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EDUCATION AND DEBATE

## Bioethical aspects of the recent changes in the policy of refusal of blood by Jehovah's Witnesses

Osamu Muramoto

BMJ 2001; 322: 37-39 [\[Full text\]](#)

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## Refuse or decline?

5 January 2001



**Prof Graham Howarth,**  
Head: Bioethics, School  
of Medicine, University of  
Pretoria  
*School of Medicine,  
University of Pretoria*

Informed consent has now become ethically and legally ensconced as a patient's right. During the process of informed consent information is divulged to a patient and this is often followed by a recommendation. The patient is then given the opportunity to accept or reject the recommendation in part or in its entirety. If the patient decides against the therapy, authorisation and hence consent is withheld. There is a tendency in the medical literature to refer to this rejection as refusal.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Refuse or decline?](#)

Despite being utilised as synonyms there are distinctions between their meanings. Refuse is the stronger of the two and often stresses firmness, at times rudeness; to refuse to obey an order, to refuse to lend somebody money. Decline on the other hand, means to reject politely or courteously and is applicable to social events or an offer to help; to decline a dinner invitation.

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The doctor-patient relationship is usually propitious and courteous. If one acknowledges this and the distinction between refuse and decline, one realises that patients seldom refuse treatment. If indeed on occasions patients do refuse in the sense that they have to be rude to express themselves as unwilling to accept something, then have we not erred in our consent taking process? Our tendency to use the term refusal, when a patient politely and courteously rejects our offer of treatment may more be an indication of our feelings rather than a reflection of the patient's sentiment.

## Re: Refuse or decline?

6 January 2001



**Osamu Muramoto,**  
Regional Ethics Council  
*Kaiser Permanente,  
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East, Portland, OR 97227,  
USA*

I appreciate Professor Howarth's comment and agree that the word "refusal" has underlying confrontational tone. In most situations of informed consent, "decline" seems to be more appropriate. However, in case of Jehovah's Witnesses, their sentiment against use of blood is much stronger than "decline." It is true that most Jehovah's Witness patients are polite and courteous as long as the care does not involve blood products. However, when blood transfusion becomes at issue, they generate intense emotional aversion against blood. Such intense emotion is well described in their own personal testimonies. The following quotes are all from the official publication of the Watch Tower Society which praises the attitudes of these patients.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Refuse or decline?](#)

Severely wounded in a motor vehicle accident, a Jehovah's Witness woman who required a major surgery wrote as follows: "For nine days the battle regarding a blood transfusion continued-my fight to live in harmony with my conscience by refusing it, the doctors' fight to convince me to accept it." [1]

Email Osamu Muramoto:  
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A Jehovah's Witness girl with leukemia was quoted as saying, she "would fight and kick the IV pole down and rip out the IV no matter how much it would hurt, and poke holes in the blood." [2]

While "decline" may be appropriate in other cases of informed consent, sentiment and attitude of Jehovah's Witnesses against blood is far from "decline." It is best described as "refusal."

### References

1. Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. Overcoming life's challenges in South Asia. Awake! 1994;Jan 22:21
2. Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. Youths who have "power beyond what is normal". Awake! 1994;May 22:13

## to decline or not

9 January 2001



**tony barrett**

Send response to journal:  
[Re: to decline or not](#)

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I understand the fear of the vast majority on the issue of blood, since I am one of Jehovah's Witnesses. The question is not, "How can I hide my choice of taking blood or blood products from the congregation; it is "How can I hide it from God?" The Holy Scriptures, that we believe to be what it is, the Word of God, states that "all" true worshipers of Jehovah God must abstain from blood. If one makes the choice to ignore this "command" from God, he makes the choice to disassociate himself from the ones that "do" follow the command. There are many scriptures that can be sighted in this matter. And I am sure that you would agree that everyone must make a personal decision based on the information that they have. If anyone were to speak with one of Jehovah's Witnesses on this matter they would be happy to show what this is based on.

**Re: to decline or not**

10 January 2001



**Osamu Muramoto,**  
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Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: to decline or not](#)

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Mr. Barrett's response as a Jehovah's Witness raises important questions. You reiterated the Watch Tower policy, but you do not address the fundamental issues this paper and reform-oriented Witnesses are raising. That is, which part of the blood is it that the "Word of God" tells one to abstain from? Whole blood or parts of blood? If you must abstain from only certain parts of blood and not the other parts, which "command" from God tells you to do so? You wrote there are many scriptures that can be cited in this matter. Which scripture can you cite to show that you should abstain only from certain parts of blood?

I agree with you that this is a matter of personal choice and decision. Suppose a Jehovah's Witness believed that there is no "Word of God" to pick and choose which part of blood to abstain from, and therefore he personally decided to take one part of blood for his medical treatment. If that part of blood he chose happened to be not included in the parts of blood the Watch Tower Society determined acceptable, is he ignoring God's command? If he does not believe he is ignoring God's command, since there is no such "Word of God", he does not need to "hide it from God", yet if he is forced to disassociate himself from the community, to be ostracized and shunned by family and friends, is it not understandable that he would want to "hide it from the congregation"? I am asking those questions to highlight the points of this debate to other readers.

**the changing word of god**

11 January 2001



**ian nesbitt,**  
 anaesthesia  
 newcastle

Send response to journal:  
[Re: the changing word of god](#)

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before july 1st 1945, there was no restriction on the acceptance of blood by Jehovah's witnesses. after that, the biblical phrases "no soul of you shall eat blood", "...abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication.." were interpreted to mean that blood transfusion was sinful.

The Watchtower Society has had a hard job reinterpreting the word of god ever since. For example, in the not too distant past, vaccinations and aluminium were campaigned against by the WTS as sinful, but are now fully accepted.

it seems that not all components of blood are sinful now, although who has made that decision seems uncertain: what is the betting that in another decade, the WTS will have abandoned this untenable and intellectually dubious position and this will be an issue of historical interest only?

**A Response**

12 January 2001



**Chris Bartlett,**  
 Information Architect  
*Digital Harmony*  
*Technologies*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: A Response](#)

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Certainly, this is a well thought-out technical discourse but I find it lacking in emotional truth and not balanced as to the subject matter. Your position of negativity towards Jehovah's Witnesses, while perhaps unintended, comes through loud-and-clear. Your choice of words like "ostracize", "shun", "interrogation", and even "dissident witnesses", while perhaps technically accurate, are not well chosen to represent a balanced attitude found in the local Kingdom Halls. It is my hope that, to research your views, you removed yourself from the "paper" trail and actually spoke and spent time in these same congregations that you boldly criticize before your final draft. The reality, I suspect, is that you did not.

From my point of view as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, I fear your comments do not represent the balanced, less-sensationalistic view that I have come to embrace as part of a true Christian's faith. This is especially so in your comments considering disfellowshipping/disassociating from the Congregation.

Specifically, I would like to address the following statements/terms:

1. Disfellowshipping as opposed to disassociation
2. Internal dissidents
3. "A member may be automatically shunned..."
4. "Simply put, if the act of receiving blood is kept strictly confidential, disassociation is highly unlikely..."
5. "Implication of the new policy on medical confidentiality" (section)

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**Number 1.** "No discipline seems for the present to be joyous, but grievous; yet afterward to those who have been trained by it it yields peaceable fruit, namely, righteousness."-HEBREWS 12:11.

In both cases, the attitude towards disfellowshipping and disassociation is a loving one. It is a case of someone who previously made an adult decision to dedicate their life to God and, therefore, his teachings in the Bible who then unrepentantly turns his back on those same teachings to follow his own path and not God's.

What you refer to as "rights" and "freedom" is not accurate when you have personally taken the step to dedicate yourself to God's way of doing things. This person had the "right" to declare his dedication and retains the "right" to turn away. Yet there remains consequences.

Disfellowshipping is a loving act provided in the Bible in helping those that have turned away from God see their error and humbly return to Him. "The wise older men" of the congregation, its elders, have the painful task of the judiciary meeting. Should the person show remorse and repentance than they may determine a reproof is all that is needed. It is only when the person is unrepentant (or not sorry for going against God's teachings) that they are disfellowshipped.

Even then, there is not an eternal "cutting-off" from that person. Yes, we do remain distant so as not to stumble ourselves and our own faith, but we remain loving and encourage the person to continue meetings if he has stopped committing his error and to repent. Should they repent, even several years later, they are re-instated and there is a great rejoicing to have a 'lost sheep' return to God.

(2 Corinthians 7:8-13) Hence even if I saddened YOU by my letter, I do not regret it. Even if I did at first regret it, (I see that that letter saddened YOU, though but for a little while,) 9 now I rejoice, not because YOU were just saddened, but because YOU were saddened into repenting; for YOU were saddened in a godly way, that YOU might suffer no damage in anything due to us. 10 For sadness in a godly way makes for repentance to salvation that is not to be regretted; but the sadness of the world produces death. 11 For, look! this very thing, YOUR being saddened in a godly way, what a great earnestness it produced in YOU, yes, clearing of yourselves, yes, indignation, yes, fear, yes, longing, yes, zeal, yes, righting of the wrong! In every respect YOU demonstrated yourselves to be chaste in this matter. 12 Certainly, although I wrote YOU, I did it, neither for the one who did the wrong, nor for the one who was wronged, but that YOUR earnestness for us might be made manifest among YOU in the sight of God. 13 That is why we have been comforted. However, in addition to our comfort we rejoiced still more abundantly due to the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of YOU.

Disassociation is similar but can only happen if the individual declares himself as such. There is not done "automatically" (see below) and there is no declaration of why he is doing so. Theoretically, a person could hide his blood transfusion indefinitely. Declaring himself "disassociated" is all he needs to do, he does not need to reveal why he is doing so.

Again, even though they declare themselves disassociated, he is welcome to take in our meetings if he has stopped committing his error and if his heart changes towards repentance he, too, will be reinstated and welcomed with open arms.

(2 Corinthians 2:5-11) Now if anyone has caused sadness, he has saddened, not me, but all of YOU to an extent-not to be too harsh in what I say. 6 This rebuke given by the majority is sufficient for such a man, 7 so that, on the contrary now, YOU should kindly forgive and comfort [him], that somehow such a man may not be swallowed up by his being overly sad. 8 Therefore I exhort YOU to confirm YOUR love for him. 9 For to this end also I write to ascertain the proof of YOU, whether YOU are obedient in all things. 10 Anything YOU kindly forgive anyone, I do too. In fact, as for me, whatever I have kindly forgiven, if I have kindly forgiven anything, it has been for YOUR sakes in Christ's sight; 11 that we may not be overreached by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his designs.

Finally, in both cases, if the person remains unrepentant and continues down a path that is in contradiction to Bible teachings, then the Christian congregation must expel and limit all contact with the individual. The person's apostate mental attitude must not be allowed to stumble others.

(2 John 9-11) Everyone that pushes ahead and does not remain in the teaching of the Christ does not have God. He that does remain in this teaching is the one that has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to YOU and does not bring this teaching, never receive him into YOUR homes or say a greeting to him. 11 For he that says a greeting to him is a sharer in his wicked works.

(1 Corinthians 5:11-13) But now I am writing YOU to quit mixing in company with anyone called a brother that is a fornicator or a greedy person or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or an extortioner, not even eating with such a man. 12 For what do I have to do with judging those outside? Do YOU not judge those inside, 13 while God judges those outside? "Remove the wicked [man] from among yourselves."

