

## RELIGIOUS FAITH AS A PLACEBO FOR EMOTIONAL PAIN INCLUDING THE PAIN OF KNOWING YOU HURT SOMEBODY

The Old and New Testaments give a message about sin and suffering and sacrifice that nobody really likes. Yet it is strange how Jews and Christians do treat the faith as a placebo. That can be seen as arrogance. Some say the Bible is protesting too much - faith is a placebo no matter how much it seems to be about things we do not like. A placebo is a person trying to be more powerful than the truth. It works for a while but it is always fragile. How comforting it is if we could make things true by wanting them to be. If religion is a placebo that is how it is being one.

### A QUOTE

"Faith helps Christians because faith is just like a placebo prescribed by a doctor, the intent of which is to deceive patients into thinking it will solve their ills...The healing is therefore self-caused".

From Christianity is Not Great (All Quotes are from this excellent book, edited by John Loftus)

The quote is quite good but not perfect.

It is good that it states that faith and deception go together.

It is good to state that the healing comes not from faith but from the person with faith.

It needs to be careful with what it said about the healing. The placebo lifts your spirits so it is an emotional healing but if there there is a cancer there or something physically wrong it is dangerous to feel cured when you are not.

If you feel better it can help you fight off your illness better. The placebo NEVER directly helps the illness.

I'd have liked to see the above book develop the point that the placebo of religion is not just about feeling better and safer in a scary universe, but also about feeling good about your so-called sins and your bad side. The placebo deals with the symptoms you have not the causes so it should only be tolerated or facilitated for very serious reasons. The ethical person tells the sick person that a placebo was used and says, "Okay, now do you see that if you feel you are getting better and believe it, how good that is for you? You did this because of the placebo. The placebo did not do it. Go and feel confident yourself. You know your power now. Tell yourself that you have the power to heal yourself. Tell yourself that often and let that be your placebo from now on."

### WHAT IS THE PLACEBO?

The placebo relieves the pain that comes from knowing that things are not good.

If you believe in the placebo, and if you expect your mind and body to respond to taking one, that can produce a beneficial response. Imagine if you thought that green tea made you feel happier - taking the first sip would be enough to trigger a happy response.

The placebo makes you believe that it is not that bad or you are getting better or you are cured.

A placebo is fundamentally a mechanism by which you seek to dodge the truth because you think it relieves or stops pain. It does not follow that the truth is really as painful as you imagine. The sensible person makes the truth her or his "placebo" instead of trying to look for quick and ultimately harmful solutions.

The placebo is offered for problems with physical health and mental health. It is easy for people to imagine that it helps their souls when it fails to do anything for body and mind. Using a placebo for alleged spiritual ill-health is one of today's biggest and most foolproof scams. For example, there are people out there who sell spells and sacraments in order to develop peace of mind and heart in you.

A placebo works because of you. It is you. However, it is trying to give your power away to a belief or idea. A belief or idea has no power to look after you so a placebo is dangerous in that sense. It is like putting a baby outside by herself and expecting nothing bad to happen. The elements are not going to look after her.

The only sensible and responsible "placebo" comes from learning that you can and will accept the terrible things that cannot be avoided in life and that you can and will embrace the good things too.

No matter what you do or don't do, you either help or you don't. Helping a bit is fine but helping a bit is not fine if it is not enough. The question is not, "How do I help?" The question is, "What is the best thing to do?" These questions are not asked. The placebo should be used sparingly or as little as possible. If the questions were asked it would be uncommon.

## EXAMPLES OF A NON-MEDICAL PLACEBO

You look to the future and imagine your marriage could break down.

You are of great age and know that death could come tomorrow.

You are in cancer remission and know it could come back.

You can be in danger of being exposed by the papers as a criminal.

There are many things you can fear.

You don't fear because you tell yourself it is in the future.

You don't fear because you feel you will handle it with help or walk away.

These attitudes themselves are placebos. They stop you being crippled by fear and anger. They feel good at the time but when reality hits they are no help then.

## THE RELIGIOUS PLACEBO

Religion thrives on the same notions. Believers feel they are ready to do great works when they go to Church but as soon as they vacate the building they become disinclined. Worship has a placebo effect and gives the illusion that religion is a lovely thing.

Many people fear thinking for themselves in spiritual matters. They are prone to the notion: "God knows better than me and has done all the thinking. I will believe and trust in this religion or book he has revealed." It relieves them of the fear of getting it wrong or having to do the hard work themselves. It means they opt out of having to develop a faith of their own that conflicts with the ethos of their community or society and all the difficulties that may entail. Handing your responsibility to some authority is a placebo itself.

No matter what they think God does, religious people try to justify it. They allow nothing to refute the love of God even if it does refute it. People have fears and they relieve them by telling themselves that untestable doctrines are true. They are trying to immunise themselves by altering their perception. They have their placebo and they feel safe with it for nothing can refute it. So the placebo not only makes them feel better but they feel good that it is unchallengable. They do not fear any refutation of it. Such a placebo can be strong but it keeps the person away from reality so it is not worth it.

Not having the truth or not recognising the truth can be dangerous and painful. Religious people deal with this by imagining they have the truth. Religion can be a placebo for the suffering that comes from uncertainty or not having the truth. Some people believe it is always that...

Religion based on God is disgusting. It has you apologizing to God instead of apologising to the people you hurt. Religion is a placebo for "sin". Anybody who hurts a child and apologising to God is more important to him than to the child even if he does apologise to the child should be told to keep his insulting apology.

## THE FAITH PLACEBO

The faith placebo gives people false comfort. Giving a person a placebo that helps them, risks judging them as stupid people or people who care about what they want to think and not the truth.

