

A MORAL CRITISQUE OF JEHOVAH WITNESSES' STANCE ON BLOOD TRANSFUSION

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Abstract: Jehovah's Witnesses believe that human beings should not live by eating or drinking the blood of another creature. Their belief is based on some specific passages of the Bible. As a result, they routinely decline blood transfusions for themselves and their children. This paper explores a moral paradigm to critique Jehovah's Witnesses in dealing with such refusals. The method employed in this research is descriptive and evaluative. Findings reveal that Jehovah's Witnesses are not thorough enough in interpreting the Bible to support their position on blood transfusion. It concludes that due to modernity and medical advancement the religious sect should reconsider their stance on blood transfusion.

Keywords: Jehovah Witnesses, Stance, Blood Transfusion, Critique.

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Introduction

Jehovah's Witnesses reject whole blood transfusions as violation of God's commandment. Other Christian sects base their beliefs on a different interpretation of the Bible. Jehovah's Witnesses are a millenarian restorationist Christian denomination that differs from mainstream Christianity in its non-trinitarian views (Muramoto, 1999; Farmer & Webb, 2000). Blood is vital to maintaining a stable body temperature. Blood is vital life-supporting substance circulating inside of every living human being. Since blood is important to survival, religions have incorporated it symbolically into worship activities. Coincidentally, Christians believe once a person has accepted Jesus Christ as a Saviour, his blood spiritually is the means by which sins are forgiven.

Blood has a specific meaning in the Bible because it frequently represents death. It was definitely banned to drink blood (Gen 9:4; Lev 17:3-7, 10-14; 19:26; Deut 12:15-16, 20-28). God atoned for his people by giving them the blood of sacrifice animals. During Passover in Egypt, the symbolic importance of blood was strongly demonstrated. When Jesus became a person, he assumed the nature of 'flesh and blood' Christ did not give his blood in the sense of a blood donor. He shed his blood to suffer the penalty of sin by dying (Rom 3:24-25; Col 1:14; 1 Peter 2:24). Blood is well-known as an essential component of the human body. The discovery of blood circulation was a watershed moment in anatomical research. According to various interpretations of the Koran, blood transfusions can be used to save lives. Blood sacrifices are also an important part of the Hindu religion.

Transfusions are used to replenish lost blood components in a variety of medical conditions. Accepting a blood transfusion may result in an instant and extremely temporary prolongation of life. Watch Tower Society's position on blood fractions was made explicit in 2000 (Sloan & Ballen, 2008). Members are told to decide for themselves if taking a fraction would violate the blood doctrine. A baptized Witness who accepts a blood transfusion without remorse is considered to have disassociated himself from the group by abandoning its doctrines. Jehovah's Witnesses hold that blood transfusions are associated with moral insanity, sexual perversions, suppression, inferiority complexes, and small crimes. Dissident groups have raised concerns about coercion to refuse transfusions, doctrinal inconsistency, and the use of information to exaggerate the dangers.

While some Bible passages prohibit the consumption of blood, the effects of consuming and transfusing blood are vastly different. Exaggeration and emotionalism are frequently used in Watch Tower publications to emphasize the dangers of transfusions. Watch Tower policy of accepting all individual components of blood plasma as long as they are not taken at the same time is inconsistent. This paper therefore synthesized the arguments of the Jehovah Witnesses against blood transfusion and critiques the arguments on a moral ground.

Who are the Jehovah Witnesses?

Jehovah's Witnesses is a millenarian restorationist Christian denomination that differs from mainstream Christianity in its non-trinitarian views

(Knox, 2018). The organization claims a worldwide membership of roughly 8.7 million evangelists and an annual Memorial attendance of over 21 million people (Knox, 2018). The Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, a group of elders in Warwick, New York, United States, directs Jehovah's Witnesses and establishes all beliefs based on its interpretations of the Bible (Chryssides, 2008). They believe that the current world system will be destroyed at Armageddon, and that the creation of God's reign over the planet is the sole answer to humanity's problems.

Charles Taze Russell, who also co-established Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society in 1881 to coordinate and print the organization's publications, founded the Bible Student movement in the late 1870s (Chryssides, 2016). Following Russell's death, a leadership conflict split the Watch Tower Society into numerous factions, with Joseph Franklin Rutherford keeping control of the organization and its assets (Schulz, 2014). In 1931, Rutherford made significant organizational and doctrinal changes, including the adoption of the name Jehovah's Witnesses to distinguish them from other Bible Student groups and to symbolize a break with Russell's traditions.