(Proverbs 4:14-19) Into the path of the wicked ones do not enter, and do not walk straight on into the way of the bad ones. 15 Shun it, do not pass along by it; turn aside from it, and pass along. 16 For they do not sleep unless they do badness, and their sleep has been snatched away unless they cause someone to stumble. 17 For they have fed themselves with the bread of wickedness, and the wine of acts of violence is what they drink. 18 But the path of the righteous ones is like the bright light that is getting lighter and lighter until the day is firmly established. 19 The way of the wicked ones is like the gloom; they have not known at what they keep stumbling.



**Number 2.** The term of "dissident witnesses" is false. There can be no such thing. What I think you are referring to are those who have been disfellowshipped or have disassociated themselves from the congregation. They may have the attitude of a dissident (but that would suggest they are unrepentant) so they are no longer witnesses if they remain as such. They have placed themselves ahead of God's teachings and no longer show humility towards serving Him.

(Job 8:13-15) Thus are the pathways of all those forgetting God, And the very hope of an apostate will perish, 14 Whose confidence is cut off, And whose trust is a spider's house.  
15 He will lean upon his house, but it will not keep standing; He will take hold of it, but it will not last.

(Proverbs 11:9) By [his] mouth the one who is an apostate brings his fellowman to ruin, but by knowledge are the righteous rescued.

**Number 3.** A member of Jehovah's Witnesses can not be "automatically" shunned without self-declaration that they are disassociating themselves from the congregation. If the person does not make this declaration, then a discussion must be held by the Elders to decide what, if any, action should be taken under the circumstances. You imply that through simple hearsay members might find themselves automatically shunned and that is simply not accurate.

(from "A lesson in how to handle problems", Watchtower magazine article)

1. A loving Christian does not assume at the outset that a brother's problems are of his own making. Harsh criticism of past mistakes-whether real or imagined-can totally discourage a person who is struggling to keep going. The depressed soul needs to be 'consoled' rather than berated. (1 Thessalonians 5:14) Jehovah wants overseers to be "a hiding place from the wind," not "troublesome comforters" like Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.-Isaiah 32:2; Job 16:2.

2. We should never make an accusation without clear evidence. Hearsay or suppositions-like those of Eliphaz-are not a sound basis for giving reproof. If an elder, for example, makes a faulty accusation, he could well lose credibility and cause emotional stress. How did Job feel about having to listen to such misguided counsel? He gave vent to his anguish with the ironic exclamation: "O how much help you have been to one without power!" (Job 26:2) A concerned overseer will "straighten up the hands that hang down," not make the problem worse.-Hebrews 12:12.

3. Counsel should be based on God's Word, not on personal ideas. The arguments of Job's companions were both incorrect and destructive. Instead of drawing Job closer to Jehovah, they led him to think there was a barrier separating him from his heavenly Father. (Job 19:2, 6, 8) Skillful use of the Bible, on the other hand, can set things straight, invigorate others, and offer real comfort.-Luke 24:32; Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:16; 4:2.

**Number 4.** Your article states: ""Simply put, if the act of receiving blood is kept strictly confidential, disassociation is highly unlikely..."

Well, of course, that is an obvious statement and has nothing to do with the blood issue but everything to do with one's faith. Your statement is a blanket for any sin against God for if that sin is willfully kept hidden then there will never be discipline from your fellow man. So you neglect two very crucial parts of this "equation".

The first is that nothing is hidden from God and he will judge us accordingly. A Christian is in bad shape if he conceals his sin successfully against man and remains unrepentant for it is God who will judge him in the end based on his works.

(1 John 3:4,8) Everyone who practices sin is also practicing lawlessness, and so sin is lawlessness. 8 He who carries on sin originates with the Devil, because the Devil has been sinning from [the] beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was made manifest, namely, to break up the works of the Devil.

Secondly, someone who has dedicated his life to serving God would certainly be weighed down in conscience in these matters. Willfully concealing their sin over any length of time would be damaging to their relationship with God and most likely they would seek help from the "experienced and wise" to repent their sins, regardless of the discipline involved. If they are not bothered by conscience then they have probably already disassociated themselves from God, whether they have made a public declaration of that position or not.

(Psalm 37:13) Jehovah himself will laugh at him, For he certainly sees that his day will come.

(1 Samuel 16:7) But Jehovah said to Samuel: "Do not look at his appearance and at the height of his stature, for I have rejected him. For not the way man sees [is the way God sees], because mere man sees what appears to the eyes; but as for Jehovah, he sees what the heart is."

**Number 5.** "Implication of the new policy on medical confidentiality" (section)



There is too much here that is incorrect. For one a person always has total control over their confidentiality- we are beings of free will and we choose to follow God's way or our own without any help from others. Of course all decisions have consequences. If you choose to violate God's will then you should expect to pay the price, small or large.

I think it all comes down to the "light" that is getting brighter and brighter. Understanding the Bible is a life-long endeavor, passed on to generations, and we must understand that. What we know now about God's will is so much clearer than what humankind knew in the past. There is a difference even between now and 50 years ago and it will be different 50 years from now as well. God has said that things will be revealed to us over time. Being revealed in the "light" that is getting brighter and brighter. It is important, therefore, to readjust our understanding to reflect this. Re-examining the blood issue is a natural step in this process, just as re-examining the damage of smoking was in the 70's and many other issues. In this time of the end, God is revealing many things to us and we owe it to ourselves, as worshippers of God and Christ, to pay attention.

Your article sounds like criticism of the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society for not remaining 'rigid' or otherwise entrenched with their doctrinal tenet of 50 years ago. In other words, it appears that you are putting more value on holding on to tradition than to the adjustments that God has commanded us to take when understanding his handbook, the Bible.

(Proverbs 4:18) But the path of the righteous ones is like the bright light that is getting lighter and lighter until the day is firmly established.

(Mark 7:9) Further, he (Jesus) went on to say to them (the Pharisees): "Adroitly YOU set aside the commandment of God in order to retain YOUR tradition."

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All together, I do appreciate some of the points you make as it encourages everyone to decide for themselves whether or not to take on the risk of blood transfusions. I am thankful to be a servant of the true God, Jehovah, and am glad to take in the knowledge of Him by receiving the publications, the "spiritual food", from the organization of brothers of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Chris

## Are Jehovah's Witnesses committed to blood policy?

12 January 2001



**Lee Elder,**  
Founder  
AJWRB

This week more than one million Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) in the U.S. alone will once again be asked to sign a health care proxy/advance directive/Durable Power of Attorney stipulating that no blood transfusions be administered under any circumstances.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Are Jehovah's Witnesses committed to blood policy?](#)

The Watchtower Society (WTS), the controlling organization of JWs, has made it very clear that all JWs should execute this legal document and distribute copies to their doctor, relatives, friends and church officials.

Email Lee Elder:  
[leeelder@ajwrb.org](mailto:leeelder@ajwrb.org)

In a letter to all bodies of elders in the U.S. dated Dec. 1, 2000, the WTS explains that the new DPA (Durable Power of Attorney) conforms to the material discussed in the June 15, 2000 Questions From Readers article and the Oct. 15, 2000 Watchtower. These are the changes discussed by Dr. Muramoto regarding the acceptability of all blood products fractionated from red cells, white cells, platelets and plasma. Even more significant is this further comment from the WTS: "only a small percentage of brothers have filled out the Society's DPA form."

This recent statement from the WTS is very important in that it shows that the level of commitment to the WTS policy is very small. If a JW is unconscious and exsanguinating and no DPA can be presented, I believe a very strong argument exists that the person is not committed to the WTS policy. Especially in light of this recent disclosure by the WTS which reveals dwindling support for its partial blood ban policy. It is also noteworthy that nearly a year after ceasing its policy of disfellowshipping Jehovah's Witnesses who accept blood or the blood products that are still forbidden; the WTS has never informed the general membership of the change. Only congregation elders have been informed to date.

Since 1997 AJWRB (The Associated Jehovah's Witnesses for Reform on Blood) has lobbied on behalf of dissident Jehovah's Witnesses who believe that there is no biblical basis for banning the use of blood or certain blood products. We believe that JWs should have a free choice in their medical care, without the threat of controls or sanctions (disassociation) from the WTS that would separate them from their JW family members and friends.

Lee Elder ([leeelder@ajwrb.org](mailto:leeelder@ajwrb.org))  
AJWRB ([www.ajwrb.org](http://www.ajwrb.org))

\*\*\*\*\*

The Associated Jehovah's Witnesses for Reform on Blood, is a diverse group of Witnesses from over 25 countries, including elders and other organization officials, Hospital Liaison Committee members, doctors and members of the general public. All have volunteered their time and energies

in an effort to bring about an end to a tragic and misguided policy that has claimed thousands of lives, many of them children.

Website: <http://www.ajwrb.org>

Email: [info@ajwrb.org](mailto:info@ajwrb.org)

Please support our educational work, send your contribution to: AJWRB - P.O. Box 190089 - Boise, ID 83719-0089 U.S.A.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Re: the changing word of god

12 January 2001



**Osamu Muramoto,**  
Regional Ethics Council  
*Kaiser Permanente,*  
*Interstate Medical Office*  
*East, Portland, OR 97227,*  
*USA*

Regarding the "changing word of God", the controlling organization of Jehovah's Witnesses (the Watch Tower Society) teaches its members that God (Jehovah) reveals the truth through the Watchtower organization. Thus any "changing of the word of God" is completely accepted by the followers no matter how illogical it might appear. Once a member accepts the fundamental tenet that God speaks only through the Watchtower organization, or that the organization is God's representative, then under this tenet, God is not changing his mind, but rather revealing the truth gradually through the organization.

Send response to journal:

[Re: Re: the changing word of god](#)

Email Osamu Muramoto:  
[muramoto@aracnet.com](mailto:muramoto@aracnet.com)

The Bioethical dilemma comes from this fundamental aspect of the religion, in which the controlling power of the religious organization is almost as great as God's. The authority of God's representative knows no boundaries even in the realm of personal conscientious decisions and medical confidentiality. As Tony Barrett mentioned in his letter above, the difference between hiding from God and hiding from the religious organization becomes so ambiguous that they feel there should be no hiding from the organization as much as there should be no hiding from God. The challenge I see here is how to respect and protect personal freedom of choice and confidentiality in such an intolerant "theocratic" community in the midst of our tolerant democratic society.

## Reply to Chris Bartlett: Obeying God or obeying the Organization?

16 January 2001



**Osamu Muramoto,**  
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*Kaiser Permanente,*  
*Interstate Medical Office*  
*East, Portland, OR 97227,*  
*USA*

I appreciate Mr. Bartlett's detailed response, since it typifies responses I receive from Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) and representatives of the Watch Tower Society (WTS). Before responding to his individual points, let me clarify several general points he brought up. Bartlett stated that my choice of word is not balanced. Whether wording is balanced or not depends on where one stands in the debate. As he admits, my wording is "perhaps technically accurate", even though it may lack "emotional truth" which is of course highly subjective. He also questioned whether I researched Jehovah's Witnesses' views by speaking and spending time in congregations. Yes, I have attended numerous meetings, assemblies and conventions and spoken to many JWs on regular basis including JW patients, in addition to studying most of the publications and exchanging correspondence with JWs. Mr. Bartlett should rest assured that my research is not based on mere "paper trail."

Send response to journal:

[Re: Reply to Chris Bartlett: Obeying God or obeying the Organization?](#)

Email Osamu Muramoto:  
[muramoto@aracnet.com](mailto:muramoto@aracnet.com)

I believe it is inappropriate for me to expand religious debate in a medical journal such as BMJ. However, I will try to help the readers understand why Bartlett claims my presentation as "incorrect" and "false" even if he cannot show any factual error. I hope this explanation will help the medical community untangle this seemingly complex debate.

