Author's response to reviews

Title: Divine intervention? A Cochrane review on intercessory prayer gone beyond science and reason

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Author's response to reviews: see over
To the Editor,

Thank you for considering our manuscript for publication. Below, we address the comments from the peer reviewer point by point. All changes have been marked with yellow in the resubmitted version of the manuscript.

1: The reviewer suggests that we check all 10 included studies. We have considered this, but found that our objective was not to redo the whole systematic review we criticise, but rather to point out some specific problems that disqualify the review as a trustworthy source of knowledge. The problems we point out with two of the major included trials, and the theological reasoning and inconsistencies on behalf of the review authors are more than sufficient to obtain this goal.

2: We would like to thank the reviewer for suggesting a very nice additional argument and offer us to use it, which we have done in a slightly shortened form.

3: We have now changed the description of the purpose of the trial of retroactive prayer from being a “joke” to being “meant to amuse”, which it certainly has been, as the debate that followed the paper shows.

4: The reviewer is correct that there were 3 outcomes in the trial of retroactive prayer and that it did not demonstrate a mortality reduction. However, there was a non-significant difference in favour of prayer in that trial, as we describe on page 4, and this difference was large enough to contribute importantly to a statistically significant effect on this outcome in the meta-analysis of the review, which we also describe. We have not discussed the other outcomes of the trial as these are discussed in depth on the BMJ website and as our aim was another than to provide a complete description of all the included trials and their outcomes.

Sincerely,

Karsten Juhl Jørgensen, Asbjørn Hróbjartsson, Peter C. Gøtzsche.