Positive & Negative Effects of Religion on Health & Healing

Jan 13, 2011

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The Institute for Spirituality and Health at the Texas Medical Center, Houston, TX 77054
Thursday Class Schedule

• January 13, 20, 27 – John Graham, M.D., 3-week study entitled, “Religion and Effects on Health and Healing”

• **Jan 13**: Positive and Negative Effects of Religion on Health and healing

• **Jan 20**: Effects of Religion when Coping with Chronic Illness

• **Jan 27**: Effect of Religion on Well Being
Thursday Class Schedule

  - Feb 3: God is Everywhere and God Lives with Me
  - Feb 10: God Knows Me and God Receives Me
  - Feb 17: God Comforts Me and God Strengthens Me
Thursday Class Schedule


- Feb 24: Essential Spirituality in Patient Care.
Thursday Class Schedule


- March 3: Effect of Religion on Depression and Suicide, (chapter 7 - 8 HRH)

- March 10: Effect of Religion on Mental Health (chapter 15 HRH)
Thursday Class Schedule

- March 17: Effect of Religion on Anxiety Disorders, Schizophrenia, and other Psychoses (ch. 9 - 10, HRH)

- March 24: Effect of Religion on Alcohol and Drug Use, Delinquency (chapter 11 - 12, HRH)

- March 31: Effect of Religion on Heart Disease & Hypertension (chapters 16-17, HRH)

- April 7: Effect of Religion on Immune System Dysfunction and Cancer (chapter 19-20, HRH)

- April 14: Effect of Religion on Longevity; and, Religion and Disability (Chap. 21-22, HRH)
Outline for today’s talk
“ The Effects of Religion on Health & Healing”

I. Introduction
   – Definition of terms religion & spirituality

II. Positive Effects of Religion

III. Negative Effects of Religion
Introduction to the Series

- During January and March-April, 2011, we will be looking at Dr. Harold Koenig, Michael McCullough and David Larson’s book,

- *Handbook of Religion and Health (2001)*

Koenig’s definitions

- Religion – is an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols designed to: (a) facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (God, Allah, higher power, ultimate reality) and (b) to foster an understanding of one’s relationship and responsibility to others in living together in community.

The Great World Religions provide people with a story (history); feast days; sacred writings, art and music; clergy; architecture – churches, synagogues, mosques, temples -- and, a philosophy or worldview (for living in this world and the next)
Koenig’s definitions

- Spirituality – is the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning, and about relationship to the sacred or transcendent, which may (or may not) lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals and the formation of a community.

Ken Pargament: Spirituality is the quest for the sacred.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Distinguishing Characteristics</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td><strong>Spiritual</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Community focused</td>
<td>Individualistic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observable, measurable, objective</td>
<td>Less visible and measurable, subjective</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formal, orthodox, organized</td>
<td>Less formal, less orthodox, less systematic</td>
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<td>Behavior oriented, outward practices</td>
<td>Emotionally oriented, inward directed.</td>
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<td>Authoritarian</td>
<td>Not authoritarian</td>
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<td>Doctrine of good/evil</td>
<td>Not doctrine oriented</td>
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Major Dimensions of Religion

1. Religious belief
2. Religious affiliation
3. Organizational Religiosity
4. Non-organizational religiosity
5. Subjective religiosity
6. Religious commitment/motivation
7. Religious “quest”
8. Religious experience
9. Religious well-being
10. Religious coping
11. Religious knowledge
12. Religious consequences
8. Religious Experience

- Religious experience is that dimension of religion examined by the American psychologist William James (1902) in his classic books, *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

- James focused on the dramatic, the spectacular, and sometimes bizarre religious experience of patients and famous people in history.

- This includes both Gradual and Sudden Conversion experiences, "Born Again" experiences, mystical experiences, physical or emotional healing, and other experiences relating to God, the Transcendent, or ultimate reality.
10. Religious coping

- Coping involves religious behaviors or cognitions designed to help persons cope with or adapt to difficult life situations or stress.

- Coping activities include: (1) praying to God to change a situation or to give emotional strength; (2) consciously deciding to trust in God or to “turn a situation over” a situation to God; (3) reading inspirational scriptures for comfort or relief of anxiety; (4) talking to a minister or chaplain to help work through a problem, or (5) employing any other religious thoughts or behaviors that are used to relieve stress.