I believe that one of the keys to understand Bartlett's reasoning as a Jehovah's Witness is to read his many comments by replacing the word "God" with another word "the Watchtower (WT) organization". As I wrote in my response to Nesbitt's letter above (Re: the changing word of god), the authority of "God" and the authority of "the organization" are not differentiated in the mind of JWs. Thus any organizational control, whether invasion of privacy, breach of confidentiality or undue punishment of free medical decisions, is all justified by replacing the word "the organization" by "God."

For example, referring to dissident Jehovah's Witnesses, Bartlett wrote, "they have placed themselves ahead of God's teachings and no longer show humility towards serving Him." Referring to confidential and conscientious medical decisions, he wrote, "if you choose to violate God's will then you should expect to pay the price..." If one replaces the words "God" and "Him" with "the WT organization" in these sentences, one can clearly see the difference between Bartlett and dissident JWs. Dissident JWs can separate between "God" and "the organization" whereas Bartlett and loyal JWs, intentionally or unintentionally, use two concepts almost interchangeably. Thus, for Bartlett, dedicating his life to God means dedicating his life to the WT organization, and showing humility towards God means showing humility towards the authority of WT organization. Violating the organizational policy of the WTS is immediately translated as "violating God's will." In contrast, dissident JWs also dedicate their lives to God and show humility towards God, but they may not do so to the WT organization. Incidentally, Bartlett's comment, "the term of 'dissident witnesses' is false. There can be no such thing" is outright "false." I have personally met with many dissident JWs who have never been disfellowshipped or disassociated. It is quite understandable that Bartlett has never met such a person, because those dissident JWs would never confide their position to JWs such as Bartlett who are loyal to the WT organization.

I am glad that Mr. Bartlett gave his systematic response, as his statements illustrate how little most loyal JWs are aware of the seriousness of the control done by "the organization" under the name of "God." Once the readers understand that "the organization" is viewed as equivalent of "God", they can understand most of his enigmatic comments and discrepancies. Confidentiality against the organization is non-existent as God knows no confidentiality. Going against the organizational policy

is viewed as going against God's will. Repentance means conforming to the organizational policy, but it is euphemized as being sorry for going against God's teachings. Organizational punishment is euphemized as "God's loving provision." Organizational policy change is equivocated with God's revelation of "brighter light." Such ambiguous language can go on and on, as seen here in Bartlett's comments.

It may seem that the focus of this debate is the faith in God, but it is not, according to the dissident JWs. For them the matter has nothing to do with their faith in God. It is only the matter of mixing up the WT organization and God, and the WT organization applying undue pressure to free speech, choices and confidentiality under the name of God. That is the heart of the debate of JWs and blood refusal.

Finally, I would like to correct a Bartlett's misunderstanding. He wrote that I criticize the WTS for "not remaining 'rigid' or otherwise entrenched with their doctrinal tenet of 50 years ago." To the contrary, I and dissident JWs are all welcoming the policy changes made by the WTS. Each change over the past 50 years has saved more lives which might have been lost if the WTS remained rigid. The only regret we have is the fact that many lives have been lost, and are still being lost today, based on the constantly mutating policy. If God has been revealing "brighter light" so frequently, should JWs wait for a yet "further brighter light" before sacrificing their lives for the soon-to-be-darker light?

## Jehovah's Witnesses and Blood vs. Justification and Responsibility

18 January 2001



**Marvin Shilmer,**  
Elder  
*Jehovah's Witness*

Jehovah's Witnesses and Blood vs. Justification and Responsibility

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Jehovah's Witnesses and Blood vs. Justification and Responsibility](#)

I am one of Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) and have read Dr. Muramoto's article with much interest. Presently the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WTS) recognizes me as an active elder (pastor) in a congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses.

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Jehovah's Witnesses desire to be loyal to God. Like most other people we are willing to die in defense of or loyalty to certain issues. As Christians we are willing to lay down our life in order to remain faithful to our Creator, Jehovah. This attribute is often played out in hospitals of the world by JWs as they demonstrate time and time again their willingness to die or let their children die rather than accept some sort of infusion of blood or of some portion of blood. Is this action justifiable under the pretext of loyalty to God? Without a doubt that is a question for every single parent among Jehovah's Witnesses and it is one they must justify in absolute terms before deciding to let a child die over accepting or rejecting an infusion of blood or of some portion of blood. Aside from parents, in their own behalf each individual Jehovah's Witnesses should have likewise performed the same mental process of absolute justification. What is the present state of that justification?

Intentionally or unintentionally Doctor Muramoto's article highlights a critical flaw in the justification most often used by Jehovah's Witnesses on this subject. Physicians acquainted with this topic are very familiar with the words "We [JWs] reject blood because the Bible says that Christians must abstain from blood." Those words are repeated time and again by many Witnesses because their conviction of rejecting blood stems from the Biblical tenet to "abstain from... blood." (Acts 15:28, 29) Within that simple tenet lay their perceived mental justification for facing death rather than accepting blood or portions of blood; the problem is: Intentionally JWs do not ENTIRELY abstain from blood! That discrepancy alone invalidates the perceived justification because it defies the invoked simplicity and implied encompassing nature of the tenet to "abstain from... blood." Do most JWs perceive this logical discrepancy—indeed a contradiction?

Sadly my experience is that most JWs do not understand the depth and breadth of the WTS' actual official position regarding the use of donated blood for medical reasons. Among my fellow JWs and elders the fact that we do not entirely abstain from blood is rarely recognized as the critical contradiction that it represents. Yet physicians immediately realize the contradiction for what it is; a critical flaw in the mental task of justification. To test my assertion that most Witnesses are ignorant of this critical flaw, physicians can do something as inoffensive and simple as asking the patient "Do Jehovah's Witnesses entirely abstain from blood?" I contend that at least 99% of JW patients will immediately answer, "Yes." Because physicians can read our official publication (The Watchtower) for themselves then they can readily know that an answer of "Yes" is incorrect, which completes the test of whether the mental justification process is accurate, complete and rational. If a JW patient THINKS that we entirely abstain from blood then they betray incomplete knowledge and therefore an incomplete process of justification. Certainly knowledge that JWs do not entirely abstain from blood is critical information when a JW patient is otherwise under an impression that our position is simple, strong and absolute and that it is based upon entirely abstaining. (And JWs must ask themselves, "If it is not based upon entirely abstaining then what is it based upon?")

Naturally physicians are careful about how far they push this issue with a patient. Because continued life depends upon more than just blood then no physician can guarantee survival based upon that one factor. That is, if a physician is asked, "Can you guarantee that I will live if I accept this blood?" he cannot do so. But the same could be said of food, oxygen, water, organs like hearts or lungs, or any other necessity of life. Life is dependent upon many necessities, but taking away only one of them causes death. For that reason, in indisputable cases a physician can do no more than guarantee that rejecting blood will cause death. Because physicians are well acquainted with life and death and because they understand the importance of respecting spiritual feelings in the process of living and dying, then they are careful not to unduly upset a patient's state of spirituality because it can be such an important part of healthy living and healthy dying. For this reason a physician may not be too active in trying to rationalize with a patient that one of their long held spiritual justifications is critically flawed.

But any reluctance on the part of a physician does not change that a critical flaw exists in the justification process, and certainly a physician's acquiescence in no way is a justification in itself of a patient's conviction.

Because Dr. Muramoto's article highlights the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses abstain from some portions of blood but do not abstain from other portions of blood then his comments highlight a critical flaw in the process of justification most often used by Jehovah's Witnesses. Considering all that that WTS has written on the subject of blood and all the discussions held among JW's about this subject, why and how has this simple though critical flaw remained unaccounted for in the minds of most Witnesses? We can only speculate about an answer, but the fact remains that a burden rests upon those who teach, and it is the WTS that teaches JW's on the merits of this subject through the pages of The Watchtower journal, its main official publication. Therefore a high degree of responsibility rests upon our organization, the WTS, to answer the question posed about why and how such a critical flaw is left unaccounted for in the minds of so many JW's. (Why would/do so many answer "Yes" to the litmus test above?) Frankly, though sadly, language the WTS applies to our use of portions of blood is most often couched in terms that take away from the bald truth, that bald truth being that JW's do use blood that has been donated by others.

What bearing does this have for physicians on the subject of medical ethics? Since I am not a qualified physician I am not sure just how to answer that question. But a good question is, who has any responsibility to educate in plain language people holding death dealing convictions when their justification is lacking or incomplete? My untrained opinion is that physicians do not hold the most responsibility for providing that education but they do have some responsibility for providing it. At the very least physicians should be willing to ask JW patients the inoffensive and simple question, "Do Jehovah's Witnesses entirely abstain from blood?" If the patient answers with a "Yes" then in my opinion that physician has a responsibility to the patient to explain that the WTS does not require that they entirely abstain from blood and that you can prove it if they want to see it. You can then do something as simple as showing them one of the latest WTS provided Durable Power of Attorney forms where it indicates the option of accepting applications and infusions of substances made from blood or portions of blood. Physicians should remind them that other people donated the blood necessary to make, have and apply those life saving substances. At least that action provides some clear and unambiguous thoughts for the JW patient to complete their personal process of justification on such an important subject.

On the other side of this subject is the WTS. Primarily that agency has the responsibility to better educate JW's about this subject so that the simple fact that JW's do not entirely abstain from blood is understood and can be accounted for in the justification process. The problem with that fact being highlighted in unambiguous terms is that it runs contrary to the seemingly simple idea that "we abstain from blood," and it makes people think more deeply about the very basis for the proposed justification for dying rather than accepting a particular portion of blood (or living by accepting a different portion of blood that is not prohibited by the WTS' published position). I know that the British Medical Journal is not a platform for religious ideology, but the WTS would do well to address well-reasoned scriptural discussions of this subject, one of which can be found online at [www.jwbloodreview.org](http://www.jwbloodreview.org). Many of my fellow JW's and elders have read the contents of such articles and realize the magnitude of what appears to be a terrible mistake on our part. If the WTS' published views are right then no JW has anything to fear about facing up to such well written and reasoned material and either accepting it or refuting it, but we cannot just ignore it and be honest as Christians should be. We can only be honest by recognizing and responding to well reasoned information.

I thank Dr. Muramoto for taking time to write his article. Unlike another responder, I believe Dr. Muramoto must have some close contact with JW's to have so precisely represented the present state of affairs as accurately as he has. As a trained and appointed elder among JW's I can testify to the accuracy of his presentation. It is not highlighted in Dr. Muramoto's article, but the record shows that the population of JW's did not universally agree with the WTS' decision to have congregations of JW's begin imposing its "abstain from blood" policy back in 1961. The Watchtower journal admits that prior to that time individuals among Jehovah's Witnesses were conscientiously accepting transfusions of blood. (See: Questions From Readers, The Watchtower of August 1, 1958, page 478) The same journal also admits that some individuals among the Witness population were, at the time, requesting that the practice of blood transfusion actually be sanctioned (authorized). (See: Letter, The Watchtower, May 1, 1950, page 143) What do those facts mean in terms of the question of autonomy and the Jehovah's Witness patient? The presence of those admissions above says much about whether Witnesses agreed fully with the policy from the beginning.

