

Achieving Health, Happiness, and Heaven

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We all want to be healthy, happy, and make it to heaven; even atheists who do not believe in heaven would prefer they enter the pearly gates if given only two choices. Who are the most likely, and the least likely, to achieve the Three H's of health, happiness, and heaven is the subject of my new book, "The Catholic Advantage: Why Health, Happiness, and Heaven Await the Faithful."

The real challenge, I found, is not deciding who these people are – the data on the first two H's are uncontested (and there is little disagreement on the attributes that make us likely candidates for heaven) – the difficult part was explaining why some have a decided advantage over others. From scouring the evidence, it became clear that the Three B's – beliefs, bonds, and boundaries – were the key to achieving the Three H's.

To make my argument, I selected practicing Catholics, priests, nuns (especially cloistered sisters), and saints as representative of the Catholic model. I chose Hollywood celebrities and intellectuals to represent the secular model. On the face of it, these two secular groups have little in common, but what unites them is their agnosticism and atheism: the former have no time for God, and the latter think they are smarter than God. On the whole, both suffer from poor physical and mental health, are largely unhappy, and are not exactly charitable or altruistic.

The first of the Three B's, beliefs, is an important variable explaining our physical and mental health. Patients who pray for relief of a specific medical condition usually find that their prayers have been answered. Indeed, frequent prayer is clearly related to physical and emotional well-being. Intercessory prayer, or absent prayer, also yields important results.

The second B, bonds, is another advantage Catholics have. The word religion is derived from the Latin, *religare*, which means “to bind together.” The opportunities that parish life provide in establishing bonds –retreats, parties, organized pastoral and political events – are plentiful. Moreover, these relationships are a great resource in time of need.

What do agnostics and atheists have to fall back on? For many of them, their beliefs are self-centered and their bonds are fragmented. It is not without consequence that celebrities are known for their narcissism and intellectuals are famous for their egotism.

Boundaries, the third B, are a critical element in determining our physical and mental health. Those who do not respect the need to use the brakes that God gave us are precisely the ones most likely to engage in risky behaviors; on this score, celebrities and intellectuals have no rival. By contrast, those who do not see constraint as a liability – cloistered nuns come quickly to mind – are among the healthiest and happiest people on earth.

Surveys show that the most generous Americans are the most religious, and that the least generous are the least religious. If you are looking to see charitableness in action, go to Utah or Alabama; don't waste your time visiting New England. Does this mean that conservatives are much more generous than liberals? Yes, the data show exactly that.

Altruism is not easy to measure, but those who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust have properly been chosen as exemplars. The evidence shows that it wasn't the self-absorbed who put their lives on the line – they were the least likely – it was those who had a clear sense of right and wrong, and duty to others. Catholics were prominent among them.

Secular intellectuals are split on the idea of heaven: Some scoff at it altogether while others hold that heaven on earth can be achieved. Their efforts to establish utopia, however,

have all ended in bloodshed.

Beginning with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the intellectual architect of the French Revolution, the quest for the “new man” – human beings who are not self-interested – has yielded nothing but genocide. Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot were all visionaries who sought to create the “new man,” thus ushering in a utopian wonderland; similarly, Hitler thought he could reinstitute a new sense of community and rescue Western civilization.

All of these secular maniacs rejected original sin. That was their fatal flaw. They saw human nature as malleable, akin to putty; it could be shaped and reshaped at their will. So they thought. Heaven exists, but only in the afterlife.

All things considered, there really is a Catholic advantage. Exercising the Three B’s – beliefs, bonds, and boundaries – is the surest way to achieve the Three H’s of health, happiness, and heaven. But they cannot be “adopted.” That’s because the Three H’s are a residual, the natural byproduct of living the life of a faithful Catholic. To say it pays sweet dividends cannot be argued, even by agnostics and atheists.

Dr. William Donohue is the president of and CEO of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, the nation’s largest Catholic civil rights organization. The publisher of the Catholic League journal, Catalyst, Bill is a former Bradley Resident Scholar at the Heritage Foundation and served for two decades on the board of directors of the National Association of Scholars. The author of five books, two on the ACLU, and the winner of several teaching awards and many awards from the Catholic community, Donohue has appeared on thousands of television and radio shows speaking on civil liberties and social issues. Read more reports from Bill Donohue – [Click Here Now.](#)