Jehovah's Witnesses are known for their door-to-door preaching, distributing literature such as *The Watchtower* and *Awake*, and refusing to serve in the military or receive blood transfusions. They believe that true worship requires the mention of God's name. They deny beliefs such as trinitarianism, inherent immortality of the soul, and hellfire as unscriptural. They don't celebrate Christmas, Easter, birthdays, or any other holidays or practices that they believe have pagan roots and are incompatible with Christianity (Schulz, 2014).

Although their material occasionally uses and cites other Bible translations, they prefer to utilize their own Bible translation, the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures. Adherents call their set of ideas "The Truth," and consider themselves to be "in the Truth" (Singelenberg, 1989 p.174). Most limit their social connection with non-Witnesses because they believe secular culture is morally corrupt and under the control of Satan. Disfellowshipping, their term for formal expulsion, and shunning, their last resort for what they consider serious offences, are examples of congregational disciplinary actions (Chryssides, 2008). Baptized people who formally quit the church are termed disassociated and outcast. Individuals who have been disfellowshipped and disassociated may be rehabilitated in the future if they are deemed remorseful.

Some countries have taken issue with the group's position on conscientious objection to military duty and reluctance to salute state symbols (such as national anthems and flags) (Chryssides, 2010). As a result, some Jehovah's Witnesses have been persecuted, and their operations in some nations have been outlawed or restricted. Thus, several countries' human rights legislation has been impacted by Jehovah's Witnesses' persistent legal challenges. The organization has been chastised for its scriptural translations, teachings, and purported member compulsion. The Watch Tower Society has made a number of unfulfilled predictions about significant biblical events like Christ's Second Coming, the arrival of God's Kingdom, and Armageddon. Several formal inquiries have been conducted into their policies for dealing with cases of child sexual abuse.

Blood

Blood is a vital fluid found in humans and other animals that provides important nourishment to all body organs and tissues and carries away waste materials. Sometimes, blood is referred to as “the river of life” (Schaller, 2008 p.289). Blood is pumped from the heart through a network of blood vessels collectively known as the circulatory system (Schaller, 2008). An adult human has about 5 to 6 liters (1 to 2 gal) of blood, which is roughly 7 to 8 percent of total body weight (Tallitsch, Frederico & Michae, 2006l). Infants and children have comparably lower volumes of blood, roughly proportionate to their smaller size. The volume of blood in an individual fluctuates. During dehydration, for example while running a marathon, blood volume decreases. Blood volume increases in circumstances such as pregnancy, when the mother’s blood needs to carry extra oxygen and nutrients to the baby.

Blood carries oxygen from the lungs to all the other tissues in the body and, in turn, carries waste products, predominantly carbon dioxide, back to the lungs where they are released into the air. When oxygen transport fails, a person dies within a few minutes. Food that has been processed by the digestive system into smaller components such as proteins, fats, and carbohydrates is also delivered to the tissues by the blood (Carl, Barlow & Brockmann, 2017). These nutrients provide the materials and energy needed by individual cells for metabolism, or the performance of cellular function. Waste products produced during metabolism, such as urea and uric acid, are carried by the blood to the kidneys, where they are transferred from the blood into urine and eliminated from the body.

In addition to oxygen and nutrients, blood also transports special chemicals, called hormones that regulate certain body functions. The movement of these chemicals enables one organ to control the function of another even though the two organs may be located far apart. In this way, the blood acts not just as a means of transportation but also as a communications system.

The blood is more than a pipeline for nutrients and information; it is also responsible for the activities of the immune system, helping fend off infection and fight disease. In addition, blood carries the means for stopping itself from leaking out of the body after an injury. The blood does this by carrying special cells and proteins, known as the coagulation system, that start to form clots within a matter of seconds after injury. Blood is vital to maintaining a stable body temperature; in humans, body temperature normally fluctuates within a degree of 37.0° C (98.6° F) (Strang, 2003). Heat production and heat loss in various parts of the body are balanced out by heat transfer via the bloodstream. This is accomplished by varying the diameter of blood vessels in the skin. When a person becomes overheated, the vessels dilate and an increased volume of blood flows through the skin. Heat dissipates through the skin, effectively lowering the body temperature. The increased flow of blood in the skin makes the skin appear pink or flushed. When a person is cold, the skin may become pale as the vessels narrow, diverting blood from the skin and reducing heat loss.