Unfortunately I felt compelled to write this response using a pseudonym. I do not have the luxury of revealing my real name as have other JW responders to Dr. Muramoto's article who have practically endorsed the WTS policy in full. If I did so then I would undoubtedly face some sort of tribunal for having openly presented the flaws I have above—and those flaws are just a few of many on the subject. At the very least my motives would be questioned and I would undoubtedly be stripped of any responsibilities as an elder—not that that is an important consequence. It is taught and understood that JW's can freely offer objections about a teaching directly and privately to the WTS. But, sadly, no matter how well reasoned a view or question, we are not permitted to discuss serious objections by openly insisting upon a resolution without the imminent risk of being labeled a troublemaker and probably ostracized and shunned as a result of that questioning on a sensitive issue. For this reason I expect that some of my fellow JW's will most likely question the veracity and genuineness of this response of mine. When the WTS reads this—and they will—I hope they come away with one thing, that I am interested in my brothers in faith and our individual and collective godly loyalty. Otherwise I



would not work so hard as an elder in spite of the facts and views expressed above. Some of my peers at our world headquarters in Brooklyn, New York may even feel they know who I am. Please, I beg you, reconsider what we are doing on this subject.

Marvin Shilmer

## Re: Jehovah's Witnesses and Blood vs. Justification and Responsibility

19 January 2001



**Osamu Muramoto**,  
Regional Ethics Council  
Kaiser Permanente,  
Interstate Medical Office  
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USA

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Jehovah's Witnesses  
and Blood vs. Justification and  
Responsibility](#)

Email Osamu Muramoto:  
[muramoto@aracnet.com](mailto:muramoto@aracnet.com)

I appreciate Mr. Shilmer's comment as an active Witness elder. Compared with Mr. Bartlett's letter, the opinions of Mr. Shilmer and Mr. Elder testify how diverse the views are on this issue among Jehovah's Witnesses. Since Mr. Shilmer raised the question of partial abstinence from blood, I would like to add one example to show how the new WTS blood policy is NOT abstaining from blood.

As I stated in this paper, and as clearly stated in the new version of the Durable Power of Attorney form printed by the WTS and distributed to the JW's in the United States last week, the new policy allows JW's to accept "all fractions" of "any primary component." The WTS has emphasized in its literature that those "fractions" are "small" and therefore acceptable. When I ask JW's why those "fractions" are acceptable, most would reply, "because they are tiny fractions." Under this new policy, the most important "fraction" JW's are now permitted to accept is hemoglobin-based blood substitutes, which had been prohibited until recently. How "small" is hemoglobin as a fraction of the blood? Let me quote a simple sentence from a college-level anatomy textbook: "Discounting its water content, an erythrocyte [red blood cells, which WTS determined unacceptable] is over 97% hemoglobin, the molecule that binds to and transports respiratory gasses.[1] If God commands to abstain from red blood cells, as the WTS teaches, why does the WTS also teach that accepting 97% of what God prohibits does not violate God's command?"

### Reference

1. Marieb E. Human anatomy and physiology. 4th ed. Menlo Park, CA: Addison Wesley Longman Inc; 1998:630

## Who is really defending dogmas?

21 January 2001



**Peter Morrell**,  
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ST4 2DE

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Who is really defending  
dogmas?](#)

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Sir,

It is very sad to behold the sniping from the side-lines and reflex denunciation of religious people [regardless of what they say], that this article [1] seems to have triggered, without very much acknowledgement, from the medical side, for the type of underlying rationale anyone might justifiably have for not wanting to have 'foreign impurities' like chemicals, vaccines or someone else's blood injected into their veins. Whither the fundamentals behind this issue?

Although their viewpoint might well be viewed as a form of anachronistic medical medievalism, yet there is a genuine issue attached to this matter, just as there was in the 19th century on the part of those who were opposed to routine vaccination. The issue, so far obscured, is that many religious people [not just Christians] believe that "the body is sacred and belongs to God" [2]. Naturally, this implies that the integrity and purity it manifested at birth, should be respected. That is the nub of the matter.

Is it universally proven beyond all doubt that blood transfusions cause no long-term, subtle, systemic harm to human beings? Would modern-day materialistically minded physicians even be capable of seeing such ill-effects if they existed? And would they be prepared to face the professional discomfort that would flow from admitting such ill-effects if they saw them? Are not such questions just about as futile as asking if Gulf War Syndrome is a real condition, or that depleted uranium does induce some ill-effects? There seems a suspiciously strong desire in medical circles to loudly beat one drum and to drown out with that drum any voice of discontent or challenge to the accepted orthodoxy on such practices.

Or, alternatively, are we watching an example of "physicians' ignorance of patient preferences, ineffectiveness at communicating with their patients, and failure to satisfy patients' expectations" [3]; "a societally sanctified imbalance of power in the relationships between doctors and patients." [3] inducing physicians to ruthlessly defend a cherished belief/dogma of modern medicine, regardless of the possible validity of any dissenting viewpoint? Is it any wonder therefore that critics of modern medicine sometimes emit sounds like this: "Medicine...is doctor dominated...and patients...are passive victims pitted against tyrannical doctors"[3]?

It would be worth knowing with greater certainty where the truth really lies on this complex issue, because both sides seem to be speaking languages pretty incomprehensible to the other. More tolerance and open-mindedness might not go amiss either.

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[3] The Lancet Dec 7, 1996, The Power of Life or Death: A Critique of Medical Tyranny, by Fabiano Tassano, book review by Miriam Schuchman

## Re: Who is really defending dogmas?

22 January 2001



**Osamu Muramoto,**  
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*USA*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Who is really  
defending dogmas?](#)

Email Osamu Muramoto:  
[muramoto@aracnet.com](mailto:muramoto@aracnet.com)

I am afraid Mr. Morrell's comment misses the entire point of my article and the debate that ensued. I have never questioned freedom of choice in medical care, even when the choice runs contrary to modern medical knowledge or, in Morrell's words, the "dogma of modern medicine." That is not the issue we are discussing here. Nor is the safety of blood products the issue either. Any medical intervention, whether it is blood transfusion, vaccination, use of antibiotics or circumcision, requires careful balancing between expected benefits and risks. Every physician knows that modern medicine is still incapable of seeing all the risks and benefits involved in those interventions. Morrell may be quite right that "long-term, subtle, systemic harm to human beings" might exist in blood transfusions. Nonetheless, we have to make decisions based on probabilities in order to deal with life and death situations. It is the current practice of most physicians, including myself, to carefully balance the benefits and risks based on available information and present them to the patient. We respect the informed and autonomous choice of each individual patient after this consideration, even if the choice is contrary to the recommendations of "modern-day materialistically minded physicians." If Morrell is questioning this basic and widely accepted tenet of medical ethics, he simply misinterpreted my article.

We are not debating here whether physicians should respect unpopular medical decisions, or whether blood products have any unknown long-term and subtle problems. The answers to those questions are affirmative and there is little room for debate. The heart of this debate is the external factors affecting the informed and autonomous decisions of each JW patient. The most important external factor is not physicians "ruthlessly defending a cherished belief/dogma of modern medicine", but the inconsistent and mutating policy of the controlling organization, the Watchtower Society (WTS). This organization ignores and suppresses free speech - the dissenting voices inside the religious community - and unduly punishes informed and autonomous decisions that do not conform to the policy, and even encourages violation of medical confidentiality. That is the ethical challenge that I hope Mr. Morrell come to learn from this article and debate.

I entirely agree with Mr. Morrell in his last sentence, "more tolerance and open-mindedness might not go amiss either." I hope that more Jehovah's Witnesses and representatives of the religious organization, the WTS, will come forward and open-mindedly debate this complex matter.

## dogma, smogma

22 January 2001



**ian nesbitt,**  
anaesthesia  
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Send response to journal:  
[Re: dogma, smogma](#)

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On issues of fact and dogma: Morrell accuses Doctors of defending dogma and beating drums loudly to still the opposition. Maybe some basic research would have helped before posting.

Blood transfusion can kill: no-one disputes this, and most undergraduate textbooks attest to this. Blood transfusion can be (often is) life saving. This is fact, not dogma. The longer term effects of blood transfusion are not unknown. (Physicians regularly publish on this topic: look up Medline). It will be impossible to ever prove beyond doubt that transfusion has no ill effects (it is after all, difficult to prove a negative). Similarly, how can anyone prove that God doesn't exist?

If the body is sacred and belongs to God (therefore no impurities should be put into it); why has the Watchtower Society withdrawn its opposition to aluminium, vaccinations, most parts of blood transfusion (and probably in the not too distant future, all parts of blood?). Why not extend this purity to the rest of life: food additives, other drugs, organ transplantation etc? If the issue of impurity is relevant, at least be consistent, even for a few years at a time.

The history of the WTS opposition to blood transfusion reads less like the ever changing, gradually revealed, word of God and more like "another fine mess" that someone got themselves in. The failure by the WTS to disseminate full and up to date information to its general membership about what is acceptable speaks volumes about the difficulties the society finds itself in.

Interests etc: Not religious. Seen a few people bleed to death. Would accept a transfusion, since I'd rather survive with the possibility of mild long term effects than die without.

## Beating the drums of compliance and conformity

23 January 2001



**Peter Morrell,**  
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Send response to journal:  
[Re: Beating the drums of  
compliance and conformity](#)

Email Peter Morrell:  
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Sir,

It is a pity that my preliminary thoughts on this subject [1] were rashly interpreted as my ONLY thoughts on it.

While I accept the points made by Muramoto [2] and Nesbitt [3], there does remain an issue about this subject. Firstly, there is an issue about anyone interpreting anything in any way they like. It is not wise to dictate to others about what their article is \*really\* about. Let the people decide. Would they as arrogantly force on the populace their cultural view about a Picasso painting? People have the right to interpret things for themselves and to formulate their own viewpoints on any subject - no matter how peculiar, offbeat or off-topic it might appear to be. That is how we all learn from one



another in a pluralistic society. If an argument is constructed with grace, architecture and intelligence then it gets my vote, regardless of whether I agree with it or not. Therefore, on those grounds alone, what I said before does have some merit and is connected more than tenuously to the topic in hand. People are at liberty to disagree with what I said, of course, but one's right to compose useful responses to an article or email remains valid and - to me - sacrosanct.

Secondly, there is an undoubted issue in this topic about 'beating the drums of compliance and conformity'. There is clear conformity within medicine. One would be hard-pushed to find a more conformist profession. Patients are expected to conform and to be deferential [4], but so also do doctors conform [5, 6] to the social norms of their profession. Carl Gray [6] asks, in his amusing article, 'how far should professionals determine style and conformity in a medical career?'. Yet he also notes that 'Mavericks, non-conformists and the person who disagrees...are secretly valued.'. And woe betide anyone who doesn't conform. 'flamboyant weirdness is captivating but also confusing' [6]. Any head that lifts itself above the common herd and expresses an alternative view may get cracked loud and hard! Look at the poor doctor who is currently being criticised for questioning the safety of the MMR vaccine. A very brave man indeed, and precisely because of the dominant drum-beating of conformity within the profession.

There is also clear conformity within all religions and JW's are no exception. Even science is not immune from this conformist drum-beating tendency. While the Pope fell out with Galileo four centuries ago, and science prides itself on a long history of challenging and defying dogma, yet, in the modern world, it has become something of a papacy in its own right that enforces its own dogmas and spawns eager young Inquisitors to root out and pour scorn upon any anti-science heretics they can find.

Thus, in all these senses, what I previously wrote is amply in keeping with the spirit of the original article and the eletters to it. Finally, the fundamental point I made about blood transfusions and other 'contagions' introduced into the blood was a valid slant on this topic. While the JW's might well have started out as anti-contagionists on this issue, these days they have clearly wished to see it more as a mark of their own religious identity, that sets them apart. Thus, the function of their refusing blood transfusions, has been transformed from being a purely biological issue, into a social aspect of their own religious identity - a badge they proudly wear 'as a sign of rebellion or conformity...to show group membership' [7] - and reflects not their antipathy towards biological impurity per se, but their attitude towards attacks upon their beliefs and their self-identity as a religious group in society distinct from a hostile host society.