Not knowing very important things or things perceived as important may be dealt with by telling yourself that you have faith and this is a gift from God which tells you what you would not know otherwise. This may comfort but it is a refusal to care properly about truth. Truth is better than faith. If faith is good it can still be the enemy of the best. The good too often is the enemy of the best.

The placebo can be given as a result of a misdiagnosis. You could die if you get a placebo for pain when the cancer has been missed. You could kill somebody if you depend on a sacrament or prayer that does not work in order to deal with your inclination to evil.

The placebo is faith in faith and that is a dangerous and that "stunts one's intellectual growth".

To have faith in faith leaves one vulnerable to religious and medical charlatans. This could outweigh any benefits. It is not worth the risk. And believers will lead the vulnerable to the charlatans and by encouraging religious faith in them they put them at risk.

The placebo helps emotional problems but it cannot affect the physical or spiritual (if we have a spirit!). It cannot make acne go away in time for the prom tomorrow night. It cannot stop a serial killer from killing by filling his heart with the grace of conversion.

Having a placebo creates a need for placebos that seem to validate it and creates an unhealthy fondness for placebos and fantasy based thinking. Religion encourages prayer which depends and prolongs the hold the placebo has over you.

Religion claims that faith fades away without prayer to nourish it. It is no wonder prayer nourishes faith when believers praise God for giving them what they pray for and when prayer doesn't work they pretend that it is working for God must have better plans and is using their prayers for something better than what they prayed for. Prayer is an exercise in escapism and cognitive dissonance. Substitute some superstition as touching wood or leaping three times for prayer and the same things will be imagined to result.

## ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER

Actions speak of what you believe more than your words. It is easy to think you believe you have healing power over sinners or bad people when you know fine well you don't. Words are an action too and do speak but we know action is the best speaker.

If religion really believes in its power to heal sin then why does it not take more risks with its claims?

It does not say, "Our prayers will stop people entering same sex marriages" when same sex marriage is legalised. It does not depend on prayer and Masses alone to stop abortion.

People who claim to have absolute faith in God or a healer do not act as if they do. In fact they act in such a way as to avoid anything that will disprove their faith. Thus they protect the lies they tell themselves - and others. They protect their placebos and hate anybody who might expose them.

Religion follows Jesus in saying that sin causes enslavement to it - in other words it has a strong addictive power (John 8:34). If a person claims to be healed of sin and forgiven and relapses too much, we should take him as an example of an addict who pretends to have recovered. He wants to fool you in order to feed his addiction. And even if faith in God's mercy is not bad in itself it can be abused as a placebo. Why would we believe that any sinner is really recovered?

## CHALLENGE THE FAITH PLACEBO

A placebo is not a good thing. At best it is a necessary evil. That being the case, it has to be gotten rid of as soon as possible. It makes people better at fooling themselves and others which means that they become prone to being devastated by negative events and people. This would be like a placebo in reverse - it does harm.

A good doctor will try to wean you off placebos. They are only for short-term immediate and important help. They are given to be outgrown. Religion is cruel for it wants to keep you hooked on its placebos. Religions toxic charm is part of its scheme.

It is evil to say you know something when you merely believe it. It is a lie and what if your neighbour claims to know that you are the Antichrist and that you should be killed? It is dangerous. Science is about beliefs for it is about working out what is probably true. Science is self-correcting. People are not keen on science for they like to think they can know things as opposed to merely believing in them. Beliefs and probabilities carry the risk of being wrong and harmful. There are indirect risks too. Once false idea can lead to an avalanche of errors. Beliefs and probabilities lead to confusion too for there is a lot of disagreement about what should be believed or regarded as probably true.

The popular view that you should challenge a person's moral beliefs but not their faith is a bizarre, unfair and dishonest one. What you believe about morality matters more than your religious beliefs! The view is only acceptable to a person who feels that faith is some kind of addiction or crutch and that it is dangerous for the believer to hear criticism and maybe

dangerous for the critic to challenge it. The view is acceptable only to a person who feels that morality should be treated separately from faith when in fact the faith has a lot of moral content. Obviously only faith that is a manifestation of hypocrisy can be enabled by hypocrites. A hypocritical faith is a placebo for the evil you have in your heart and that you actually do.

Some people feel that you must not try to wean a person away from religious belief. They confuse religious belief and moral belief. When they say they want the religious belief respected they mean the moral beliefs or they think that the religious and moral are too intertwined so to wean the person from faith is to wean them from morality. This view suggests that it is really morality that matters. Surely then it is okay for one religion to convert another religion as long as the moral code is not ruined?

#### FUTURE ORIENTATED PLACEBOS

Placebos help not just with current turmoil but with the fear that terrible things may happen in the future. "Don't let things get to you." "Whatever happens you will be okay." "God will lovingly protect you." All these thoughts make you feel you can face anything. It is easy to feel good about the dangers of future when they have not happened yet. But when the turmoil comes none of the thoughts will help. Religion tricks people to believe the future will be bearable and that they will never feel alone. None of these promises are true and are in fact a disgrace. If one fares badly and copes and feels supported by a higher power that is down to luck not their belief. The sense of being protected from unbearable suffering and the feeling of abandonment by God is the reason why people do daring things in the name of evil and power. We all know power-hungry people who don't seem to think that they could lose all they have in minutes or reap what they sow.

#### FINALLY

Faith in the supernatural or in God is not the same thing as religion. You can have faith but no religion but you cannot have no religion without faith. Faith should not necessarily be a placebo but that is what it becomes. It amounts to people using faith to feel better about hurting you. Take it personally.