

Faith and the Health of "My Whole Being"

As is my custom, I conducted some interviews before writing my response to the question, "Do you believe that faith can affect your health or is that a lot of new age nonsense?"

"A no-brainer," said a World War II med-vet. "How could anybody imagine that faith *can't* affect your health?"

"It depends on what the faith is *in*," said a hospice chaplain. "If you believe more in God's judgment than in his mercy, your faith can have a negative effect on your health."

"Faith can help your *inner* health when your outer health, health of body, does not have a hopeful prognosis," said a man on permanent disability.

"Regular church-going correlates with better health except in the case of church secretaries," said a church secretary. (She was ruefully remarking the strainfulness of this occupation, not commenting on "church-going" as public worship.)

1.....In the question, what follows "or" unwittingly explains the existence of the question. The religion-and-health connection was and is assumed by all but a thin sliver of humanity, the positivist-materialist sliver that severs spirit from body and denies the existence of spirit. "New age" spirituality and religion post-modernly restore the body-spirit living unity; instead of being "new" in this regard, it is re-old, restorationist.

2.....The science of commensurables (measurables/quantifiables/weighables) has been so successful that for short it's called "science" (Latin for knowledge). But the science (i.e., knowledge) of what can't be physically measured—faith, hope, love, the virtues and vices, poetry and the other products of "soul"—preceded by millennia the science of "body." Efforts to apply the principles of the latter to the realities of the former are laughable. / One such recent attempt gained widespread media attention. Correlating prayers for healing (how much prayer, by how many?) with healing, the study (predictably) found no measurable correlation. Beyond the measurable (i.e., "science" in the narrow sense), human consciousness is in the realm of metaphor and anecdote. The immanent and the transcendent are different levels, layers, or dimensions of reality. / An anecdote: Not many days after my 90th birthday, a surgeon announced that I was dying. Leaders of our church family gathered around my hospital bed, and we celebrated Holy Communion. The lead physician happened in on us and said, "Sorry for the interruption. What you are doing is more important than anything I can do." Dear reader: Whatever comment you may have on this event will say more about you than about the event.

3.....Fakes are compliments to facts as counterfeits are to authentics. Faith-healing is a fact inviting many fakes, who give a bad name to faith-healing and to faith. On a walk in 1942, Ernest Cadman Colwell (an eminent scholar of the Gospels, dean of the very liberal University of Chicago Divinity School, later president of the University) said to me, "It's ironic that those who want to see Jesus' healings as hagiographic additions to his story must now confront the fact that they are in *the earliest layer* of our information about him." Faith-healing is fact, a human fact in history and the here-and-now.

4.....In a 1969 "Newsweek," Kenneth Woodward remarked on my use of Psalm 84:2 in interviewing prospective faculty for New York Theological Seminary. I asked, "What are you longing for?" and "What are you singing about?" The New Living Translation (1996) well renders thus: "With my whole being, body and soul, I will shout joyfully to the living God." The Hebrew here uses "*basar*" for what you can see about a human being (call it "flesh" or "body"), and "*lev*" for all you can't see (call it "heart" or "spirit" or "mind" or "soul"). The unity and integrity of *basar* + *lev* is assumed. The Jewish and Christian doctrine of the resurrection further assumes that this unity-integrity is mysteriously revived after death, as in the resurrection of Jesus.

5.....As the Bible sees it – and as research increasingly confirms - a person's "whole being" - in sickness and in health - is a physical-spiritual continuum, making this "On Faith" question - indeed - a no-brainer.



Comments

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Willis, you present many good examples of folks who's health was enhanced by faith. Do you have any of the opposites? Are there examples of people with "no faith" suffering declines in their health as a direct result? Is there anyone who ever did it both ways and compared the results?

There are many paradoxes. Faith enhancing health is one of them for "the good die young" you know. But then nothing can possibly be healthier than going to heaven. I could be wrong about that last one.

Have you verified the supernatural being in the burning bush was really God yet? As going to heaven is the healthiest of activities going to hell most certainly is the unnn-healthiest. Don't you think or are you like the pope and just thinking about Lucifer being in that burning bush makes your head hurt? Headaches are an unnn-healthy symptom so I've heard. Thinking can wear your brain out too, unnn-healthy.

Take 2 Tylenol and call me in the morning. The cure could easily be worse than the disease.

POSTED BY: BGONE | JUNE 17, 2008 12:56 PM

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Can faith heal? Can it do what science can't? Simple test, give me one example of the power of prayer regrowing a missing limb, or even a finger. Not fair? I thought god was omnipotent.

Face it, a positive attitude can help you get better quicker but if you think spirits, god or little green men can replace medicine then you are in big trouble. There are plenty of quacks and conmen out there who will take you for every cent you've got.

There are many tragic cases of people who believed in this moonshine dying in agony of perfectly treatable diseases, or even worse letting their kids die of perfectly treatable diseases.

Belief in faith healing is not harmless new age puff, it's dangerous. It can rob you of your money, your health and your life.

POSTED BY: HAIRYSTEVE20 | JUNE 16, 2008 2:43 PM

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Editing advice

The underlining of a few words is conveying no meaningful emphasis. The wrong words seem to have been selected, and the visual effect is that of a useless distraction.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | JUNE 14, 2008 6:49 AM

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In other words....

1. Billions of people can't be wrong! After all, truth is established by majority voting.
2. You can't measure magic! If you try, I'll just create a new excuse why you didn't detect anything.

3. Yes, all those other faith healers are con men. But I have the power of JEEESSUUUSSS! Mastercard and Visa are accepted.

4. Let me distract you now with a "mystery" of faith.

5. The Bible says we have a spirit! So I'll claim research supports that too, since nobody calls me on any of the other stuff I just make up.

POSTED BY: ASH | JUNE 11, 2008 8:14 AM

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