While I recognise that, I also see the defence of dogma in medical circles by doctors stating that vaccination is safe and a blood transfusion is safer than bleeding to death [which it clearly is]. One can view these facets BOTH as scientific facts and as features of the social identity of physicians. I would go further, and say that for some people their identity as a conformist physician is more important for them to maintain [and be seen to maintain] than is the biological truth or falsity of the doctrine itself. That is precisely where belief turns into dogma and the drum beating commences.

No doubt the same holds true for JW's. In other words, as Muramoto has said, the religious refusal of transfusion has become as much a mark of their religious identity [conformity with beliefs of their Elders], as it is a mark of their rejection of biological contamination. I think this summarises in more detail my own attitude to this complex and interesting matter.

#### Sources

[1] BMJ letter, 20 Jan 2001, Peter Morrell, Who is really defending dogma?

[2] BMJ letter, 21 Jan 2001, Re: Who is really defending dogma? Osamu Muramoto

[3] BMJ letter, 21 Jan 2001, Dogma, smogma, Ian Nesbitt,

[4] LETTERS, Taking medicines: concordance is not compliance, David Dickinson, Patricia Wilkie, and Miriam Harris, BMJ 1999; 319: 787. [Full text] </cgi/content/full/319/7212/787>

[5] CAREER FOCUS, The crisis of conformity, Douglas Carnall, BMJ 2000; 321: 2. [Full text] </cgi/content/full/321/7252/S2a-7252>

[6] Career focus, Eccentricity and conformity, Carl Gray, BMJ 1999; 319: 2. [Full text] </cgi/content/full/319/7220/S2-7220>

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## Re: Beating the drums of compliance and conformity

26 January 2001



**Osamu Muramoto,**  
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USA

I do not believe I have any major disagreement with Morrell. He has every right to respond to my article in any way he would like. I simply indicated that what he wrote was not in the scope of what I and others were discussing here. Morrell looked at it differently, and that is his own perspective. I have no intention to demand "conformity" from Morrell. I agree that conformity exists in many groups in the human society, including religion and academia. Whether it is good or bad, it is a fact. Also, there has always been a struggle between conformists and non-conformists throughout human

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[Re: Re: Beating the drums of compliance and conformity](#)

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history. This is also a fact. Jesus Christ was a typical non-conformist of his days, struggling with the conformists of the existing religious authority. History shows that his self-claimed "successors" became typical conformists, "beating the drums of compliance and conformity" by enforcing their own dogma. Likewise, when JW religion was created by Taize Russell in Pennsylvania in late 19th century, it was a typical non-conformist group. However, it soon became a typical drum- beating conformist, enforcing the religion's own creative dogma such as the blood policy as I reviewed here. History of the communist world is full of the cyclical transformation from non-conformists to conformists. In this respect, the JW religion may be a small scale model of how a non- conformist group transforms into a dogmatic conformist in a short period of time.

I also agree with Morrell in his comment that the blood policy is "a mark of their own religious identity, that sets them apart." This aspect of the blood refusal was well described by a Dutch sociologist Richard Singelenberg in 1990.[1] The policy is still a powerful underlying source of cohesiveness among the members. By signing the so-called "blood card", the members pledge their own lives and children's lives for "Jehovah." By readying themselves to die for the religion, JWs make a uniquely intense commitment to the religion, which is not seen in most other religions. This very nature of the blood card as religious identity also raises the question regarding the validity of the card as a medical advance directive. In fact it is a well-known fact among JWs that the blood card has been used for identification purposes. For example, when a new book was released at the 1993 JW district conventions it was in short supply. The blood card was used to identify those who had more than a certain number of years as JWs and so qualified to receive the book.

Finally, Morrell's characterization of the blood refusal as "transformed from being a purely biological issue into a social aspect of their own religious identity" is inaccurate. The policy has always been primarily a religious issue throughout the history, though biological issue or "anti-contagionists" stance has been extensively deployed to fan general fear against blood transfusions among JWs.

#### Reference

[1] Singelenberg R. The blood transfusion taboo of Jehovah's Witnesses; origin, development and function of a controversial doctrine. Social Science and Medicine 1990; 31:515-23.

## Are they really reformers?

27 January 2001



**George Smithson**

Sir:

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Are they really reformers?](#)

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For the past several years, I have followed the publication of numerous items describing so-called "reform" Jehovah's Witnesses and their "struggle" to have the Watchtower leadership approve blood transfusions for their membership. Frankly, I find the whole discussion and their Web site rather ridiculous for the following reasons.

First, when I think of reformers I am immediately reminded of people like Luther, Tyndale, and Wycliffe, as well as countless other men and women who were willing to die a painful death in order to engender reform in what they believed was a harsh and tyrannical organization.

However, the so-called "reform" Jehovah's Witnesses hide behind a web site and do not have the courage to identify themselves. If they were truly concerned about the number of Witness lives that are being lost as a result of refusal of transfusion, they would not be hiding behind an electronic front.

Of course, that might mean that they would be ostracized or even "disfellowshipped" for speaking out. But if they were truly concerned about the loss of Witness lives, of what concern would that be. They should be willing to do anything in their power to elicit change. But they are not! What is the explanation for this?

To me it can only be explained in one of two ways. Either they are not really active Jehovah's Witnesses, as they claim, or they are not truly interested in "saving lives" but are simply determined to stir up bad publicity for Jehovah's Witnesses with no real concern about any lives.

Second, when I first began to read the material from the JW reformers, their spokesperson called himself "The Liberal Elder" and claimed to be an active Jehovah's Witness elder. However, as time went on he admitted that he was not an elder or even an active Jehovah's Witness. This type of deception casts doubt over the claim that active Jehovah's Witnesses are involved in this movement.

Third, Dr. Muramoto is not honest in his declaration of competing interests. While he mentions that he has relatives that are Jehovah's Witnesses, he does not mention that these "relatives" are his wife and daughter. Some time ago, I read on another Web site a discussion by Dr. Muramoto of his efforts to dissuade his wife and daughter from being Witnesses. I think it is dishonest for Dr. Muramoto not to disclose this when he writes articles about issues involving Jehovah's Witnesses. He is not a neutral party.

In conclusion, I don't think it is up to Dr. Muramoto to judge the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses or any other faith community. Every human being should have the right to believe as they choose.

Thank you.

George Smithson

Disclosure: I was raised a Jehovah's Witness and continue to monitor activities and developments within their faith.

## The conundrum of the three flasks

27 January 2001



**Peter Morrell,**  
Hon Research Associate,  
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ST4 2DE

Sir,

I thank Prof. Muramoto for making such a patient and polite response to my letter, and it serves as a fine example of how people, with very different perspectives, can still dialogue intelligently and cordially on a difficult subject, without resorting to attacks on the person rather than dealing with the points being made.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: The conundrum of the three flasks](#)

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However, I would like to return to a couple of small points, which my reply was based on and which Prof. Muramoto appears to have ignored. My essentially post-modern slant on this issue was inclined to demonstrate two things. First, that anyone is entitled to any view they wish both in perception and worldview and also in their approach to the interpretation of phenomena. Second, that scientists and medical practitioners are probably no less guilty of being 'compliant conformists in their belief of established doctrines', within their chosen fields, than are JW's. I think that latter point has not been entirely explored. It is akin to the conundrum of the three flasks.

The three flasks here are medicine, science and JW's. In chemistry, any valid experiment must proceed on the basis that the conditions in each flask are near identical save one condition, and then the outcome is due to the single condition that was altered. My analogy sought to apply this approach to the subject of JW's blood refusal, and thus to test the hypothesis that the only major differences between science, medicine and JW's - our three flasks - is the content of their knowledge and beliefs and NOT their apprehension of it.

Thus, one might say that although scientists and medical practitioners have different forms of knowledge, they have the same attitude towards it, while JW's have both different knowledge AND a different attitude towards it. That seems to be an accurate depiction of the usual position. By showing that there is 'belief' and 'conformity to accepted beliefs' in all three flasks, I sought to demolish the contention that the contents of the three flasks were essentially different and hence the widely-held view that science and medicine are sufficiently similar to each other, and radically different from JW's, so as to automatically discredit the JW's by the 'deeply-held and conformist' nature of their own belief system - or attitude towards their own knowledge. I attempted to show that this is not readily demonstrable, as a similar attitude towards knowledge persists not solely in the JW flask, but in all three, as some degree of 'compliant conformity to the accepted norms of belief' manifestly exists in all three. Therefore, any alleged differences between the flasks is more apparent than real.

I would be very grateful if Prof. Muramoto could give his reaction to this idea and whether he accepts that any alleged differences between science/medicine and JW's are more apparent than real - on this basis - or whether he believes that scientists/medics really are substantially LESS guilty of 'compliant conformity to the accepted norms of beliefs' as compared with JW's? And if so, then why? Where is the evidence?

He may, for example, contend that the 'rate of change in beliefs' easily (?) demonstrated within science and medicine is much higher than occurs typically in JW religion, for the difference to be greater than imagined. But that is also matched by the point previously made by Dr Nesbitt about the 'changing word of God' and the contentions Prof. Muramoto himself makes about the fluid nature of JW belief over an extended period. Do these not also comprise evidence for the fluid and evolving nature of JW belief of a similar magnitude to that occurring in science and medicine?

And I would also caution that any apparent changes in belief in science are precisely that - much more apparent than real. Although ideas and facts have certainly evolved, and at an accelerating pace, yet the essentially materialist [and pervasively anti-religious] attitude within science has barely changed at all in the last three centuries, since the time of Boyle, Locke and Newton. Likewise, 'the dogmatising tendency' within science seems to be no less rabid than that in religion. If so, then the 'fluid and evolving nature of belief' cannot really be used as a true measure of any difference between the three flasks either! I thank Prof. Muramoto in advance for any further light he might care to shed on this matter.

## Re: Are they really reformers?

28 January 2001



**Lee Elder,**  
Founder  
Associated Jehovah's  
Witnesses for Reform on  
Blood - AJWRB

In his response to Muramoto's article, George Smithson made some remarks that require a response from me personally and as a representative of the Associated Jehovah's Witnesses for Reform on Blood (AJWRB).

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Are they really reformers?](#)

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Mr. Smithson finds AJWRB and our efforts "ridiculous" because most of our members feel compelled to remain anonymous. He in fact states, "if they were truly concerned about the number of Witness lives that are being lost as a result of refusal of transfusion, they would not be hiding behind an electronic front...they should be willing to do anything in their power to elicit change. But they are not! What is the explanation for this?"

This is a complex issue, but I will attempt to address this question. Mr. Smithson's clear implication is that the disfellowshipping and subsequent shunning of all AJWRB's members would somehow be the catalyst for changing the Watchtower Society's (WTS) blood policy and hence save lives. Such

reasoning and argument is so naïve it calls into question the purpose of Mr. Smithson's remarks.

The WTS has for many decades implemented what amounts to a "scorched earth" policy in matters of dissent. As recently as this week during the Theocratic Ministry School, members were once again indoctrinated on "apostasy" and the need to completely shun anyone who disagrees with the channel that God is using to communicate with his people - the Watchtower Society.