Unquestionably, blood has crucial functions in our lives and in worship. Primarily, the vital fluid brings nutrients to our body tissues. The blood delivers oxygen to the lungs and carries away carbon dioxide. In addition, blood takes away waste from our body's

organs, and it is filtered and cleaned by the liver and kidneys. Moreover, blood carries immune cells and antibodies to places of infections, forming clots at wound sites to halt the loss of further fluids. Finally, blood helps in regulating body temperature. Since blood is important to survival, there is little wonder why religions have incorporated it symbolically into worship activities. The use of blood physically or as a symbol in religions can have many connotations. For instance, a rite of passage could be involved, which may include nonlethal piercings. Many religions may demonstrate death by evoking images of blood. Indeed, rebirth or initiation could be called forth applying the universally recognized fluid for life. Coincidentally, Christians believe once a person has accepted Jesus Christ as the Savior, His blood spiritually is the means by which sins are forgiven.

Blood in the Bible

Blood has a specific meaning in the Bible because it frequently represents death; not death from natural reasons, but death through killing or violence. Anyone responsible for the death of another bears the blood of the deceased, and the one who executes the guilty avenges the blood of the deceased (Num 35:19; 1 Kings 2:32-33, 37; Matt 27:4, 24-25; Acts 5:28; Rev 6:10; 17:6). Those who sacrifice their life for the sake of others are, in a sense, offering their own blood (2 Sam 23:15-17; Rom 5:6-9). Because "the life of the flesh is in the blood" (Gen 9:4; Lev 17:11; Deut 12:23), blood has a special significance (Noth, 1977). The Bible, on the other hand, focuses on spilt blood rather than blood moving through the body; not on blood's chemical qualities, but on its

metaphorical importance. Because blood signifies life in the body, spilt blood represents life poured out, i.e. death.

One of the foundational concepts of Israelite law was that all bodily life belonged to God and was thus valuable in his eyes. Because men and women are created in God's image, this was especially true in the case of human life (Gen 1:26). Anyone who killed another person without God's permission was judged unworthy of God's gift of life and was sentenced to death. Because he was working with God's sanction, the executioner was not guilty of any evil. Because he was carrying out God's judgement (Gen 9:5-6), the blood of the dead individual screamed out for justice until the murderer was punished (Gen 4:10; Num 35:33; Deut 19:11-13). Animal life belonged to God as well. Humans could eat animal meat, but those who took an animal's life had to acknowledge God as the legitimate owner of that life, according to the law God established for Israel (Ottuh & Idjakpo, 2021). Only with God's permission did they end the animal's life.

As a result, they either spilt the animal's blood (representing the life stolen) on the altar or on the ground. This was a sacrificial show of gratitude to God for the advantages acquired at the expense of the animal's life. It was definitely banned to drink blood (Gen 9:4; Lev 17:3-7, 10-14; 19:26; Deut 12:15-16, 20-28). Because of this link between shed blood and life laid down, God atoned for his people by giving them the blood of sacrifice animals. Their sin rendered them guilty in the eyes of God, and the punishment was death. But, in his generosity, God devised a method for repentant sinners to come to him and have their crimes forgiven while the penalty for their wrongdoing was

carried out at the same time. In their stead, an animal was slaughtered. People were forgiven because of the animal's blood, or because the animal died in their place (Lev. 17:11) (Lindsey, 1985). During the Passover in Egypt, the symbolic importance of blood was strongly demonstrated. The blood splattered around the entrance indicated that an animal had died in lieu of the person facing judgement.

Through the death of an innocent substitute, the firstborn was preserved (Exod. 12:13). Humans exist in a fleshly body that is kept alive by the blood that circulates within it. As a result, when Jesus became a person, he assumed the nature of 'flesh and blood' (Heb 2:14; 5:7; cf. Matt 16:17; Gal 1:16; Eph 6:12). Because of sin, all of humanity was under the penalty of death; but, when Jesus Christ died on the cross in the place of the sinner, he made salvation possible. Through his own blood, Jesus shattered the power of sin (Acts 20:28; Eph 1:7; Titus 2:14; Rev 1:5; 5:9). The terms 'blood of the cross,' 'blood of Christ,' and 'death of Christ' are frequently interchanged throughout the New Testament (Rom 5:7-9; Eph 2:13, 16; Col 1:20, 22). To be alive because of Christ's blood is to be alive because of his death. There is no mention of utilizing Christ's blood in any way that might be compared to a blood transfusion in current medicine. Christ did not give his blood in the sense of a blood donor who helps another person overcome a physical deficiency. He shed his blood to suffer the penalty of sin by dying (Rom 3:24-25; Col 1:14; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 1:7). That who 'shares in Christ's blood' gain from his death by being cleansed of sins and receiving eternal life (John 6:54-58; 1 Cor. 10:16).

