

Modern Medicine: A Neo-Christian Religion; The Hidden Influence of Beliefs and Fears

Olivier Clerc, France

About the author:

Olivier Clerc is a Swiss Journalist, living in France. He has been working in the field of personal development, health and spirituality for the past twenty (20) years, as an author, translator, journalist and publisher. He is the author of four (4) books.



When the Christian missionaries of the last three or four centuries were evangelizing so-called "primitive people", they believed that they had only to destroy or burn the various cult objects of these people in order to eradicate their religions, superstitions, and customs. Centuries after the conquistadors tried to stamp out the Inca culture, or the Inquisition tried to stamp out the protestant 'heresies', or the similar attempts to annihilate the Voodoo, or the many African and Asian religions, we know that such arrogant high-handedness does not work. These beliefs still continue today, sometimes under different guises, long after the objects of worship associated with them have been destroyed.

This lesson from history is not only valid for primitive people and their religions. It can equally be applied – if not more so – to aspects of our own modern society. Indeed, even a superficial study of contemporary culture will reveal that the supposed secularization of present day society is just an illusion. Even though most people do not conform to the outward show of religious custom and practice – mostly Judeo-Christian in western culture – the beliefs and superstitions remain deeply embedded in their subconscious, influencing many aspects of their daily lives without them realizing it.

And as several sociology studies have shown, the superstitious beliefs that used to be attached to the formal religions have in many cases simply been transferred to other objects, persons or events. The daily evening television news bulletins, watched by millions worldwide in their respective countries, the stars of show business and sport, humanitarian associations, cults and all sorts of other things in modern life, these have now become the new gods we venerate or fear, or the shrines at which we worship or curse, and where we still experience those primitive religious urges and feelings, where we can believe without necessarily having to think or rationalize.

However, it is in the field of medicine that this unconscious transposition of the religious experience – and more specifically the Judeo-Christian ideology, myths, beliefs, expectations and hopes – seems to have had the greatest impact. The facts show clearly – for anyone taking the time to study them – that medicine enjoys today an astonishing degree of undeserved credit that is out of all proportion to its actual results or promises. Real health keeps regressing, while the great medical "miracles", such as vaccines and antibiotics, are now clearly showing their limitations, which some had foreseen and warned of right from the start. This undeserved credit comes mostly from the fact that medicine and science have replaced religion as the only certain belief in an uncertain world. And the doctors and scientists are seen as the priests of the new religion, delivering through the certainties of science what the old discredited gods were not able to deliver. If we can no longer believe in the miracles, the cures, and the curses of the old religions, we can certainly believe in the miracles, the cures and the destructive powers of the new science.

Almost imperceptibly, medicine has taken on a saving, or messianic role, the characteristics of which we must examine. Looking back through history, there is a sense in which medicine can be said to have displayed characteristics that have at various times characterised the Roman Catholic Church: autocracy, centralization, the control and manipulation of people, censorship, propaganda, total obedience, infallibility, the destruction of heretics, the stamping out of individuality. All this, of course, has been done in the name of public health and the general good, just as the church acted for mankind's salvation.

Let me make my position clear. I am not a conspiracy theorist. I do not believe that doctors, scientists and governments are intentionally and corruptly conspiring together, abusing their powers in pursuit of wealth, "Big Brother" and "Brave New World" just a step away. But rather, I do believe we are faced with a phenomenon that is largely of the unconscious kind.

What I believe is happening is that people, whether within the medico-pharmaceutical industry or outside it, are being subconsciously influenced by their deeply rooted myths, fears and superstitions which are now being projected onto the new screens of science and medicine. This produces an amazing paradox.

Although medicine sees itself as exclusively scientific and rational, with no room for spiritual or human dimensions (such as psychic healers, or shamans, who are dismissed as charlatans), it organizes itself and functions in a way that can be described as intrinsically religious. The paradox is that by rejecting any spiritual dimension medicine in fact becomes the toy of the forces and myths it tries to ignore and cannot control. Mere denial of something's existence has never made it disappear, except perhaps in our consciousness, but instead, it is banished to our subconscious mind, where, beyond our control, it can roam free, wreak havoc, and wield even greater power.

We can see, then, that even though our society considers itself to be secular, it has remained as Christian as it was a century ago, but with two major differences. Firstly, our society is not aware of it. It believes itself to be rational, scientific, and free of superstition. It fails to recognise that it is still, in effect, observing the old religious rituals, but under a new guise. Secondly, our society now lives its religious experiences through secular forms - medical ones, in particular - and has at the same time transferred its hopes and aspirations from the spiritual world to the material.

Medicine, then, has become the new world religion. The specific myths, beliefs and rites of Christianity have been unconsciously projected over medicine since Pasteur. As I explain in detail in my book, we can establish a very close parallelism between the catholic religion and modern medicine, although, for lack of space, I cannot go into all the details of each comparison in this article. In brief:

- physicians have taken the place of priests;
- vaccination plays the same initiatory role as baptism, and is accompanied by the same threats and fears;
- the search for health has replaced the quest for salvation;
- the fight against disease has replaced the fight against sin;
- eradication of viruses has taken the place of exorcising demons;
- the hope of physical immortality (cloning, genetic engineering) has been substituted for the hope of eternal life;
- pills have replaced the sacrament of bread and wine;
- donations to cancer research take precedence over donations to the church;
- a hypothetical universal vaccine could save humanity from all its illnesses, as the Saviour has saved the world from all its sins;
- the medical power has become the government's ally, as was the Catholic Church in the past;
- "charlatans" are persecuted today as "heretics" were yesterday;
- dogmatism rules out promising alternative medical theories;
- the same absence of individual responsibility is now found in medicine, as previously in the Christian religion;
- patients are alienated from their bodies, as sinners used to be from their souls.

