

CHURCH TEACHING DENIES THAT THE PLACEBO EFFECT ALONE EXPLAINS THE POWER OF THE SACRAMENTS AND SINCERE PRAYER

Church teaching: The benefits of prayer and the sacraments cannot be put down to a mere placebo effect.

The Truth: So the Church leaders are psychiatrists? Didn't know that!

Religious people should be well aware of the placebo effect. If people think sacraments help or that prayer works, religion wants them to say it is God that is helping and not the placebo effect. This is sheer manipulation. Suppose it is true that taking communion makes you a better Christian, Catholics insist that for this to happen you must believe that it is the body and blood of Jesus Christ. They say that if you don't see it for what it is, Jesus, you miss the point and miss out on many of its benefits. What they are trying to do is manipulate you. Without belief, the placebo effect will be weak or nothing will happen at all. They are trying to trigger the placebo effect in you and then get you to fool yourself that it is God at work and not a mere placebo. It takes some arrogance to hold that the healing power of your positive attitude is really the power of God. Religion when it is dogmatic is dogmatic for it wishes to do exactly that. If communion has power it will work regardless of what you think of it. You do not need to believe in an antibiotic for it to help you. Religion's obsession with belief is a sign of conscious manipulation of the vulnerable. It takes pains to warn that unbelievers will be punished but it never explains why belief matters.

This is bullying.

We could be told by any Church that Mother Teresa got her strength to do good from prayer

The Truth: Most people who pray do not do as much good as they could for other people so we have no way of knowing if this is true, not everybody reports such strength. And many would take issue with Mother Teresa's goodness. Psychologists would not take such a simplistic view that it was prayer that empowered any good that Mother T did. Prayer must be anti-psychology then!

Church teaching instructs us that prayer must always be made in a spirit of gratitude to God. Even if we ask for healing for a friend, we must make sure first of all that we are grateful to God so that the prayer is made with gratitude at the back of our minds. Ungratefulness is offensive to God and will stop the prayer from being answered.

The Truth: Though Christians claim to believe God is in control they do not. They don't thank him for killing their babies with cancer. They don't thank him for letting them be abducted as infants and raped left right and centre by sick paedophiles. They don't dance up and down with spiritual delight at how God let Hitler come to power. If they don't want to celebrate the evil they could say they celebrate how the evil served good. How could prayers that deny God's plan and how he uses evil to do good really honour God? How then could any of their prayers work? If anybody is answering them, it is not God.

Christians say that evil is good that lacks something. So evil is good in the wrong place and time. That means they should rejoice in a baby's cancer for the cancer is not inherently evil so it must be inherently good. If evil is mistaken good then you must honour the good not the mistake which means you celebrate cancer. And if the cancer is inherently evil and is in no way good then God has created evil and to honour him is to honour something worse than Satan for even Satan cannot create evil!

Against the Christian insistence that prayer is good therapy we affirm that those who promote religious faith to people who are troubled do not have those people's true concerns at heart. The person who tells a person with commitment issues and who has promiscuous sex to pray instead of seeing a therapist is cheating that person. They are manipulating that person to dull pain with rationalisations. The same can happen if praying is seen as more important than working with the therapist. If they tell the person to prayerfully go and see a therapist they are encouraging that person to believe that prayer is only using the therapist as a tool to heal and that the therapist in herself or himself is useless. That is dangerous if prayer does not work. It is making the progress less effectual.

Christianity's scriptures teach that suffering is something to be boasting about (Romans 5:1-5) for sufferings bring patience etc. The scriptures forbid us to boast about our good deeds (Ephesians 2: 8 - 10) so nobody can pretend that it means that we are to boast about how we handle suffering. It means we are to boast about suffering but not boast about the good results it brings. This is masochism.

Suppose I pray for help. I get a good idea afterwards that solves my problem. Or I feel that the problem is not going to be so bad. Or I feel stronger about dealing with it. That these things may happen after prayer does not mean that prayer really caused them. If prayer does a placebo effect for consciences that will explain how so many people are so nasty in the name of religion and feel good about it. Prayer only leads to people being manipulated by religious delusions and lies. Why do I want to believe the good things were down to my praying? It is because I want to feel that God is on my side and going to protect me from anything really bad.

Religion leaves people unprepared and without other resources when trauma comes. The mother with a dying child who prays all the time instead of looking for a therapist will end up worse off than an irreligious mother who took all the secular help that was available.

Miracles are evil if they imply approval for the evil of prayer. And religion says miracles are about inviting us to experience the love of God. The miracle which is about the power of prayer and Jesus being alive to pray for us, the resurrection is thus blacklisted. It is top of the blacklist.