The presence in heaven of those slaughtered for the sake of Christ is symbolized by Christ's blood in the

book of Revelation. However, it is Christ's sacrifice, not theirs, that qualifies them to appear in God's presence. They are cleansed by the blood of Christ. This does not imply that they are washed in blood in the same way that clothing are washed in water, but rather that they are cleansed of sin by Christ's atoning death (Rev. 7:14; cf. 1 Peter 1:2; 1 John 1:7). People's access to God was restricted under the Old Testament system. The high priest could only enter the Most Holy Place, the emblem of God's presence, once a year, on the Day of Atonement. Even back then, he could only approach the divine presence by bringing a sacrificial animal's blood and sprinkling it on and in front of the mercy seat. This blood was a sign of a life put down in atonement for sin, in order to remove the barrier to God's presence erected by sin (Lev 16:1-34; Heb 9:7, 25) (Keil & Delitzsch, 1982). But Christ, the great high priest, entered God's divine presence via his blood, not with it. He gained access through his death. In heaven, Christ does not need to perform blood rituals since he has already atoned for sin via his own sacrifice (Heb 9:12, 24-26). His people can have the same courage as he did when he entered God's holy presence via his blood. They claim the benefits of his death for themselves (Heb 10:19).

According to Ottuh and Idjakpo (2021), human and animal blood is a complex fluid that contains cells, various forms of food for tissues, oxygen, disease antibodies, hormones, and other elements that, when in balance, keep people and animals healthy and happy. Thus, "in the blood" is the life of the flesh (i.e., the entire body). Blood is well-known as an essential component of the human body. The discovery of blood circulation was a watershed moment in anatomical research. In recent years, it has been established that the health of the body

is dependent on the speed with which blood flows, and that blood transfusions are a recognized method of extending life. According to the Bible, "the life of the flesh is in the blood" (Leviticus 17:11) and "the life of all flesh is in the blood" (Leviticus 17:14) (Harrison, 1980). As a result, one can deduce that blood represents life. Although blood symbolizes life, it's worth noting that the Bible also mentions "breath" (oxygen) as being vital for survival (see Psalm 104:29, 30).

In addition to oxygen, one must understand the importance of water and food nutrition in preserving physical life. As a result, blood is not the only component of physical life. Blood represents life, and life is so important to God that the Mosaic (Old Testament) law required the use of animal blood in all sin offerings as man's vicarious substitute (atonement). And practically everything is purged by the law with blood, and there is no remission without the spilling of blood (Hebrews 9:22). Atonement appears to be efficacious in covering human guilt only if it is tied to death, the loss of blood, rather than life set free. For a Christian, the rules governing the sacredness of blood have a lot of spiritual significance. In addition to justification and redemption by Christ's blood (see Romans 5:9; Ephesians 1:7), the Christian gains access to God through faith (Hebrews 10:22), triumphs over evil (Revelation 12:11), and receives eternal glory (Revelation 12:12; 7:19). Christ's death has given mankind new life by atoning for us in a way that is entirely beyond our human powers to accomplish.

Most religions, without a doubt, understand the real and metaphorical significance of blood, but with major caveats. In Islam, for example, the human body must not be violated. However, according to various

interpretations of the Koran, blood transfusions can be used to save lives under specified circumstances (Youb, 2005). Blood sacrifices are also an important part of the Hindu religion. These sacrifices differ based on the deity and the desired result. According to Hindu sources, even success in a quarrel may necessitate a blood sacrifice (Candra, Madhva & Basu, 1974). Finally, during a blood rite, the Blackfoot tribes of Canada and the United States demanded a sacred oath. During the sun dance event, young warriors frequently took their ceremonial oaths. The blood ritual, however, has been outlawed by authorities due to the aspect of self-torment involved. Christians, on the other hand, recognize that Jesus Christ chose to shed His blood on the cross during the crucifixion in order to provide humanity with a chance for redemption. Many Christians think that accepting Christ as Savior automatically entitles a person to join the church as a Christian. There is no need to make a bodily sacrifice. According to Revelation 1:5, the spiritual transformational blood of Jesus Christ "washes" sins away while initiating a rebirth of the inner being for the individual. In short, according to a variety of theological viewpoints, blood is necessary for humankind's survival in this world and preparation for the next realm.