People are still being manipulated by their fears and childish hopes. They are still told that the source of their problems is outside them, and that the solution can only come from the outside. They are not allowed to do anything by themselves and they must have the mediation of priest-physicians, the administration of drug-hosts, and the protection of vaccine-absolutions.

Just as the magnetic field of a magnet placed under a sheet of paper controls the way iron filings fall on its surface, revealing the invisible lines of force between the two poles of the magnet, a "religious field" likewise imperceptibly structures and organises the development of modern medicine. Invisible, impalpable, this "religious field" is made up of all the beliefs, myths and values of the Christian - and more specifically the Catholic - religion. In other words, the secularisation of society happened only on the surface. We took away the "iron filings", the specific religious forms, but we did not change the "current of thoughts", the underlying "religious field", which continued to exert the same influence, but through medicine. That is the reason why behind the different structures of medicine and the Church of Rome we find the same fundamental concepts, the same relationships, the same characteristics, the same fears, the same hopes and expectations.

This substitution of medicine for religion has had many unfortunate consequences. In medical research, it influences what should be looked for and what can be discovered. Any discovery or theory that is at odds with the over-arching orthodoxy is rejected, and its authors called heretics. Entire areas of research, as well as promising new lines of approach, are thus disqualified.

Furthermore, the unconscious need to bring the medical world into "religious" obedience frequently leads to (involuntary) falsifications of results, as became clear with Pasteur's discoveries. The medical credo takes precedence over reality, something that scientists refuse to acknowledge when it does not correspond with their preconceived ideas.

And lastly, the hidden religious dimension of modern medicine inhibits the free debating of already fixed beliefs, and preventing them from being properly re-examined and criticised. Indeed, dogmatism, irrationality and passions - all characteristic of the religious experience - take precedence over any calm and carefully thought out argument, even over the most tenuous facts. The same vehemence that led Galileo to be condemned by the Church for his theories, in spite of the scientifically demonstrable facts, is now being used by medicine to reject any thesis that is contrary to its own dogmas. Science has learnt its lessons from the Church.

My aims in writing and lecturing on this topic have therefore been several. Firstly, I wanted to bring to the fore this phenomenon of projection and transfer of religious content, which takes place in the medical field. In recognizing this phenomenon, we should then dissociate from medical practice the spiritual aspirations that quite logically can only be satisfied in the spiritual dimension. It is dangerous to mistake eternal life with physical immortality, or to think we can achieve collective salvation through science and genetic engineering instead of individual salvation through transformation and personal achievements.

I also hope that by bringing to the fore the influence of religious beliefs in medicine, which is but one example of a very widespread phenomenon today, readers will start thinking about how their beliefs filter their perceptions, biasing and distorting them. Every time an object, a person, a social group or an event becomes the target of religious projections, there is danger. Their real characteristics fade in the eyes of those who colour them with their beliefs. These targets then become the objects of religious urges, impervious to any rationalisation, whether they are expressed through fear, hatred, "devilisation" and search for scapegoats, or through deification, idealisation and unconditional devotion. From Princess Diana to Wacco, and from Mother Teresa to Saddam Hussein, there are

numerous examples of the kind of consequences brought about by this transfer of religious expression to real persons or situations.

Beyond this dissociation of medicine and religion, I would like to encourage an increased awareness of the fears found in the depths of our consciousness, which remain the hidden determining factors of most of our actions. As shown in my book, these fundamental fears - fear of death, mostly, but also fear of evil, fear of suffering, fear of separation, fear of solitude - have lead humanity, at all times throughout history, to make up all kinds of beliefs, in an effort to exorcise these fears. Then, with the development of science and the rise of intellectualism, mankind has tried to justify rationally these beliefs, hidden under the cloak of medicine and life sciences.

In other words, there are three layers superimposed inside us:

- 1) a **core of fears**, from which we have learned to protect ourselves by covering it with
- 2) a **layer of beliefs**, which make us feel safe (even though those fears have not disappeared), this layer being itself dissimulated under
- 3) an **intellectual varnish**, a rational facade, which give us the illusion of having transcended superstitions and beliefs, and which shelters us from our fears, keeping us barricaded behind intellectual knowledge.

But in reality, as soon as any unexpected event scratches this varnish, our underlying beliefs and fears reveal their presence and their indirect influence.

As long as they are not acknowledged, accepted and transformed, these fears will feed on every area of human endeavour. The intellect cannot think freely and the heart may not love fully, as long as both of them are hamstrung by the permanent task of appeasing our deepest anxieties, which keep trying to re-surface in our consciousness. No technological innovation, no scientific discovery, no external knowledge will ever enable us to avoid this confrontation with ourselves, and - more specifically - with our shadow. It is quite instructive to see to what degree the intellectual and technical knowledge of this century - often quite remarkable - remains captive to the fears that haunt society. We only have to look at the poor state of our planet, at the multiplicity of wars and at the emergence of new diseases, to see how this way of using our inner capacities is unproductive.

Finally, through this increasing awareness and consciousness to which I invite my readers, I hope to encourage greater individual responsibility, be it on the medical or on the spiritual level. It seems inexplicable to me that we should give away our power to whatever external authority (priests, physicians, experts) and then blame them for abusing us with it. Very few people are capable of being totally impartial and disinterested, especially when money and power are at stake. And especially when psychological studies show that the noblest motivations often go hand in hand with more dubious unconscious intentions.

Therefore, taking personal responsibility for our own health, our own inner evolution, and our own life at every level, without rejecting any available help or advice, remains the safest and most rewarding attitude. The obscurantism that endures under new forms will not so much be fought by the lights of science than by the sparks of our own self-awareness, that each one may awaken in himself. At least, such is my conviction.

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The author can be contacted at <olivierclerc@yahoo.fr>