- Ken Pargament has written a book entitled, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping*. (we will look at next week)
The Positive Effects of Religion on Health
We will Address Positive effect of Religion on Healing (from disease):


• March 3: Effect of Religion on **Depression and Suicide**, (chapter 7 - 8 HRH)

• March 10: Effect of Religion on **Mental Health** (chapter 15 HRH)
The positive effects of religion:

- March 17: Effect of Religion on **Anxiety Disorders, Schizophrenia, and other Psychoses** (ch. 9 - 10, HRH)

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Benefits of Religion According to OZ

Healthy advice from America’s favorite physicians
THE YOU DOCS

Healthy advice from America’s favorite physicians

by Michael Rolzen, M.D., and Mehmet Oz, M.D.

Feel the spirit

WHETHER you meditate or say the rosary, sit in simple silence or shout out ecstatic praise to the heavens, 90 percent of us pray — and more than half of us do it daily.

Of course, what you pray for and whether the heavens deliver varies widely. No prayer can make you skinny, erase wrinkles or get teenagers to clean their rooms voluntarily (though we’re open to miracles).

Research on how prayer affects others is conflicting and controversial, although new, headline-grabbing data suggest that praying for others might improve their physical health — if the sender and the receiver are right beside each other. What is clear: Your spiritual health is somehow hard-wired to your physical well-being.

Contemplate these:

1. Going to religious services, it turns out, can protect against age-related memory loss and thinking problems.

2. Weekly attendance at services and regular religious study at home may cut your risk for high blood pressure by 40 percent. Going more often than weekly may nudge your systolic blood pressure down by three points.

3. Sending up a simple prayer for your mate’s well-being could help you feel less wronged and more ready to forgive.

4. People who go to services more than once a week have half the risk of major depression as those who attend less often.

5. Regular prayer increases your concern for other people, say researchers from Florida State University, which could help you make your part of the world a brighter, better place.

6. "Stressed out? Focusing on your spiritual values can quiet the anterior cingulate cortex — a collection of hair-trigger brain cells that fires up when things start going wrong in your life, raising your stress levels."

7. Thinking about God or other spiritual beliefs keeps you calm under fire, according to new research from the University of Toronto.

Fish oil is better for heart health

Q: Can I get the same heart-health benefits from flaxseeds as I do from fish oil?

— CYNTHIA, Port Jervis, N.Y.

A: Nope. Fish oil has got it all over flaxseeds in terms of DHA and EPA omega-3s, the ones that studies have shown make blood platelets less sticky, reducing the risk of blood clots that can cause a heart attack or stroke and also help lower your blood pressure and triglyceride level. That’s because flaxseeds, unlike fish oil, are indirect sources of omega-3s. Flaxseeds are packed with ALA (alpha-linoleic acid), of which your body converts about 2 percent to EPA omega-3s, and 2 percent of EPA gets to the really effective DHA.
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Benefits of Religion, according to Dr. Oz

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The assumption that religious faith has a positive effect on health has many sources. Religious scriptures, religious professionals, faith healers, popular writers, religious health professionals and “a few leading” health professionals sympathetic to religion all make this claim.

There have been movements to integrate religion into the clinical practice of medicine and psychology. That’s what we will look at now...
In Religious Scriptures, the devout are rewarded with good health

Psalm 103:2-5 “Bless the Lord, O my soul; and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”

Proverbs 3:8 “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.”

3 John 1:2 “I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.”
Religious Professionals

Sermons by ministers and rabbis often encourage devout religious belief and practice to achieve not only spiritual growth but also greater well-being, happiness, purpose in life, and fulfillment in marriage, family, at work and in relationships with others.

Likewise, in liturgy and hymns sung during religious services often include themes having to do with joy, peace, confidence, overcoming adversity and other positive health consequences of having triumphed over evil forces.
When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like the sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
“It is well with my soul.”

*It is Well with My Soul*, by Philip P. Bliss

There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole,
There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul. . .

*There is a Balm in Gilead*, Afro-American spiritual

Thro’ many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come;
Tis grace hath bro’t me safe this far, and grace will lead me home.

Amazing Grace, by John Newton & John Rees
Clergy in churches, synagogues, temples and mosques in America are important sources of healing and mental health.

10 – 20% of clergy time is spent in counseling. Add to that, nuns or chaplains in hospital settings. Today, many clergy have taken additional training and are licensed Pastoral Counselors.

So, a tremendous amount of counseling is done by Religious professionals in America.
Outside mainstream Christianity, there have arisen many charismatic groups including televangelists and faith healers who, in a dramatic fashion, claim physical “healings.”