If Mr. Smithson is indeed familiar with the AJWRB website he has read accounts like the one concerning Br. Wayne Rogers who was disfellowshipped when his wife turned him in for sending an email to AJWRB supporting our efforts. His wife was later encouraged to separate from him after a decade of marriage because he posed "absolute spiritual endangerment".

The WTS and member congregations have highly effective mechanisms in place to squelch any voice of dissent. Once a member is disfellowshipped, it becomes impossible for that member to discuss the blood issue with others, even members of their own family.

AJWRB believes that the most effective way to pressure the WTS into making needed reforms is to act anonymously. This prevents the WTS from silencing our voices or claiming that we are "disgruntled former members" or "apostates". The truth of the matter is that quite a few of our members have been disfellowshipped for holding or sharing their dissident views on the WTS' blood policy. While their stories make for interesting reading, they do not serve to help other JW's who are forbidden to even say a greeting to them.

Thus the need for anonymity is clear and the right to anonymity is acknowledged by informed and discerning individuals like Justice John Stevens of the United States Supreme Court: "Anonymity is a shield from the tyranny of the majority. It thus exemplifies the purpose behind the Bill of Rights and of the First Amendment in particular: To protect unpopular individuals from retaliation -- and their ideas from suppression -- at the hand of an intolerant society."

Additionally, AJWRB has never claimed that all of its members were "active" Jehovah's Witnesses. This is a WTS term designating one who reports time spent in the ministry and is a non-issue. Furthermore, "stirring up bad publicity" for the WTS is also a non-issue. Once the WTS grants JW's a free choice in their medical care, without control or sanction, AJWRB will disappear, having served its purpose. We would like to see this happen immediately and have no desire for the WTS to receive "bad publicity", beyond the obvious purpose it can serve as a catalyst for further change in the policy.

Mr. Smithson's comments regarding me personally are false and uninformed. My status as a Jehovah's Witness has been openly and accurately disclosed from the beginning and was recently published in an article written for the Journal of Medical Ethics. I am a third generation Jehovah's Witness who served as an elder for approximately ten years until my conscience required that I resign. I was an "active" elder when I began my activities related to the blood issue in 1995 and when AJWRB was founded in 1997. After I resigned I changed my identity from "The Liberal Elder" to "Lee Elder" specifically for the purpose of not giving anyone the impression I was still serving in that capacity. I remain a Jehovah's Witness in good standing in my local congregation though not an elder. As a dissident opposed to the WTS blood policy it would be impossible for me to go into the house to house ministry and try to convince others to join my religion since they and their children would be subject to this policy. Hence, I am "inactive" meaning that I do not report field service time (ministry). This too is a "non-issue" in my view. Ironically Mr. Smithson never bothers to disclose whether or not he himself is an "active" or "inactive" Jehovah's Witness. His comments amount to a shallow personal attack on Muramoto and myself while he fails to address any of the core issues raised by Muramoto.

In closing let me say that Mr. Smithson is correct about one thing. He stated: "Every human being should have the right to believe as they choose." This should include dissident Jehovah's Witnesses who are presently persecuted by the WTS simply for holding a different view on the matter of blood and refusing to sacrifice their lives or the lives of their children for a policy they cannot conscientiously support.

## Re: Are they really reformers?

28 January 2001



**Osamu Muramoto,**  
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Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Are they really reformers?](#)

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Smithson claims I am not honest in saying I have relatives who are Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) without disclosing which relatives they are. Is such disclosure really necessary? Does it make any difference whether the relative is one's wife, husband, daughter, son, brother, sister, grandfather, grandson, nephew or niece? Aren't they all included in the word "relatives"? Smithson failed to give any reason why such individualized information is relevant to this paper. If he really thinks such information is important, why does he not list all of his relatives who are JWs? While I do not believe such disclosure is relevant, Smithson is inconsistent in demanding that I provide such detail when he fails to provide it himself..

Why is it wrong for me to take a position on the blood refusal issue if I have relatives who are affected by that? Most of us are motivated to take an action by what has happened in our own lives. One doctor lost his father from lung cancer due to heavy smoking. He became a strong advocate of an anti-smoking campaign because of his personal experience. What is wrong with that? A mother lost her infant son due to religiously-based medical neglect. She is now organizing a child-advocacy group against religions which teach medical neglect. She writes many articles in medical journals. Is anything wrong with her behavior? I have witnessed many tragedies among Jehovah's Witnesses in



my professional life as a physician and as a family member of JW's. Without such personal experience, I would have had no motivation to do in-depth research on this issue. What is wrong with my actions?

Whether one's writing is neutral or not all depends on where one stands on the entire spectrum of the debate. There is no question that I will be viewed by loyal JW's as biased against them. However, I have also received encouragement and support from many other JW's such as Mr. Shilmer as published above.[1] Smithson's claim is no more surprising than the claim of the executives of the tobacco companies saying that the American Lung Association is not "neutral." Whether a viewpoint is neutral is all relative, and I am not claiming that I am neutral from the viewpoint of loyal and orthodox JW's.

It is interesting to note that Smithson focused on personal issues concerning critics of the Watchtower Society such as myself and Lee Elder, yet he never addressed the very questions raised in this debate. This is not surprising because he is not the only JW who engages in personal attacks to distract the audience from the very issues we are debating. Such ad hominem attacks by loyal Jehovah's Witnesses without addressing the very issues only enhance my impression that JW's have no solid rationale, whether religious or medical, behind the current practice of blood refusal. Over the past several years in which I have engaged in this debate, I have received many personal attacks from loyal JW's, some of which are outright slanderous. When I was asked whether the BMJ editorial should invite a Jehovah's Witness representative to respond to my article, I replied to the editor that he is welcome to do so, but that he would very likely receive another piece with personal attack without addressing the substance of the issue. It appears my prediction was correct. In my opinion, when one starts attacking the messenger without addressing the message, it is a sign that one tacitly admits that the message has merit.

Finally, I have no disagreement with Smithson's conclusion. I have never claimed it is up to me to judge any religion. I also believe every human being has the right to believe as they choose, which very few people would argue against. However, we are still left with this question: why does Smithson as a JW conclude his letter with only such obvious statements, without addressing the important issues we are discussing here, such as a religious organization promoting illegal breach of medical confidentiality?

#### Reference

1. Shilmer M: Jehovah's Witnesses and Blood vs. Justification and Responsibility. BMJ <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL11>

## Re: The conundrum of the three flasks

29 January 2001



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Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: The conundrum of the three flasks](#)

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I appreciate Peter Morrell's ongoing thought-provoking comments. Although my personal interest is in the vicinity of his discussion, I did not want to go too much into detail of his comments. I did not ignore them, but I wanted to maintain our focus to specific issues of JW's and blood refusal. With Morrell's insistence, I will try to address his question.

I understood that the essence of his question is whether there is any difference, apparent or real, between science/medicine and JW's with regard to "compliant conformity to the accepted norms of beliefs." As I stated in my second reply[1], it is a fact of our life that dogmatic conformity exists in almost any group, including religion and academia among others. In that sense, I agree that there may be no real difference between science and medicine and JW's. I also agree that "fluid and evolving nature of belief " exists in both science and medicine and religion. In my view, that is another universal nature of human being.

Is there any difference then? I think one of the most important differences is the source of the authority with which the dogma is generated, the conformity is enforced and the evolution of beliefs is justified. In science and medicine, the source of the authority is tangible and reproducible evidence. In our present time, most of us do not believe in any authority in science and medicine whose claim is not backed up by sound evidence that can be easily verified in objective and reproducible methods. At the same time, anybody can assume a supreme authority if his/her claim is backed up by indisputable evidence. When there is a debate in medical science, whether HIV as the cause of AIDS or safety of the MMR vaccine, the debate usually boils down to the evaluation of the evidence. If the evidence is 100% established, the authority is also established 100% without much controversy. If the evidence is only 70% when the scientist claims 100% authority, we often see heated debate and controversy.

In contrast, the source of authority in religion is God, who requires no proof, evidence or discussion. Anybody can generate a dogma and enforce the conformity with unparalleled authority, once he assumes the authority of "God's representative." The dogma can be changed without any reason under the name of God, and the compliance with the new dogma is demanded as much as the defunct old dogma under the name of God. The authority is always 100% regardless. Here I am only referring to organized, highly structured religious system such as the JW religion. A personal religious belief which is kept personal on the individual level does not apply in this discussion, as the "conformity" by definition involves interaction among individuals inside a group of people. I have totally different views on personal religious beliefs, but I will stop the discussion here, as I am afraid we are further digressing.

Morrell asked which is "less guilty", science/medicine or religion. Historically, science and medicine have made numerous errors and mistakes based on dogmatic approaches, causing many harms. Organized religions have also caused numerous tragedies under the name of God. Which is more harmful, I cannot tell. However, one thing that is clear to me is the fact that the science and medicine of our time readily admit to our mistakes and errors. We learn a lesson from the previous errors. We scrutinize our own errors and make every effort not to repeat the same errors. Of course there are exceptions, but that is the mainstream of the scientific and medical communities today. In contrast, the religion seldom admits to their own errors, present or past, though certain religions recently have made a remarkable progress in this regard. In most other religions including the JW religion, the errors are just a minor imperfection which are hidden behind the glory. At any given time in history, the current religious organization is the only source of the truth backed up by God. There is no room for them to criticize themselves, to learn a lesson from their own serious errors, or to examine alternative views. After all, if God is always behind them, there should be no serious errors. Why bother anything else other than their own authority?

#### Reference

1. Muramoto O: Re: Beating the drums of compliance and conformity. BMJ 2001 <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL18>

## Re: The conundrum of the three flasks

29 January 2001



### Thomas Daniels

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: The conundrum of the three flasks](#)

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[ocotillo50@hotmail.com](mailto:ocotillo50@hotmail.com)

Peter Morrell has raised some interesting concerns and I for one applaud his decency as a human being in being willing to step forward and give voice to them. I have been associated with Jehovah's Witnesses all my life, as were my parents and their parents before them. Speaking from that perspective, I can perhaps shed some additional light on the subject, which may prove helpful.

First and foremost, it must be kept in mind that Jehovah's Witnesses are rationalists par excellence. Morrell defends the right of individuals both to believe and to perceive things as they wish, and rightly so, but for Jehovah's Witnesses, who eschew the notion of blind faith, or in other words, faith that is contradicted by physical facts, the issues are unique.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the world that we perceive is a real one and reject any and all systems, such as those of Hinduism or Christian Science, which teach that only the mind or spirit is real. Jehovah's Witnesses reject the idea of modern day miracles such as speaking in tongues, faith healing, etc. Similarly, they reject the idea of the Earth being created in six literal days and for that matter any other traditional Christian belief that in their opinion is illogical or in some other way is contraindicated by physical or mathematical law. In short, Jehovah's Witnesses believe what they believe not out of a sense of tradition and not out of an intentional desire to display an outward sign of their religious identity, (although this can sometimes be the unintentional end result) but because they are confident that the evidence, when honestly examined, unqualifiedly and incontrovertibly supports these beliefs. Further, and more importantly for the purposes of this discussion, Jehovah's Witnesses believe that any reasonable person approaching the subject with an open mind would adopt these beliefs once they have been adequately explained. This is in part why they come knocking at your door in the first place.

