What the world's religions teach, applied to vaccines and immune globulins


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Notes

John Grabenstein is an employee of Merck & Co., Inc., Kenilworth, NJ. This work represents the author’s opinions, not those of Merck & Co.

The presenter has been a practicing Roman Catholic his entire life, and has explored religious aspects of immunization since the 1990s.

This presentation is intended to describe religious teachings, not to criticize or argue against any religious belief.

This presentation presumes that current state policies related to vaccination are those desired by the people of the State.
Religion and Immunization

• For millennia, humans have sought purpose, solace, values, understanding, and fellowship in religious practices.

• Buddhist nuns (bhikkhuni) performed variolation against smallpox. Written account 1022-1063 CE.

• Since Jenner developed vaccination against smallpox in 1796, some people have objected to and declined vaccination, citing various religious reasons.

Selected Religious Objections to Immunization

• Rejection of Jenner’s mode of vaccination – England c. 1800
  – Contrary to God’s will
• Anti-Vaccination League, 1853, London
• Similar activity in Netherlands
• Anti-Vaccination Society, 1879, Boston

• Christian Science: Rejection of blood transfusions
• Linkage of human cell lineages to two abortions
• Source of rubella RA27/3 strain in aborted fetus
Religion and Society

- *Religio* or *religionem*
  - Respect for the sacred or God or gods
- Religious groups develop their own systems of culture
- Religious ~ theological
- Social ~ scholarly

Individual Rights ~ Collective Duties

- Individual rights
- Contagious diseases affect more than one person deciding for him/herself. Genesis 4:9: “…am I my brother’s keeper?”
- Parental choices for children
- > 60 published reports of vaccine-preventable outbreaks among religious schools, congregations, communities
  - Diphtheria, *Haemophilus influenzae* b, hepatitis A, measles, mumps, pertussis, polio, rubella, tetanus
  - Across borders; from religious cohort to surrounding people
  - Measles, pertussis 6-35 times higher risk in people claiming religious exemption
Topics to Consider

• All populous faith traditions were considered, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

• Subjects of concern were evaluated against the religious concerns identified, including:
  – Blood components
  – Pharmaceutical excipients of porcine or bovine origin
  – Rubella strain RA 27/3
  – Cell-culture media with remote fetal origins.

Methods

• Searches: PubMed – all hits. Google – at least top 50 hits

• [outbreak & religion], [vaccine & religion],
  [vaccine & «group»]
  – Each religion estimated to have > 5 million adherents: Bahá’í Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shinto, and Sikhism.
  – Also populous denominations within Christian tradition: Amish, Anglican, Baptist, Church of Christ (Scientist), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (or “Mormon”), Congregational, Dutch Reformed Congregations, Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, Episcopalian, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Roman Catholicism, and Seventh-Day Adventist.
Key Points from Selected Religions

**Jainism** (~ 9th—6th centuries BCE)

- Respect for all living beings (ahimsa).
- Expectations are less strict for lay persons than monastics.
- Hierarchy of life forms: Mobile beings accorded more protection than immobile ones.
- Regretful acceptance of cooking food, boiling water, paper, using soap, using antibiotics and vaccines.
  - Boiling water kills microbes, but fewer than if allowed to reproduce then more deaths later.
  - Microbes killed in course of vaccine production.
- Violence in self-defense can be justified.

Key Points from Selected Religions

**Hinduism** (> 1500 years before common era, BCE)

- Respect for all life (ahimsa), favoring nonviolence. Not pacifism.
- Gandhi MK: “Man cannot for a moment live without consciously or unconsciously committing outward himsa. The very fact of his living--eating, drinking and moving about--necessarily involves some himsa, destruction of life, be it ever so minute. ...”
- No contemporary Hindu concerns with trace bovine components found.
Key Points from Selected Religions

**Buddhism (≈ 563-483 BCE)**

- Respect for all life (ahimsa), favoring nonviolence.
- Treatment is an act of mercy.
- Buddha's Sermon at Benares: *To keep the body in good health is a duty* for otherwise we shall not be able to trim the lamp of wisdom, and keep our minds strong and clear.*
- Dhammapada, Chapter XV – Happiness, verse 204. **Health is the greatest gain**, Contentment is the highest wealth, Those inspiring trust are kinsmen supreme.
- Sāmaññaphala-sutta: "In fact we would salute him respectfully, and get up and invite him to sit down, offering the requisites of robes, alms, lodging, medicine in case of illness, and provide him with proper care and protection."
- Bodhicharyavatara of Santideva: Chapter III. "May I be a balm to the sick, their healer and servitor until sickness come never again."