People in wheelchairs stand up and walk, the blind see, and the deaf hear at their meetings.

Tens of thousands flocked to Kathryn Kuhlman and Oral Roberts. Lately, Benny Hinn and others.

Thousands have made pilgrimages to holy places like Lourdes, France, to receive their healing.
Positive Confession Movement

Similar to Faith Healers, the positive confession movement of Kenneth Hagin and Ken Copeland have had a significant impact on the beliefs of many evangelical Christians.

These men teach health and prosperity are provided in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and that believers may “claim” a promise from scripture and speak it into existence by the word of their mouth (a positive confession).

These groups are strongly criticized by mainstream religious groups but they attract thousands to their meetings.
The term refers to any Christian to the far right of center on beliefs. Yet, some fundamentalists reject faith healers and even avoid physicians, as well.

Fundamentalism arose in response to 19th C modernism in Christianity and held to five essentials: Biblical inerrancy, literal nature of the biblical accounts (miracles), the virgin birth of Christ, bodily resurrection of Christ, and salvation by substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross.

It also avoided social action seeing this as error of liberalism.

Fundamentalists typically believe healing was a gift that passed away at the end of the apostolic age.
Healing in non-Christian Religions

Just as Lourdes does for Christians, places of healing exist for Hindus (Benares, along the Ganges River); Jews (The Temple Wall in Jerusalem; and Muslims (Mecca, in Western Saudi Arabia).

In America, there are Jewish centers for healing and renewal (Elat Chayyim in Accord, NY and the National Center for Jewish Healing, in NYC; and, Buddhist healing centers (Medicine Buddha Healing Center, San Jose, CA).

The Dalai Lama visited Beth Israel Medical Center in 1998, meeting with physicians and scientists to discuss the common ground between modern Western medicine and ancient Buddhist practices.
Islam and Healing

One of the sayings of Mohammed notes that each illness has its treatment and that we should look for it:

“Seek treatment, because Allah did not send down a sickness but has sent down a medicine for it.”

Religion and Healing

Everything about our cultures and our sacred books urges us to know it is God’s will that we be healed.

The Children of Israel were challenged to live their lives in accordance with the precepts in Torah and told that if they did, they would prosper and: “If you pay attention to these laws . . . The Lord will keep you free from every disease.” Deut 7:15

For Christians, the NT gospels speak of how frequently Jesus engaged in healing the sick. The disciples were also sent out to be healers: “Jesus called the Twelve together ... and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. Luke 9:1-2
Popular Secular and Christian Writers

A number of well-known American writers such as Norman Vincent Peale and Dale Carnegie have included references to religious scriptures in their best-selling books.

Koenig says, “Hence, the wisdom of health (Peale) and success (Carneigie) appears grounded in the sacred writings of the Judeo-Christian Tradition.” Handbook, p 56

Another group of writers address health issues in the area of counseling: Tim LaHaye (How to win over depression, 1974); Bruce Larson (Living on the Growing Edge, 1968) and Robert Schuller (Tough Times Never Last; Tough People do! 1983).

Jewish popular writers include Rabbi Harold Kushner and his best seller: “When Bad Things Happen To Good People.”
Religious Health Professionals

Religious health professionals include:

- medical physicians,
- psychiatrists,
- psychologists,
- and other health workers

These are health care professionals who are trained in the secular tradition but who use religion in their clinical practices to complement (not replace) traditional therapies.
The Emmanuel Movement was the first organization of religious health professionals in Boston, in the early 1900s.

Medical Practice

In 1908, an Episcopalian minister, the Rev. Elwood Worcester, and a prominent physician at Tufts Medical School, Dr. I Cariot, coauthored *Religion and Medicine*.

In 1970s, Dr Granger Westberg, Prof of Preventive medicine at the Chicago School of Medicine, founded several Wholistic Health Centers in the midwest.

Along with the Emmanuel movement, Westberg’s effort was to integrate religion and medical care by involving religious professionals and churches. These movements did not gain momentum and had little influence on American medicine.
Psychiatric Practice


The Christian Psychiatry movement began at Duke U (Dr. William Wilson) and at the U of Georgia (Dr. Mansell Pattison) in the 1970 - 80s. They made attempts to organize training programs for psychiatrists interested in practicing Christian psychiatry (Psychiatry that integrates Christian beliefs and practices into psychotherapy and treatment for mental disorders).
This was followed by the emergence of a network of Christian psychiatry units in hospitals and at independent treatment centers (in the early 1980 – 90s). They were designed to attract the Evangelical Christian community who largely had been dubious about psychiatry and psychiatrists in particular.