Blood Transfusion

The technique of transferring blood products into one's circulation intravenously is known as blood transfusion (Carson, Stanwort, Roubinian, Fergusson, Triulzi, Doree, & Hebert, 2004). Transfusions are used to replenish lost blood components in a variety of medical conditions. In the past, whole blood was used in

transfusions, but nowadays, just blood components such as red blood cells, white blood cells, plasma, clotting factors, and platelets are usually used (Carson, et al., 2016). Red blood cells (RBC) contain haemoglobin and provide oxygen to the body's cells. White blood cells, which are part of the immune system and fight infections, are not often used in transfusions.

Plasma is a "yellowish" liquid component of blood that works as a buffer and includes proteins and other vital chemicals for overall health. Platelets have a role in blood clotting, which helps to keep the body from bleeding. Doctors used to believe that blood was homogeneous before these components were discovered. As a result, many people died as a result of incompatible blood being given to them. When haemoglobin levels went below 10 g/dL or the hematocrit fell below 30%, red blood cell transfusion was considered (Carson, Grossman, Kleinman, Tinmouth, Marques, Fung, Holcomb, Illoh, Kaplan, Katz, Rao, Roback, Shander, Tobian, Weinstein, Swinton & Djulbegovic, 2012). Because each unit of blood contains dangers, a lower trigger level, such as 7 to 8 g/dL, is increasingly commonly employed, as it has been found to improve patient outcomes (Carson, et al, 2012). For hospitalized patients who are not bleeding, the typical treatment is a single unit of blood, which is followed by re-evaluation and consideration of symptoms and hemoglobin concentration.

Patients who have a low oxygen saturation level may require additional blood. The recommendation to utilize blood transfusions solely in cases of severe anaemia stems in part from data that higher volumes harm results. People experiencing symptoms of cardiovascular illness, such as chest pain or shortness of

breath, may benefit from a blood transfusion (Fast, Dileone & Marschner, 2011). Parenteral iron is the chosen treatment option in circumstances where patients have low haemoglobin levels owing to iron insufficiency but are cardiovascularly stable. Other blood products are used when necessary, such as to treat clotting disorders.

History of Belief

Since 1931, when the name "Jehovah's witnesses" was adopted, Watch Tower Society publications have maintained the view of Society founder Charles Taze Russell that the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15:19–29's reference to abstaining from eating blood was merely a "suggestion" to be given to Gentile converts (Findley & Redstone, 1982). During the president of Joseph Franklin Rutherford, Watch Tower publications praised the commercial and emergency uses of blood. A man was honoured in a 1925 issue of The Golden Age for donating blood 45 times without being paid (Singelenbreg, 1990). The Watchtower reported in 1927 that God said in Genesis 9 that Noah and his descendants should not eat blood because it contains life. Consolation magazine published an article in 1940 about a woman who shot herself in the heart with a handgun and survived a major surgical surgery during which an attending physician gave a quart of his own blood for transfusion.

The Watchtower Society asserted in 1944, under the leadership of president Nathan Homer Knorr, that the decrees in Genesis 9:4 and Leviticus 17:10–14 forbade the eating or drinking of blood in biblical times, whether by transfusion or by the mouth, and that this

applied spiritually to today's consecrated persons of good will, also known as 'Jonadabs' of the Lord's 'other sheep' (Muramoto, 1968). In the Dutch edition of Consolation in September 1945, representatives of the Watch Tower Society in the Netherlands commented on blood transfusion. According to Singelenbreg (1990), the statement in the Dutch version of Consolation may have been published without awareness of the doctrinal position announced by the Watch Tower Society's headquarters in the United States in the English July 1945 issue of Consolation.

The application of the blood concept was expanded in 1945 to forbid whole blood transfusions, whether allogeneic or autologous (Singelenbreg, 1990). The prohibition did not specify any penalties for taking a transfusion, but in January 1961, in what was later called as an "enhanced strictness" application, it was declared that conscientiously accepting a blood transfusion was a disfellowshipping crime. Accepting a blood transfusion may result in an instant and extremely temporary prolongation of life, but at the cost of eternal life for a devout Christian, according to the Watch Tower Society.

