



It was recently reported that Dr Kent Brantly who contracted the killer disease, Ebola, in Liberia, West Africa has been surprisingly cured and says that God cured him by "answering to the thousands who prayed for him." He is a medical doctor all right. But the hitch is that he is also a Christian evangelist. In a conflict of interest his religion has got in the way of his science. Let me explain.

Ebola is the latest lethal disease hovering the globe. From time to time, we get such new evil visitors coming in to plague man. At one time, it was AIDS. Much earlier in human history it was Small Pox. Many such diseases that swooped on humanity have now been found a cure by scientists. AIDS is still a work-in process. Most cancers are in the same category. The latest malevolent visitor appears so fatal that thousands have already died. Medical people are in a rush to find a vaccine. The vaccine ZMAPP is being tested. And so the process of occurrence, suffering and cure continues.

At each turn, until scientists came out with successful counter moves popular belief looked to supernatural origins and gods and deities were placated. I remember when I was small and attacked by Chicken Pox my elders would say it was an 'Am-mawarunge Lede.' I cannot exactly translate that but I suppose it was a case of sourcing the disease to an entity outside the natural world. Today, it is common to hear even men and women of modern education attributing what seems a cure for a cancer here and a cancer there as the work of God. God has answered prayers! Australia's only saint, Mackillop, was supposed to have been a specialist in bringing about miracles to cure disease. Other saints have specialized in other diseases. Just google the index of patron saints and you will find an amazingly long list there. Just a few examples: Saint Agatha looks after breast disease; Saint Dymphia, insanity; Saint George, Syphilis and Saint Benedict, kidney disease. This is a historical list and many of those saints have retired by now as the afflictions have found cures and preventions.

Even Buddhists, who are enjoined by the Buddha to test their beliefs and keep an open mind, resort to Bodhi Pooja to cure a cancer or other terminal condition. We rush to the Bodhi tree and keep pouring water and the temple monk chants and chants. Pirith nool or chanted thread is tied round the wrist of the afflicted patient. The chants are about the qualities of the Buddha. How on earth can such chants be absorbed by thread and how on earth can the 'soaked' thread cure the unfortunate disease? Buddhists don't bother to question-just like the Christians. When it comes to religious faith we hesitate to ask ourselves.

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From immemorial time men and women, struck by what seems inexplicable find meaning in a supernatural being or force as being at work. At the beginning of humanity's settled existence, almost everything seemed supernaturally originated. Neolithic records have shown up the dominance of the supernatural in the fossils, bone and other remains that have been unearthed. Vedic beliefs in India are full of the supernatural. Since the birth of science and the use of the scientific method the huge veil of supernatural cloud has gradually receded.



## THE INCURABILITY OF RELIGIOUS CURE

Man has become wiser; taken life into his hands and now defiantly acts God himself. Yet, thousands of faithful men and women flock to the deity.

We now know that all our diseases are founded not in God or a god or other divine force but in the natural chain of cause and effect operative in nature. Many previously serious diseases are known to be caused by bacterial infections -by staphylococci and streptococci, for instance, and not by a deity up to his round of mischief. The latter is curable by a brand of penicillin and not by prayer or Bodhi tree worship. Once we know more about cancer or AIDS or EBOLA we will find a cure. From past experience, we need not lean on the supernatural during the ignorant phase.

Richard Dawkins (The God Delusion) mentions the story of a "bouffant-haired American evangelist" crying out before his gullible congregation to "give until it hurts." Please don't give your money to any divine middleman, church or temple to intercede with disease; give it to the relevant medical research foundations. The Bodi Pooja has

the administration of the drug and the cure had closely followed up on each other there was no need for him to find a distant, complex explanation. Have you heard of Ockham's razor? William of Ockham was a philosopher who lived in the 14th century. He pointed out that one must avoid complex explanations for an event when a simple one is ready at hand. "Among competing hypotheses the one with the fewest assumptions should be selected."

Explanations are not immediately obvious faithful persons are ready to give God the credit for the apparent cure. This is merely the application of the historical experience that wherever ignorance prevails religion must explain.

Evangelical Christians, evangelical Islamists and misguided Buddhists are doing incalculable damage to patients by encouraging the latter to resort to prayer or worship in place of seeking the help of evidenced-base medicine to find a cure or a relief.

We have been hearing a lot about faith healing these days. On this subject The American Cancer society issued a publication dated 17 January 2013 that states: "available scientific evidence does not support claims that faith healing can actually cure physical ailments... death, disability, and other unwanted outcomes have occurred when faith healing was elected instead of medical care for serious injuries or illnesses.... When parents use faith healing in the place of medical care, many children have died that otherwise would have been expected to live. Similar results are found in adults."

"One review published in 1998 looked at 172 cases of deaths among children treated by faith healing instead of conventional methods. These researchers estimated that if conventional treatment had been given, the survival rate for most of these children would have been more than 90 percent, with the remainder of the children also having a good chance of survival. A more recent study found that more than 200 children had died of treatable illnesses in the United States over the past thirty years because their parents relied on spiritual healing rather than conventional medical treatment.

In addition, at least one study has suggested that adult Christian Scientists, who generally use prayer rather than medical care, have a higher death rate than other people of the same age."

So there you are, have your prayers by all means but when it comes to serious diseases have faith in your doctor.



**Making Sense**

**Shyamon Jayasinghe**

By praising The Lord for his surprising cure Dr Kent was also doing a disservice to the progress of medical science by propagating the idea that medical research can stop so long as we mortals keep praying and praying and giving money (to the church tills) "until it hurts." Does he realize he has been very unethical here? Does he also not reflect on the senselessness of praying to an all merciful and omnipotent God to save his own creatures? Is God playing dice with his creatures? Secondly, why would God listen only to those who pray to him? Isn't he vain and arrogant if he accedes only to those who bend on their knees and beg him? What about the thousands who die in poverty and pain and who don't pray? Aren't they also not God's creatures? Is it a fair God who discriminates like this? The criteria of making sense don't apply here.

The fact is that however modern and educated a person may be he/she can be stupid or naïve when it comes to religious behaviour. Such power does a religion hold. Whenever a thing like a cancer remission is observed for which empirical