

The Power of Prayer

by *Bill Dawson*

I watched a programme recently on BBC 2 entitled "The Power of Prayer".

So, what's wrong with praying to a god to help you out of bad situations? After all, don't some priests recommend that you 'take your worries to god'? But let's look at it in a common-sense way.

First, why would anyone try to corrupt their god? Because if you pray, that's exactly what you try to do. The word pray means 'to beg or entreat' (though nowadays it includes thanking and praising). Look at all the usual reasons for prayer: it's to ask your god for favours, things you like or want for self; to ask it to solve your problems; to cure illnesses; stop people dying; to protect you and yours; or to make you win in games, in business, in war - at the expense of others (if you win, someone must lose).

Look honestly at what this really entails: it amounts to begging for preference or favouritism or benefits for *your* favourites. It means begging your god to 'fix it' for you, not on merit, but because *you* want it so. Both these amount to corruption (just imagine you were inveigling a government minister to fix things for you, grant you personal privileges).

Then you have praising and adoring. This is nothing but sheer flattery, and no *super intelligent Being* would ever fall for that. After all, it'd have to be an egomaniac to enjoy endless grovelling and flattery by hordes of people, all telling it how good and mighty it was, all pandering to its ego. Otherwise it would be an insult to its intelligence.

Then there's the tactic of trying to inveigle your god by getting someone with influence to ask for you - for example, his mother or a saint, or a priest. This is presumably because you think his mother could soften him up, or wait until he's in a good mood, like children do in families when they want something out of the father. How devious! Your all-knowing god would have to be soft in the head to fall for that one. Do you think he wouldn't know what was going on?

Then there's direct *bribery* - offering *inducements* to your god by promising to make sacrifices, or cause yourself suffering, or do extra periods of flattery, or give money - on condition he gives you what you want. Presumably because he likes all of these things you're offering - to watch you suffer because he's sadistic, to enjoy the flattery because he loves the prestige, to be grateful that you give money to his agents because he's hard up.

All this is corruption in its worst sense. It would be nothing but an insult to the intelligence and integrity of your god - if he existed. If you employed the same tactics

towards a high government official today, and if he did as you wanted, it would be labelled as 'sleaze'.

Nevertheless, the prayer system of eliminating your worries would be a good idea, for people with no scruples about corrupting their god - *if it worked*. But it doesn't, any more than the antics of a primitive witch-doctor doing a rain dance when his people are short of water. A few years ago, about 500,000,000 members of one religion prayed to their god to save the life of their supreme leader, who was seriously ill: *he was dead within about two weeks*. Not very effective, I'd say. What do you think?

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