The Minirith-Meier New Life treatment centers, the Rapha mental health centers and the Kairos mental health centers are the best known of these.

Among popular psychologists, James Dobson, filled the bookshelves with Christian counseling advice books.
In academic psychiatry, Brigham Young U professor Allen Bergin led efforts to integrate patients’ religious beliefs and values into the practice of psychotherapy.

In 1980 he wrote an article on psychotherapy and religious values, in which he argued that, unless psychologists sincerely considered and conceptually integrated the religious belief systems of clients into their work, they would not be fully effect professionals.

In his article he said that “Religious communities that provide the combination of a viable beliefs structure and a network of loving, emotional support should manifest lower rates of emotional and social pathology and physical disease” (Bergin, 1980, p 102).
Similar attempts have been made to integrate religion and spirituality into the practice of medicine. The best known are that of the Yale surgeon Bernie Siegel (Love, Medicine and Miracles, 1986) and Texas cardiologist Larry Dossey (Healing Words, 1995) and Georgetown internist Dr. Dale Matthew’s (The Faith Factor, 1998).

All argue that the religious or spiritual dimension of patients should be considered in medical care.

The fact that a substantial number of health professionals are themselves religious, have made efforts to partner with religious professionals, and use patients’ religious beliefs to speed healing contributes to the view that religion has a positive effect on health and healing, especially mental health.
Health Professionals sympathetic to religion

Another source of support for religion’s health benefits comes from the lectures and writings of leading academic health professions.

Practitioners in this category includes the eminent psychologist Carl Jung who wrote:

“I have treated hundreds of patients, the larger number being Protestants, a smaller number Jews, and a few Catholics. Among all my patients in the second half of life, there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because he had lost that which the living religions of every age have given to their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain his religious outlook.

(Jung 1933, p 229)
Health Professionals sympathetic to religion

A prominent medical professional who has emphasized the potential benefits of religion and spirituality on health is the Harvard Professor Herbert Benson, who helped create the growing field of mind-body medicine.

Benson has published extensively on the health benefits of the Relaxation Response in peer reviewed journals such as the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Lancet*, and *Science*.

Harvard holds a continuing medical education course entitled “Spirituality and Medicine” with world-wide attendees.

In recent decades, a growing number of highly respected mental health and medical professionals have spoken out in favor of the health benefits of religious belief and practice.
The Training of Physicians

This position has affected the training of medical doctors. In 1992 only four of 125 medical schools in the United State offered courses on religion and medicine. By 1999, more than 60 medical schools offered such courses and today virtually all medical schools have courses on religion and medicine.

Among medical schools offering courses on religion/spirituality and medicine include:

• Harvard
• Johns Hopkins
• U of Pennsylvania
• Western Reserve University
• George Washington U
Summary of the Positive Effects of Religion

Although Koenig’s book admittedly focuses on the Judeo-Christian tradition in America, physical and emotional healing plays a vital role in the belief systems of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, as well.

Many health professionals are themselves religious and have made attempts to integrate religious beliefs and healing methods into their practices.

There is now considerable momentum among U.S. medical schools to educate young physicians about the religious beliefs and practices of their patients and how they relate to health and healing.
The Negative Effects of Religion
Religion’s Negative Effects (chap 4)

In this chapter of the *Handbook of Religion and Health*, the authors examine what skeptics say about religion’s health benefits.

First of all, just because a religious person has mental or physical illness, does not necessarily mean the person’s religious faith caused their health problem.

Conversely, when we see a religious person is healthy, we cannot assume that his or her religiousness is responsible for their excellent health.
Sigmund Freud

Just as Freud clearly and convincingly taught the inner working of the human mind, he also presented his views on religion without ambiguity. His views were not favorable.

In one of his first papers was entitled, “Obsessive Acts and Religious Practices” (1907), he compared religious practices such as prayer and religious rituals to the obsessive acts of a neurotic.