**Judaism (~ 1200 BCE)**

- Imperative for *Pikuakh nefesh*, acting to save one's own or another's life
- Duty to protect one's children and one's neighbors: "do not stand idly by"
- Encouragement to teach children how to swim
- [Smallpox] vaccination on Sabbath encouraged
- Dietary kosher limitation on medications with porcine components apply to oral administration, but not to injection.
  - Even so, consider importance of medicine in preserving life
- Deuteronomy 4:9. Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes saw, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but make them known unto thy children and thy children's children; (alternately translated as "...be particularly careful of your well being...")
- Deuteronomy 22:8. When thou buildest a new house, then **thou shalt make a parapet for thy roof**, that thou bring not blood upon thy house, if any man fall from thence.
Key Points from Selected Religions

**Christianity (~ 30 CE)**

- Vaccines with remote fetal implications are morally acceptable (with a duty to protect children), unless alternative products are available.
- Jehovah’s Witnesses may accept certain blood derivatives, including immune globulins, interferons, coagulation factors, erythropoietin, and others.
- Concern that ‘the body is a temple not to be defiled’ contrasts with other Scripture passages and modern quality-control requirements.

(1) Passages cited to support immunization

- First Letter of Paul to Corinthians 10:24. *Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other.*
- Second Letter of Timothy 1:14. *Guard the good treasure entrusted to you,* with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

(2) Passages cited in declining immunization

- First Letter of Paul to Corinthians 3:16-17. *Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?* 17 If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. **For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.**

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**Selected Christian Denominations**

- Dutch Reformed Congregations
- Amish Communities
- Church of Christ, Scientist
  – Disease not fundamentally real, but rather something to be dispelled – illusion from the devil
- Churches that rely on faith-healing
Key Points from Selected Religions

**Islam** (570–632 CE)

- Consider law to protect life, principle of preventing harm (izalat aldharar), and principle of public interest (maslahat al-ummah)
- Muhammad: “God has not made things that are unlawful for you to consume to be your medicine”
- Transforming haram components may generate halal products (e.g., wine to vinegar)
- Extensive dilution of components of concern may result in minute quantities per dose
- Vaccines are intended for important medicinal purpose, not diet
- Vaccines help protect others
- Consider the law of necessity, whether alternative

Qur’án surah (chapter) 2, verse 173. He has only forbidden to you dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allâh. But whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring [it] nor transgressing [its limit], there is no sin upon him.

Considerations of Vaccine Components

- Bacteria, viruses, cell substrates
- WI-38 and MRC-5 cell lines
- Rubella virus strain RA 27/3
- Porcine excipients
- Bovine excipients
- Misunderstanding of production methods or components
  - Eggs, blood, alcohol, toxins, heavy metals, contraceptives, abortifacients.
- Pathogen route of exposure
Themes of Objection

• Most ostensible objections to immunization per religious belief fell into three categories:

(a) violation of prohibitions against taking life,
(b) violation of dietary laws, or
(c) interference with natural order by not letting events take their course.

• Objections unrelated to religious belief:
  – Vaccine safety
  – Distrust of government or other authority
  – Tradition

Themes of Acceptance

• Themes favoring vaccine acceptance included:
  – transformation of excipients from starting material,
  – extensive dilution of components of concern,
  – medicinal purpose of immunization (contrast to diet), and
  – lack of alternatives.

• Other important features included
  – imperatives to preserve health and
  – duty to community (e.g., parent to child, among neighbors).
Discussion

• Infectious risk is not modified by righteousness of objection.

• The implications of a personal infectious-disease decision reach beyond self, to affect neighbors

• How can this information be useful to:
  – Health professionals
  – Policy makers
  – Public
Notable Scriptural Passages

Table 1C. Notable Passages from the Hebrew Bible

Source: www.torah-online.org/

Genesis chapter 4, verse 9. And the Lord said unto Cain: 'Where is Abel thy brother?' And he said: 'I know not; am I my brother's keeper?'

Leviticus 19:16. Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people; neither shalt thou stand idly by the blood of thy neighbour: I am the Lord.

Deuteronomy 4:9. Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes saw, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but make them known unto thy children and thy children's children; (alternately translated as "... be particularly careful of your well being...")

Deuteronomy 22:8. When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a parapet for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thy house, if any man fall from thence.

a – These selected scriptural passages should be interpreted in context with text preceding and following them.

b – Relevant also to Christians in the context of their Old Testament.

Table 1D. Notable Passages from the Christian New Testament

Source: www.biblestudytools.com/, using the New Revised Standard Version. This website also offers other translations.

(1) Passages cited to support immunization

First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 10:24. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other.

Second Letter of Timothy 1:14. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

(2) Passages cited in declining immunization

Mark 2:17. 16When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians 3:16-17. 16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

a – These selected scriptural passages should be interpreted in context with text preceding and following them.
Key Points from Selected Religions

Notable Passages from Christian Bible, Related to Jehovah's Witnesses

• Source: www.watchtower.org, using New World Translation of Holy Scriptures, translation preferred by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

• Leviticus 17:10-14. 10 As for any man of the house of Israel or some alien resident who is residing as an alien in your midst who eats any sort of blood, I shall certainly set my face against the soul that is eating the blood, and I shall indeed cut him off from among his people. 11 For the soul of the flesh is in the blood, and I myself have put it upon the altar for you to make atonement for your souls, because it is the blood that makes atonement by the soul [in it]. 12 That is why I have said to the sons of Israel: “No soul of you must eat blood and no alien resident who is residing as an alien in your midst should eat blood.”

• Acts of the Apostles 15:28-29. 28 For the holy spirit and we ourselves have favored adding no further burden to you, except these necessary things, 28 to keep abstaining from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication.