

3. TOXIC RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS summarised by Bill Jackson from the book Toxic Faith by Stephen Arterburn & Jack Felton (Oliver-Nelson, 1991).

A. 11 Characteristics of a toxic faith system

1. Religious addiction is developed in a toxic faith system. The following characteristics differentiate it from systems, churches, and ministries committed to growing people in faith and developing their relationship with God

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

Those points certainly show that Roman Catholicism is one of the worst religions.

The first point speaks about religious addiction. Catholicism certainly teaches that religion is more important than spirituality. It is a religion built on spiritual abuse and it practices such abuse all the time.

2. "Special" claims

a. The leaders of toxic faith systems claim a special pipeline to God which places them at a level above all the others in the church which creates an atmosphere of unapproachability. The leader can use this superiority to manipulate the followers who either believe and obey or suffer the consequences

b. In the toxic system, the minister will set him/herself up as having a special destiny or mission that can be performed by no one else. This special anointing or calling many times is nothing more than the pathological need to be valued or esteemed. He/she can also posture special powers from God like the ability to supernaturally heal

c. The victimized followers, seeking a closer relationship with God but focusing more on the addicted leader than on God, lose contact with God and often fall away from faith permanently. Misguided loyalty allows the delusions of the leader to grow and destroys the faith of the loyal.

The only hope for everyone involved is for the leader who claims to be God's special officer to be forced into accountability or dethroned to protect other potential victims.

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

The second point speaks about how toxic religion has leaders who have a hotline to God. The pope and the Catholic clergy certainly claim to be infallible under certain conditions. No religious leader likes to be thought of as infallible all the time - that puts too much pressure on him. So not surprisingly, the Roman Catholic Church lays down conditions for infallibility.

The priesthood is like a caste and priests are often unapproachable.

They certainly think they have spiritual powers that make them superior to the laity.

The Catholic Church claims a special power to work out the truth - a power it says that no scientist or other religion has.

Faith healers fool people by making them think they are cured by them. As bad as this is, what the Catholic priesthood does is worse. At least the faith healers try to provide evidence. But the Catholic priests claim they have heal souls by feeding them with bread and wine they have turned into Jesus and forgiving sins and putting in virtue. The healing they give is undetectable and put beyond evidence. They have excuses for when the healing doesn't work. The excuse is that the person

didn't really want the healing so they never go it. If that is not cheating then what is?

3. Authoritarianism

- a. Churches and ministries are started and grown through the vision of a strong leader. The authoritarian leader comes to power because a driven personality accompanies talent and charisma. A toxic system arises when that leader moves into a free rein style with no real accountability. Often, this ministry is the first experience of authority for the leader
- b. Those who work in this setting find themselves either agreeing with the direction of the ministry or leaving. There is no room for compromise since the dictatorial leader believes that everyone should submit to his rule without question. Those who fear for their jobs or feel they may not be able to find similar jobs will comply with the leader rather than challenge certain decisions or actions that appear to be wrong. The leader and the people, therefore, mutually deny their accountability structures and wave the option of having safeguards in the system

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

The third point warns against leaders being authoritarian. Catholicism is authoritarian - in the places where it is not, it is really a case of the Church not being able to throw its weight around.

4. An "Us Versus Them" Mentality

- a. Religious addicts are at war with the world to protect their terrain and establish themselves as godly persons who can't be compared to other persons. They see themselves in the cutting-edge ministry and other people need to come into the light
- b. Those in the exclusive society believe they are serving God but they are serving a person, and that person's concept of what should be and should not be
- c. Any scrutiny of the ministry is seen to be an attack from the enemy

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

The fourth point says that toxic religion has an us versus them mentality. The strongest sign of such a mentality is when a religion claims to be the one true Church like Catholicism does.

Jesus Christ ranted about the world being in the control of the Devil. He said that the Devil will not put demons out of people - implying the Devil controls all people for he cannot have a kingdom unless he possesses.

5. Punitive in Nature

- a. The minister addicted to power punishes and purges the system of anybody who would upset the status quo
- b. To outsiders, the whole ministry appears negative and punitive, out of balance, and distorted from the love, acceptance, and forgiveness freely given by God and his Son

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

The fifth point is that toxic religion is punitive in nature. Catholicism is punitive in nature. It teaches that no good work can earn salvation but then it dares to teach that evil works earn everlasting damnation. This is not a very encouraging proposition. Plus they want to believe that sins such as adultery and idolatry and heresy will take one to Hell forever unless one repents - the punishment is more severe than the crime.

Jesus himself was punitive in nature. In Luke 13 we read about people who were murdered by Pilate and how Jesus remarked that just because they died that way it didn't make them worse or better as sinners than everybody else. He said they were just as sinful as everybody else and that unless his hearers repent they will "likewise perish". He said that the eighteen who died when the tower of Siloam perished were not more guilty of sin than anybody else in Jerusalem. Then he repeated that unless the hearers repent they will perish the same way.