This paper was followed by *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and *Psychoanalysis and Religious Origins* (1919). In these works he articulated his theory of religion, rooting it in the oedipus complex. In 1927 he wrote *Future of an Illusion* and said “Religion is the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity.”
Freud was not alone—Albert Ellis (1980s)

Albert Ellis – said, “Devout, orthodox, or dogmatic religion (or religiosity) is significantly correlated with emotional disturbance.” and “The emotionally healthy individual is flexible, open, tolerant, and changing, and the devoutly religious person tends to be inflexible, closed, intolerant, and unchanging. Religiosity is therefore equivalent to irrational thinking and emotional disturbance.” (Ellis, 1980, 637)

In 1988, he identified 11 pathological characteristics of religiosity: Religiosity discourages self-acceptance, self-interest, and tends to make human-to-human relationships difficult, are prone to fanaticism, encourages inflexibility and intolerance of others, too suffused with guilt to pursue their goals, and find it difficult to live in the real world.
Freud was not alone – Wendell Watters (1990s)

**Wendell Watters (1992)** – “Christian doctrine and teachings are incompatible with many of the components of sound mental health, notably self-esteem, self-actualization and mastery, good communication skills, related individuation and the establishment of supportive human networks, and the development of human sexuality, and reproductive responsibility.

He even said, “Christian doctrine can contribute indirectly to the development of Schizophrenia in a child born with limited capacity to adapt.

In another paper he said concerning depressive patients that they manifest characteristics that are “inevitable products of Christian belief system, one that preaches self-abasement . . . .”
Freud and other Psychiatrists

**Thus,** prominent mental health professionals in teaching situations in the U.S. have passionately argued that religious beliefs and practices, particularly those based in the Christian tradition, have negative effects on mental health.

Interestingly, this is the exact opposite of what religious professionals (in non-health professions), religious health professions (M.D., R.N., Phds), and some non-religious health professions claim and what abundant RCT studies have consistently shown.

In any other setting one would have to say many non-religious psychiatrists are prejudiced against religion and are unable to look at the facts objectively and scientifically.
Yet, there *are* negative effects of religion

Religious beliefs may adversely impact health particularly physical health in a number of ways:

1. Stopping life-saving medications
2. Failing to seek timely medical care
3. Defending the rights of children to receive medical care
4. Condoning forms of religious abuse
5. Replacing Mental Health care with Religion
6. Unhealthy Belief systems – God as distant, wrathful
7. Folk healers – controlling by communing w the “spirit world”
Research Showing Negative effects of religion

1. Authoritarianism
2. Prejudice
3. Alcoholism
4. Social and Community Integration
5. Physical Health
Summary of Negative effects of religion

• First, it must be said that a number of highly respected health professionals view religion as having a negative influence on mental health, physical health, or both.

• It is true that many people with mental health present with bizarre and distorted religious ideas and that religious beliefs and practices are used in pathological ways.

• Devoutly religious persons may have high expectations of themselves and of others. They may condemn themselves for having difficulties that they think religious people should not have.

• They may judge themselves and others harshly and alienate those who do not believe or act as they do.
Summary of Negative effects, continued . . .

Nevertheless, the claims of religious abuse and negative effects of religion rest largely on isolated case reports and highly selected case studies, rather than on population based systematic research studies (RCTs).

The fact is, some studies that show either no correlation between religion and health or reveal the negative effects of religion on health.

Many of these reports are older studies of college students and adolescents without mature faith or use cross-sectional studies that make causal inferences impossible or fail to account for variables which can effect the outcome of the study.
Summary of Negative effects, continued . . .

• What remains largely unknown is whether traditional religious beliefs and practices, as engaged in by the majority of adults in the U.S. and around the world cause negative health effects or result in abuse.

• If religion does have adverse effects on mental or physical health, this would be important to know.

• For example, do religious people rely on religious healing instead of traditional medical care? Or, do they tend to rely on both?

• And, do the majority of clergy sexually abuse children or dominate the lives of their parishioners? Or, do these happen only rarely?
Summary of Negative effects, continued . . .

• Finally, if negative religious effects do occur, do the health benefits outweigh the negative effects for most?

• These are studies which still need to be done.
Next Thursday:


- Jan 13: Positive and Negative Effects of Religion on Health and healing

- Jan 20: Effects of Religion when Coping with Chronic Illness

- Jan 27: Effect of Religion on Well Being
February Class Schedule


- Feb 3: God is Everywhere and God Lives with Me

- Feb 10: God Knows Me and God Receives Me

- Feb 17: God Comforts Me and God Strengthens Me
Feb 24 Class


• Feb 24: Essential Spirituality in Patient Care.
Next Thursday -- Grand Rounds

Thursday, January 20, 2011 at 12:00 noon
In the Denton Cooley Auditorium at St. Luke’s Hospital
Cardinal Di Nardo of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston speaking
All are invited to attend, but registration is required.