception of the Holy Spirit is an important one. In the book of Acts, LH is connected to the reception of the Holy Spirit three times: hands are laid on the Samaritan converts (Acts 8:17), on Saul (Acts 9:17), and on the Ephesian disciples (Acts 19: 6).

The author observes that there are other examples in Acts when the Holy Spirit comes in a direct manner from God, with no human action. The question is: Does Luke purposefully make such an association? In addition, is baptism or LH that which gives the Spirit? LH is important because it transfers more than a simple symbol. On the basis of Acts 2:38, water baptism is the *locus* for the reception of the Holy Spirit, the sacrament having full value (184).

In contrast, the context here suggests that the promise of the Holy Spirit makes allusion to the promise of Joel 2:28 and the prophetic empowering (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4, 8; 2:33).

Tipei rightly observes that “Thus, although Acts 2:38 can be understood as making a close connection between conversion-initiation and the reception of the Spirit, it cannot be taken to imply that the reception of the Spirit is initiatory” (193). The reception of the Holy Spirit was promised to God’s people since Old Testament times, and this promise was given to everyone: old, young, sons, daughters, and servants. The issue of whether the reception of the Holy Spirit is implicated by Luke as being initiatory has to do more with the character of the gift than with the temporal connection between baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit. It is clear that baptism and the receiving of the Holy Spirit by LH are two different things.

LH is also found in the Pastoral Epistles to include an effective way of assigning new responsibility and imparting a spiritual gift to fulfill the responsibilities in the church. Paul, according to Acts, received the Holy Spirit when he was baptized. There are many different opinions about this issue. The supporters of this position argue that the attention on Acts 9:17 is fulfilled in verse 18 (204). However, the Bible says that Ananias, in verse 17, laid his hand on Paul and said: “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” According to Tipei, some scholars propose that a parallelism exists between verses 17 and 18 in terms of promise and fulfillment. As mentioned on the text above, on the other hand, Paul’s sight was restored first, and then he received the promise of the Holy Spirit.

The interest of this book lies in its subject matter, the methodology used, and the well-considered conclusions. The usefulness of research of this kind can be measured in terms of the stimulus it provides for further analysis and new studies.

Tipei’s book is interestingly written (although the book was not edited as it should have been), incorporating various thought-provoking insights about LH. All in all, the author has made a very valuable contribution to our understanding of the laying on of hands in the New Testament. Subsequent scholarship on this subject will need to engage Tipei’s work. This book includes an ample bibliography and an index of authors but no index of subjects or scriptural citations.