In 1964, Jehovah's Witnesses were forbidden from giving blood transfusions to their pets, from using blood fertilizer, and even from writing to dog food manufacturers to verify that their goods were blood-free if their consciences were unsettled (*The Watchtower*, 1964). Later that year, it was announced that Jehovah's Witness doctors and nurses would not deliver blood transfusions to fellow faithful members. The Watchtower declared that the decision to administer transfusions to non-members is down to the Christian doctor's conscience. Due to the holiness of blood, a 1982 article in *The Watchtower* declared that it would be

inappropriate for Witnesses to allow leeches to feed on their own blood as part of a medical procedure (*The Watchtower*, 1982). Each individual must determine whether or not to embrace hemodilution and autologous blood salvage (cell saver) operations, according to The Watchtower in 1989. A pamphlet titled "How Can Blood Save Your Life?" was published in 1990, detailing Jehovah's Witnesses' broad blood teaching. The Watch Tower Society's position on blood fractions was made explicit in 2000. Members were told to decide for themselves if taking a fraction would violate the blood doctrine. Members were informed in a subsequent piece that Jehovah's Witnesses do not donate blood or save their own blood before surgery.

The Watch Tower Society amended its medical directions and identity cards in May 2001 to meet its doctrinal perspective on blood; the revised papers were distributed beginning May 3, 2001 (*The Watchtower*, 2001). These updated records claimed that "allogeneic blood transfusions" were not acceptable, whereas the previous document from 1999 said that "blood transfusions" were not appropriate. Until December 20, 2001, the amended 2001 documents were in effect. The Watch Tower Society then revoked the updated document, noting that it had been determined that the cards dated "md-E 6/01" and "ic-E 6/01" should not be utilized following further investigation. Please destroy these materials and do not distribute them to the publishers." Elders were told to go back to the 1999 edition of medical directives and identification cards (*The Watchtower*, 2001).

Basis of Belief against Blood Transfusion

Jehovah's Witnesses' belief against blood transfusion is based on various biblical texts, including Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 17:10, and Acts 15:28–15:29: Blood is sacred to God and represents life (Lee, 2000). God has only authorized the use of blood after it has been removed from a creature for the atonement of sins. When a Christian abstains from consuming blood, they are effectively expressing their belief that only Jesus Christ's shed blood can truly redeem and save them (Lee, 2000). Blood should not be consumed or transfused. Even in the event of a medical emergency, Blood that has left a human or animal's body must be disposed of. Certain medical procedures involving blood fractions or the use of a patient's own blood during a medical procedure, such as hemodilution or cell salvage, are a matter of personal choice, depending on what one's conscience allows (*The Watchtower*, 2000). A baptized Witness who accepts a blood transfusion without remorse is considered to have disassociated himself from the group by abandoning its doctrines, and is subsequently shunned by other members.

Certain medical procedures involving blood are specifically prohibited by Jehovah's Witnesses' blood doctrine. This includes the use of red blood cells, white blood cells, platelets and blood plasma. Other fractions derived from blood are not prohibited. Watch Tower publications state that some products derived from one of the four primary components may be so similar to the function of the whole component and carry on such a life-sustaining role in the body that most Christians would find them objectionable. For procedures where there is no specific doctrinal prohibition, individuals are

to obtain details from medical personnel and then make a personal decision (*The Watchtower*, 1989).

The following are some of the harmful effects of blood transfusions that are regularly mentioned in Watch Tower Society publications:

- i. A 1951 issue of *The Watchtower* wrote, "Let the savior-complex transfusion devotees consider the truth that transfusions frequently inflict injury, spread disease, and frequently result in fatalities, which, of course, are not published."
- ii. Americo Valerio reported a 1961 article in *The Watchtower* as suggesting that blood transfusions were frequently followed by moral insanity, sexual perversions, suppression, inferiority complexes, and small crimes (*The Watchtower*, 1961). Furthermore, Alonzo Shadman claimed that a person's blood contains all of the individual's hereditary taints, disease susceptibilities, and poisons resulting from personal living, eating, and drinking habits – thus the poisons that cause the desire to commit suicide, murder, or steal are in the blood (*The Watchtower*, 1961).
- iii. In 1969, *Awake!* published an article on a man named Robert Khoury who remarked, "When I recovered, I found I had a tremendous drive to steal" (*Awake!*, 1969, p.30).
- iii. In 1974, the Referenced Center for Disease Control's report claims that the presence of serum hepatitis in blood for transfusions could cause up to 35,000 fatalities and 500,000 illnesses per year (*Awake!*, 1974).
- v. *Awake!* Magazine published an article in 2006 about the dangers of transfusion-related acute lung injury (*Awake!*, 2006).