Their stance on the medical use of blood is no exception. Morrell attributes what almost seems to be an ontological nature to the Witnesses refusal of blood that is not accurate. The Witnesses' view on transfusion medicine had as its origin not a desire to protect the integrity and purity of the human body and not a fear of biological contamination. It was, in the last analysis, simple misconception. As Morrell could probably explain far better than I can from an historical perspective, Man has only understood the role that blood played in sustaining the life of the body relatively recently. For example, Claudius Galen in the 2nd century taught that the liver converted the food in the intestines into blood and from there it flowed outward through the entire body. This belief in various forms persisted for centuries. It was in fact based on the misconception that blood itself is the food upon which the body is ultimately sustained that early researchers surmised that a therapeutic benefit could be gained by transfusion.(1) This idea continued to be a layman's misconception at least up to the late 19th century. For example consider how H G Wells in his 1898 novel *The War Of The Worlds* speculates as to how a highly evolved race might sustain itself:

"They were heads---merely heads. Entrails they had none. They did not eat, much less digest. Instead they took the fresh living blood of other creatures and injected it into their own veins.....The physiological advantages of the practice of injection are undeniable, if one thinks of the tremendous waste of human time and energy occasioned by eating and the digestive process. Our bodies are half made up of glands and tubes and organs occupied in the process of turning heterogeneous food into blood."(2)

When blood is viewed in this light, it is perfectly understandable for Christians who believe that they must obey the biblical prohibitions against eating blood to conclude that blood transfusion, through a very simple logical construction, would fall directly under the umbrella of a scriptural prohibition. Such was clearly the case with Jehovah's Witnesses. (3) (4) (5) (6)

Although less informed individuals within the community of Jehovah's Witnesses today will sometimes attempt to directly support their stance on blood by invoking the biblical phrase "abstain....from blood" outside of its context, thinking Witnesses as well as the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society itself candidly acknowledge that the phrase is a direct reference to the eating of blood



as forbidden in the pre Christian era. (7) (8) (9) Therefore as far as blood is concerned, the issue for Jehovah's Witnesses is still presumably a rational one inasmuch as it has as its ultimate basis the idea that a demonstrable equivalency exists between the acts of consumption and transfusion.

However the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society discarded the idea that transfusion is physically equivalent to eating blood years ago. Subsequent argumentation implies a moral equivalency through the use of terms sufficiently generic enough to apply to both acts (e.g. "Taking in blood" "Taking blood into one's system" etc.) but fails to specifically explain what this equivalency is or how it is established. In the absence of a concrete explanation, the use of such terminology is little more than equivocation and many thinking Witnesses are aware of this.

Therefore by its very nature, the Witness view of transfusion medicine is not sacrosanct to the extent of being exempt from polite inquiry and consequently, Muramoto's suggestions do not seem inappropriate. When my own daughter was hospitalized early last year as a result of a blood disorder, both my wife (who is an "active" Witness) and myself (I am "inactive") were very grateful to be able to sit down with the pediatric hematologist and his staff and calmly explore our options in the knowledge that our final decision was between us and God alone.

Tom

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- (4) Anonymous The Watchtower 1951 July1: 415
- (5) Anonymous Awake! 1960 April 22: 8
- (6) Anonymous The Watchtower 1961 September 15: 558
- (7) Anonymous The Watchtower 1958 September 15: 575
- (8) United In Worship Of The Only True God, Watchtower Bible & Tract Society 1983: 149
- (9) Insight On The Scriptures vol. II, Watchtower Bible & Tract Society 1988: 587

### Re: Re: Are they really reformers?

30 January 2001



dave,  
student  
bolton university

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Re: Are they really reformers?](#)

Email dave:  
[djd1civ@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:djd1civ@bolton.ac.uk)

These reformers have all got one thing in common, they no longer preach from door to door, so they are not Jehovah's witnesses. Any genuine witness believes that the WTS is God's organisation on earth and that to go against what the WTS says is going against God. Also, a genuine witness although not wanting to die, believes that if he/she dies faithful in Jehovah's service will receive a resurrection. If someone does not believe this then why do they wish to continue associating with the witnesses? The taking in of blood is against God's law and the society teaches this. Whether people accept this or not is up to them, if they don't they should find a religion which they do agree with.

I am an active Jehovah's witness.

### Re: Re: Beating the drums of compliance and conformity

30 January 2001



Sam Beli,  
Member of the AJWRB

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Re: Beating the drums of compliance and conformity](#)

Email Sam Beli:  
[sambeliever@hotmail.com](mailto:sambeliever@hotmail.com)

I am responding specially to these words of Dr Muramoto: "The policy has always been primarily a religious issue throughout the history, though biological issue or "anti-contagionists" stance has been extensively deployed to fan general fear against blood transfusions among JWs."

Let me try to add another perspective to this very interesting debate. I write with considerable knowledge of Jehovah's Witnesses because I was an active JW for over 30 years and I served as an elder in a local congregation and lectured at some of their circuit assemblies.

I believe that Dr Muramoto may be concerned as I am about the following issues:

1. Lack of adequate information/education about the blood issue found among most JWs.
2. Considerable peer pressure is applied to JWs facing possible life/death decisions to refuse "blood transfusions."
3. The great difficulty of maintaining confidentiality of a JW's medical record.
4. Excommunication of the JW who decides that he/she can conscientiously accept a forbidden portion of blood if and when the violation is discovered.

Here are some of my thoughts on these issues.

- (1) JWs are discouraged from reading literature that is not published by their Watchtower Society (WTS). Most adhere to those instructions. They believe that God speaks through the WTS and that all

other literature ultimately originates from the Devil. Most do not read and educated themselves independently from the WTS about the blood issue. Therefore, life and death decisions by JW's are often made when they do not possess all the information available.

The official WTS reasons for banning blood transfusions is a religious one. However, more of their published column space is devoted to the medical hazards of blood therapy and to unfavorable outcomes associated with medical use of blood than is devoted to the religious arguments against blood usage. For example, a "Blood Brochure" published in the 80s (I think – I became so disappointed with the WTS that I got rid of most of my library of JW literature) containing 32 pages, devotes only 3 pages to the Biblical supporting evidence for their blood doctrine. The remaining 25 pages (subtract 4 pages for inside and outside covers) are filled with descriptions of the untoward effects and hazards of accepting blood products. The "fractions" that they do permit are not itemized anywhere in any of these 32 pages.

The result is that most JW's form the opinion that all blood therapy is more hazardous than helpful, and that the majority of transfusions are associated with unfavorable outcomes. These results, they believe, confirm the wisdom of God's (WTS) banning blood transfusions.

The bottom line conclusion of many JW's on this subject is that they believe it is physicians who are uninformed. They believe that if doctors really wanted to, they could treat all patients with 'alternatives' to blood therapy or "blood substitutes," making blood itself unnecessary.

(2) Peer pressure among JW's can be an awesome force in these matters. When relatives, friends, close religious associates and church officials clamor for a JW to refuse blood and the threat of ostracism hangs over the head of the person (s) making the decision, it is very difficult for the typical JW to exercise his/her own conscious if it differs from these peers. The goal of the WTS and the elders is to preserve unity; to keep all JW's "in line," with all JW's answering with a firm "no" to doctors who suggest that blood is needed.

I have seen JW's and their elders, while visiting a JW patient, actually ridicule blood administration being given to another patient nearby, showing little respect for that person's decision. These dispersions add to the pressure on all JW's within hearing to conform to the "no blood" policy of the WTS.

A JW who openly agrees to accept one of the forbidden blood products can expect to be disfellowshipped (excommunicated). Their family and friends will have little to do with them thereafter. Some have even been excommunicated while in their deathbed.

(3) As others have noted, JW's working in healthcare are encouraged to "keep their eyes open" to any information implicating another JW in "wrong doing," namely accepting forbidden blood "fractions." Many JW's would be quick to report such information to their elders) even when local law prohibits such disclosure. A judicial hearing (trial) usually follows with ostracism the probable result.

(4) The JW excommunication results in shunning of the 'guilty' party by family as well as by friends and religious associates. This practice is a powerful motivator that helps to keep JW's in-line. The prospect of losing the respect of ones parents, spouse, children, etc. is more than unpleasant, it can be down right debilitating, crippling ones abilities to reason effectively on the issues and to exercise one's own conscious

Physicians can be of immense help to the thinking JW by explaining fully the choices, offering to assist in maximizing the confidentiality of the medical record, and by offering to administer any forbidden products in the most inconspicuous way possible. More than a few JW's have opted for necessary blood administration in an inconspicuous manner, out of sight of prying eyes of "friends" and church elders.

Unfortunately, when a JW does receive blood products in an inconspicuous manner and it remains undiscovered by JW friends and church officials, these JW's have their misconceptions reinforced. They wrongly conclude that, once again, the doctors were wrong – the patient survived without blood based treatment.

**Re: Re: The conundrum...**

30 January 2001

**Joseph Watine,**  
Eur Clin Chem  
*Hôpital de Rodez, France*

Send response to journal:

[Re: Re: Re: The conundrum...](#)

Email Joseph Watine:  
[j.watine@ch-rodez.fr](mailto:j.watine@ch-rodez.fr)

One can agree with Osamu Muramoto [1] when he writes: "...science and medicine have made numerous errors and mistakes based on dogmatic approaches, causing many harms. Organised religions have also caused numerous tragedies under the name of God. Which is more harmful, I cannot tell..."

However, isn't there a contradiction somewhere when he adds: "...science and medicine of our time readily admit to our mistakes and errors... In contrast, religions seldom admits to their own errors..."?

It seems to me that Osamu Muramoto forgets that not only organised religion but also organised health care has a feudal structure that is quite well established in many countries [2, 3], as demonstrated by various observations, e.g. the absence of protection for the (young) doctors from the reactions of their hierarchy whose frauds they would denounce [4-6], the patients' difficulties when they ask to know their biomedical files [7], the lack of independence of local ethics (or else)

committees from their own institutions [5, 7], doctors' refusal to have their scientific and medical knowledge checked at regular intervals of time [8], etc. The recent scandals (contaminated blood in transfusion medicine, etc) enabled the public to discover, with dismay, the huge extent of these problems...

#### References:

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- [8] Watine J. Doctors' attitudes resemble those of the old aristocracy. BMJ 2000; 321:447 (and ensuing e-responses at [www.bmj.com](http://www.bmj.com)).

## Is debating unprofitable?

30 January 2001



**David Race,**  
"Prove All Things"--  
Christian apologetics/  
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45434-0773

Let me begin by saying that I have never been a member of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society but I have followed the beliefs and history of the WTBS for some time now and can attest to the accuracy of Dr. Muramoto's articles. The need for physicians to have accurate information when it comes to the subject of JW's and medical issues is great. As he pointed out, what individual JW's accept about the blood issue, may not reflect the actual WT position. It behooves those who are interested in the welfare of JW's to become acquainted with the reasoning of the WTBS in order to respond both scripturally and medically.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Is debating unprofitable?](#)

Email David Race:  
[chalkman15@cs.com](mailto:chalkman15@cs.com)

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the WT is "God's sole channel of communication". I recently sent an article to an active JW about whether God must use an organization and was told that he would not consider anything written by an "apostate". Basically, anyone who conscientiously leaves the WTS or is disfellowshipped for questioning doctrine, is considered an "apostate". JW's equate this with falling away from God. Those who have left the WT have indeed fallen away, yet they have fallen away from the organization, not God per se. JW's view their organization as the "truth". The organization takes the place of Jesus Christ. The Bible says that Jesus is the way, truth and the life and that no one can come to the Father "but by him". The WT has taught that one of the requirements for salvation is to be associated with God's organization. This organization is defined as the WTBS. This is why it is so hard for JW's as a whole to see the contradiction in the blood issue. Fortunately there are those who actually make their own decisions based upon the evidence. I applaud the efforts of the AJWRB and Dr. Muramoto. They are getting much needed information out to the medical community and those JW's who normally would not question the authority of the WT.