God is ultimately in control of all things. Nothing happens unless he lets it happen. Even if we have free will to break the

law of God, God has consented for us to be tempted to break his law and gives us the power to do it. We do not sin in spite of God but because of him. If we sin in spite of him then he is not all-powerful and he is not God. Thus in this logic, it is perfectly acceptable to say stuff like Thank God for the tsunami like the Westboro Baptist Church did in 2004. And indeed if we really trust God and believe in him that is exactly what we will say!

The Catholic Church declares that if anybody thinks they know what Catholic doctrine is and they reject that doctrine they sever themselves by automatic excommunication from the Church. So anybody who questions the faith is purged from the system spiritually if not physically.

6. Overwhelming Service People get burned out by the service demands of the system which feeds on compulsive personalities

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

Jesus had the apostles leaving everything and serving him all the time.

7. Followers in Pain

Many religious addicts in the system are physically ill, emotionally distraught, and spiritually dead because they are looking to the leader and ministry to give them what only God can give.

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

Yes because they believe that God has authorised the ministers as his agents so to obey and serve the agents is to serve God.

If there is no God, then it follows that religion is evil simply because it takes people to a help that is not there.

8. Closed Communication

a. Communication is from the top down or from the inside out. Those at the top no longer hear the perceptions and needs of the people. The addicts on the inside no longer care about the needs of the people on the outside

b. Someone in the system has the job of shielding the leader from the truth by placating those who disagree and satisfying those who want a direct voice to the leader. The lieutenant is never to tell the leader anything but what he/she wants to hear

c. The organization eventually becomes ineffective because it loses touch with the people it is designed to serve, just like a father loses touch with his children

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

8. Closed Communication - the Catholic Church makes many decisions in secret. All religion keeps the archaeological, theological, scientific, historical and philosophical facts that contradict it away from the people. There is no such thing as a religion publishing books of science.

9. Legalism What you do is more important than who you are. Performance is everything.

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

9. Legalism was endorsed by the Old Testament God.

Legalism exists in the Catholic Church. If a Catholic simply cannot believe that contraception is wrong, the Catholic is still urged out of respect for Church authority to try to believe and pray for the grace of understanding and to tell people that contraception is wrong. The person is still obligated to refrain from it.

The Council of Trent said that if you go to confession and you repent your serious sins for the fear of Hell only, then that is acceptable as repentance. But rejecting the consequences of the sin is not rejecting the sin. It is the punishment not the sin that is bothering the person so by no means could this be considered to be true repentance. The Catholic is blackmailed to at least fear everlasting damnation in Hell when approaching the confessional to get his sins forgiven. To encourage a person

to practice fake repentance under the threat of Hell is to set up the person to sin even more in the future.

What you do is more important than who you are. Performance is everything with the legalist.

10. No Objective Accountability

- a. This is the key to a toxic faith system. If religious addicts were in healthy, accountable relationships with others, toxic faith would not be allowed to flourish
- b. A person accountable only to God is a person out of control

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

Jesus Christ condemned point 10. He said that the greatest commandment was to love God with all your powers ie in totality. We are to love our neighbour because God commanded it which means we do not love the neighbour for herself or himself but for God only. Love for God alone is expressed through doing his will for others.

Thus no healthy relationship with others is possible. People do not want you to be helping them just because God ordered it.

Also, the commandments of Jesus tell you that its all about God - practically speaking you see yourself as accountable only to God.

11. Labelling

- a. Labelling attempts to dehumanize persons so that dismissing them or their opinions is much easier. Rather than say that John Doe has made a negative comment, the addict proclaims that they are "traitors" or have a "critical spirit." The labels become rallying points under which the other followers can be moved to action to squelch a revolt. Once the label is in place, it becomes more difficult to see that person as a human with real needs and the potential for good judgment
- b. Because it is difficult to rally against rational, thinking people who have different views, labels must be used to polarize the opponents and energize the followers to fight against those opponents. The enemy is "shot" so the underlying issues that need to be considered can be avoided

REPLY BY PATRICK GORMLEY

11. Labelling - the Church labels people as mortal sinners. For Catholics, the mortal sinner cannot do any genuinely good work because he has himself on the throne and not God. So it is appropriate to describe them as evil. The greatest commandment is to love God and let him fully rule you in all things therefore the greatest sin is the sin of putting yourself before God.

Labelling attempts to dehumanize persons so that dismissing them or their opinions is much easier. Rather than say that John Doe has made a negative comment, the addict proclaims that they are "traitors" or have a "critical spirit." The labels become rallying points under which the other followers can be moved to action to squelch a revolt. Once the label is in place, it becomes more difficult to see that person as a human with real needs and the potential for good judgment.