A Moral Critique

The refusal of blood transfusions by Jehovah's Witnesses is emblematic of the conflict that can arise between divergent moral values. Failure to act may lead to criminal charges of negligence or even culpable homicide on the part of the physician. Intervention could also lead to claims for damages by the patient for violation of the right to self-determination. In 1979 Tom Beauchamp and James Childress published the first edition of *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (cited in Beauchamp & Childress, 2013). Today, there are four commonly accepted principles of health care ethics:

1. Principle of respect for autonomy,
2. Principle of nonmaleficence,
3. Principle of beneficence, and
4. Principle of justice.

When two or more of these principles apply, they may find that they are in conflict. Physicians have a duty to be of a benefit to the patient, as well as to prevent and to remove harm from the patient. The good health of a particular patient is an appropriate goal of medicine. Prevention of disease through research and the employment of vaccines is the same goal expanded to the population at large. Rawls argues that inequalities humans experience are as a result of social lottery (Smith, 2003). Justice is a strong motivation toward reform of health care system in society. The demands of the principle of justice must apply at the bedside as well as in the laws and policies of society. The four principles currently operant in health care ethics had a long history in the common morality of every human society. Beauchamp and Childress (2013) do not claim that principlism provides a general moral theory. Rather,

they affirm the usefulness of these principles in reflecting on moral problems.

Both members and non-members have expressed opposition to the Jehovah Witnesses' blood transfusion doctrines. The Associated Jehovah's Witnesses for Reform on Blood (AJWRB), a group of dissident Witnesses, claims that there is no biblical foundation for the prohibition of blood transfusions and is working to reform several laws (Lee, 2000). In a series of articles published in the *Journal of Medical Ethics*, US neurologist Osamu Muramoto, a medical adviser to the AJWRB, has raised concerns about coercion to refuse transfusions, doctrinal inconsistency, the Watch Tower Society's selective use of information to exaggerate the dangers of transfusions, and the use of outdated medical beliefs (Muramoto, 1998).

From the viewpoint of 'dissident' Jehovah Witnesses the Society's use of Leviticus 17:12 to buttress its anti-blood transfusion stance contradict its own belief that Christians are not bound by the Mosaic Law (Muramoto, 1998). According to Hoekema (1963), the blood forbidden by the Levitical regulations was not human, but animal. He cites numerous scholars who agree with him that the command to abstain from blood in Acts 15 was given to maintain a peaceful relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians, rather than as an everlasting covenant (Bruce, 1955; Lenski, 1994). He has referred to the Witnesses' use of a scriptural prohibition on consuming blood to prevent medical transfusions of human blood as ludicrous literalism.

Muramoto (1998) argues that Jehovah's Witnesses' unwillingness to receive "life-saving" blood treatment raises major bio-medical ethical concerns. He

has questioned the Watch Tower Society's "controlling involvement" through what he alleges is information control, as well as its policy of punishing members who accept blood transfusions or fight for the freedom to choose blood-based treatment (Muramoto, 1998). He claims that the prospect of being labeled a disassociated Witness and hence shunned by members' friends and relatives compel Jehovah's Witnesses to embrace and observe the blood transfusion rule. However, in one case involving a Russian district court judgement, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) found no evidence in the judgments that any illegal pressure or undue influence was used. On the contrary, many Jehovah's Witnesses appear to have made a deliberate choice to refuse blood transfusions in advance, free from the time restrictions of an emergency situation. A competent adult patient has the option of refusing a blood transfusion. Patients must, however, have the freedom to make decisions that are consistent with their own beliefs and values, regardless of how foolish, unwise, or imprudent such decisions may look to others (cited in Malyon, 1998).

Muramoto (1998) claims that the involvement of Hospital Liaison Committees can add to the "organizational pressure" exerted on Witness patients to refuse blood-based treatment by family members, friends, and congregation members. While HLC members who are church elders, he points out, "Although they may provide moral support to the patient, their presence is known to have a significant impact on the patient. According to case reports, after a visit by the elders, Jehovah Witnesses patients changed their minds about accepting blood treatment." He says that such organizational pressure jeopardizes Witness

patients' autonomy and intrudes on their privacy and confidentiality. He has advocated for a policy in which the Watch Tower organization and congregation elders would not query patients about their medical care in detail, and patients would not reveal such information. He claims that the Society implemented such a guideline in 1983 regarding specifics of married couples' sexual conduct.

Muramoto (1998) suggests that doctors meet with patients in private to discuss their wishes, without the presence of church leaders or family members, allowing patients to feel free of church pressure. He suggests that doctors question Witness patients about:

- (a) whether they have considered that the Watch Tower Society may soon approve some medical practices that they currently find objectionable, in the same way that it has previously abandoned its opposition to vaccination and organ transplants;
- (b) whether Witness patients are aware of which blood components are allowed and which are prohibited, and whether they acknowledge that those rulings are organizational policy rather than religious doctrine;
- (c) whether Witness patients are aware of which blood components are allowed and which are prohibited; and
- (d) whether they are aware that, while some Bible passages prohibit the consumption of blood, the effects of consuming and transfusing blood are vastly different.

It has viewed that Muramoto's suggested questions are an affront to coerce Jehovah's Witnesses with complicated philosophical inquisition. Malyon (1998), and if used by doctors, would be an abusive transformation of the medical role of succour and care into that of devil's advocate and trickster. Exaggeration

and emotionalism are frequently used in Watch Tower Society publications to emphasize the dangers of transfusions and the benefits of alternative treatments, but they give a misleading image by failing to report any benefits of blood-based treatment (Muramoto, 1998). Its articles also fail to admit that there are no alternatives to blood transfusions in some instances, such as quick and catastrophic haemorrhage. The risk of death associated with refusing blood transfusions is frequently discussed in Watch Tower Society literature, but little attention is paid to the protracted pain and impairment that can arise from refusal, adding to the burden on family and society. In urgent instances, Jehovah Witness publications overestimate the medical hazards of taking blood and the efficacy of non-blood medical therapies (Louderback-Wood, 1999).

The Watch Tower policy of accepting all individual components of blood plasma as long as they are not taken at the same time is inconsistent (Muramoto, 1998). Muramoto, for example, claims that the Society provides no biblical justification for distinguishing between prohibited treatments and those considered a matter of conscience, claiming that the distinction is based entirely on arbitrary decisions made by the Governing Body, to which Witnesses must strictly adhere on the basis that they are Bible-based "truth." Muramoto has questioned why white blood cells (1% of blood volume) and platelets (0.17% of blood volume) are prohibited but albumin (2.2%) is allowed. Muramoto (1998) also questioned why it is considered unethical to donate and keep blood for autologous transfusion, while the Watch Tower Society allows the use of blood components that must be donated and stored before Witnesses utilize them. It's also worth considering why

Witnesses, while seeing blood as sacred and symbolizing life, are willing to let someone die because they value the symbol over the reality it represents.

The Watch Tower Society's argument is that the true issue is respect and obedience to God, not the fluid itself (*Watch Tower*, 2005.). The fact that adherents of the Jehovah Witnesses are allowed to eat meat that still contains some blood, according to them, demonstrates their principle of abstaining from blood as a sign of respect. When an animal's blood is drained, a person can consume the meat, even if it contains a small bit of blood, because they have showed God reverence. The perception of meat and blood among Jehovah's Witnesses differs from that of kosher Jewish devotees, who go to considerable efforts to remove even slight traces of blood.

Conclusion

Jehovah's Witnesses reject transfusions of whole allogenic blood and its primary components. They do not reject transfusion of whole autologous blood so long as it is not stored prior to surgery. Controversy has stemmed from what critics state are inconsistencies in Witness policies. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that storing blood violates direction from the Bible to 'pour blood out onto the ground'. They do not donate blood except for uses they have individually pre-approved. Witnesses are told that acceptance of blood fractions from donated blood is a matter of conscience. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that human beings should not live by eating or drinking the blood of another creature. They routinely decline blood transfusions for themselves and their children.

Findings revealed that they are not thorough enough in interpreting the Bible to support their position. Due to modernity and medical advancement Jehovah's Witnesses should reconsider their stance on blood transfusion for the sake of promoting human well-being. In this sense, the principles of autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence and justice are strong motivation toward reform of Jehovah Witnesses' anti-blood transfusion policies and health care system in modern society.

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