I spoke to a few Witnesses at the last district assembly here in the Dayton, Ohio area. I wanted to see if a public forum could be arranged where Witnesses and others from differing backgrounds could discuss a subject like "blood transfusions". I was directed to speak to local congregations to see if they would actually participate. I was told that if the purpose of such a forum was to debate, it would not be encouraged since, according to them, it would be unfruitful. Such would involve argument which would not be profitable. The real issue at hand is that a public debate would expose those attending to both sides of the issue. Now what about debating on the internet? To be frank, the WT has a dim view of the internet and the use of it to do what many here have done. I have had some in depth debates with Witnesses on debate boards and could probably write a couple of books with the responses I have saved. I have also been told that Witnesses would not be reprimanded for debating on the internet, yet I know that such has happened in certain instances. I have noticed that the Witnesses I have debated have used pseudonyms in order to maintain anonymity. I find it rather interesting that someone would attack the AJWRB for remaining anonymous, when many JW's who wish to defend the WT have to hide behind pseudonyms because they are afraid of organizational discipline(not Biblical discipline). I realize that there are JW's apologists who debate on the internet without pseudonyms--i.e. Firpo Carr(who has appeared on the Trinity Broadcasting Network) and Gregg Stafford(Jehovah's Witnesses Defended, but this is not representative of Witnesses as a whole. Most Witnesses would never dare do what these men have done. My point is that debates are indeed profitable or else JW's would not engage in them on the internet. Before I left the convention last summer, I was told that the only web site which could be relied on would be the official site of the Watchtower. Any other site which claims to be run by JW's may actually be apostates or opposers who are seeking to deceive and lead others astray. The AJWRB would be considered as such.

I proceeded to contact a local congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses and spoke with the presiding overseer. I told him of my intention of setting up a forum/debate. He told me that he would get back to me. Predictably, I was told that such an enterprise would accomplish nothing. It would be just a battle of words and unprofitable wrangling. I still plan on soliciting other responses to my request and if all else fails, I will still offer a lecture to educate the public and the medical community concerning this most important subject--JWs and blood.

I do not think that a formal debate would be unprofitable. I believe that it would demonstrate the inability of JWs to actually address the real issue. If a Witness were to agree to such a forum, I feel there would be an attempt to divert attention away from the contradictory position of the WT and utilize typical negative WT rhetoric against the use of blood, such as the fear of contracting disease(i.e. HIV/AIDS)

I realize that this response does not address specific details of Dr. Muramoto's article, but there were other posts which digressed from the heart of the issue. I know those who used to be Jehovah's Witnesses, and of course, according to JWS, this must make any information I have about the organization unreliable, since it must have come from apostates. Such mind control techniques are used in order to keep Witnesses from hearing all of the available evidence. Something that is true is still true whether it comes from someone who used to be a Witness, or whether it comes from a doctor who has family members who are currently involved with the WT. The issue is that there are people out there who are JWs who disagree with the WT over the blood issue. If there are caring individuals in the medical profession who are willing to ask pertinent questions, maybe the "accepted profile" of what JWs think about blood will be dismantled. We hear about racial profiling. What about "religious" or "medical" profiling?

Many JWs already accept the transfusion of their own intraoperatively stored blood and yet many other Witnesses would never consider this as a possibility because they simply are ignorant about past doctrinal changes and the current position on blood.

Thank you Dr. Muramoto for bringing this subject to a greater audience, especially those who have to treat JW patients. Who knows how many lives have been saved through the efforts of informed physicians and people involved with groups like the AJWRB, not to mention apologetics and educational ministries.

Thank you,

David Race

## Re: Are they really reformers?

30 January 2001



**Sam Beli,**  
Member of the AJWRB

Mr. Smithson said: "so-called "reform" Jehovah's Witnesses hide behind a web site and do not have the courage to identify themselves."

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Are they really reformers?](#)

Email Sam Beli:  
[sambeliever@hotmail.com](mailto:sambeliever@hotmail.com)

You hail reformers of the past who have died for the cause they championed, but deride present-day fighters against the tyranny of the WTS and its blood policy. Please tell us Mr. Smithson, what good has come from the deaths of those JWs who have died for their faith by refusing blood transplantation? You and I both know that nothing has been gained with respect to changing the WTS ban on blood or if it has, the WTS has not admitted it. JWs and the WTS excuse these deaths by saying that they would have died anyway, blood would not have saved them.

He also said: "If they were truly concerned about the number of Witness lives that are being lost as a result of refusal of transfusion, they would not be hiding behind an electronic front."

If I revealed my identity no JW would say a greeting to me let alone carry on a conversation about any matters of faith including the blood issue. The AJWRB members are a diverse group. The WTS and many JWs know precisely who some are because they spoke openly about the error of the scriptural interpretation of JWs concerning blood. They were disfellowshipped for there trouble. Others were excommunicated because they were "discovered" to have doubts about this issue.

Some of us have chosen to remain anonymous so as to more effectively carry on our work of helping JWs needing healthcare to make more informed decisions about blood therapy. Like you, the WTS would like to hunt us down and kill us (in a 'spiritual sense") to eliminate us from their membership. They, and probably you, view us as "evil apostates" deserving spiritual death (excommunication or disfellowshipping as you prefer to call it).

An electronic web site is an excellent way to reach far more people than we could ever reach by any other means that we could afford to finance.

He also said: "Either they are not really active Jehovah's Witnesses, as they claim, or they are not truly interested in "saving lives."

You are uninformed about us as this statement demonstrates. For example, I am a JW in good standing. That is, I have never been disfellowshipped, never been "reproved," never been put on "probation," or any of the other terms used down through the years to describe the disciplining of JWs. I am no longer "active" in that I do not knock on doors anymore as a JW trying to win converts. My conscious will not allow me to do that because I would not try to convince another to join an

organization that I know has serious errors in its basic teachings.

Of course we are interested in saving lives. We are not savages. We are, in many cases talking about our families' and our own lives. Let me tell you of my own experience in very brief form:

While lying in a hospital ICU bed, with death in view, my doctor tells me that I need FFP (six units). The WTS representative (HLC member) tells me that FFP is among the forbidden blood products. He quickly adds that I can take the individual components of FFP, one at a time. What he already knew and I was about to find out was that all of the components of FFP are not available individually.

That is when I woke up and realized that the WTS blood policy was highly unreasonable and indefensible. Soon thereafter, I saved self (with the help of some fine physicians) by making a more informed decision and now I'd like to save as many JW lives as I can. So would all of the members of the AJWRB.

## Re: Re: Re: Are they really reformers?

31 January 2001



**Lee Elder,**  
Founder  
*AJWRB - Associated  
Jehovah's Witnesses for  
Reform on Blood*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Re: Are they really  
reformers?](#)

Email Lee Elder:  
[leeelder@ajwrb.org](mailto:leeelder@ajwrb.org)

"Dave", a student from Bolton University and a Jehovah's Witness wrote "these reformers have all got one thing in common, they no longer preach from door to door, so they are not Jehovah's witnesses."

This is simply incorrect. AJWRB has members in over 25 countries and while some do not actively preach the "good news of God's Kingdom" others do. Members include both active and inactive Jehovah's Witnesses, including elders and ministerial servants and Hospital Liaison Committee members.

"Dave" further stated that, "any genuine witness believes that the WTS is God's organization on earth and that to go against what the WTS says is going against God."

It is true that most Jehovah's Witnesses feel this way just as most Catholics believe that the Pope is the "Vicar of Christ" and has the ability to interpret divine law. There are, however, exceptions to the rule. As with politics and other religions for that matter, there are liberal, moderate, conservative and ultra conservative Jehovah's Witnesses. Perhaps the main difference among Jehovah's Witnesses is that a member must restrain his personal views whenever they differ with current teaching of the Watchtower Society or potentially face charges of apostasy. Once official teachings change, as they have recently on blood, alternative service, voting, the generation of 1914, etc, then one must again change their view to reflect this current "new light", even if the change amounts to a complete reversal or is personally objectionable. Under Watchtower dogma, the appearance of unity is seen as paramount – even if it only amounts to uniformity.

The mental gymnastics required by such a policy are well illustrated by the Watchtower's position on organ transplants. "Dave" is probably too young to remember that prior to 1967 the WTS looked favorably on organ transplants but then in 1967 suddenly ruled that they amounted to cannibalism and were not acceptable for JW's. This remained the WTS position for thirteen years until 1980 when the policy was completely reversed. Did God first decide that organ transplants were OK, then change his mind twice in thirteen years? What about the JWs who refused organ transplants during this time? Were their deaths not in vain?

"Dave" ignores some of the core issues involved for members of my faith. For example, if taking blood is wrong and is "against God's law", then why does the WTS permit the use of all blood products fractionated from red cells, white cells, platelets and plasma?

The list of blood products used by Jehovah's Witnesses is quite comprehensive. These include hemoglobin, interleukins, albumin, fibrinogen, immunoglobulins and all clotting factors. In short, Jehovah's Witnesses accept everything in blood but the red cell membrane, the white cell membrane and the platelet membrane. While we are still working on exact numbers, I believe that it is quite accurate to state that Jehovah's Witnesses are now permitted to use over 97% of the contents of human blood. So "Dave" hasn't even begun to struggle with the enormity of the problem. The argument that Jehovah's Witnesses "abstain from blood" borders on the ridiculous as anyone with a background in science or medicine can clearly see.

Once "Dave" begins to grasp these issues, perhaps he will understand why so many thousands of dissident Jehovah's Witnesses can no longer support the Watchtowers mandated blood policy and are in a quandary as to how to proceed when entire generations of their family members belong. Perhaps he will then understand why many of us find it difficult if not impossible to knock on our neighbor's door and encourage them to join the Watchtower organization.

The simple truth is that the Watchtower's blood policy is in a state of disarray. The Watchtower will require that a member reject red cells, but permit a member to use hemoglobin that accounts for 97% of the red cell (dry weight).

The only logical conclusion one can reach is that the blood policy is being phased out. I applaud that but what about all of the members, especially the children, who will die in the meantime? Such a "staged" dis-entanglement policy may make sense from a legal standpoint but is it morally and ethically correct? I think not.

## Re: Re: Re: The conundrum...

1 February 2001





**Osamu Muramoto,**  
Regional Ethics Council

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Re: Re: The conundrum...](#)

Email Osamu Muramoto:  
[muramoto@aracnet.com](mailto:muramoto@aracnet.com)

Joseph Watine thinks that organized health care has a feudal structure and therefore I was contradicting when I said science and medicine readily admit errors. Examples Watine mentioned are not unique to medicine or health care system. There are very few organizations and corporations which have no feudal structure and which are totally free from disputes and scandals. Health care organizations are no exception. In my opinion, however, the examples Watine mentioned only supports my point.

The very fact that disputes and scandals are publicly exposed and debated is an indication that there is an effective mechanism, officially or unofficially, to correct dogmatic approaches inside the feudal system. Just think of a real example of dogmatic conformity. Would you hear such disputes and scandals about Hitler if you were inside the Hitler's organization? Was there any place of a whistle-blower to expose criminal acts in his party? Likewise, if you are inside the Watchtower organization, would you hear any scandals and disputes which exist inside the leadership of the religious organization? The answer is a resounding no, with the only exception of anonymous communication afforded only recently by the advent of the internet.

There will never be a dispute or scandal in an organization which is lead by "God's representatives" because there is nothing to be corrected by dispute. There is no check and balance in such a system. In contrast, publicly expressed disputes and dissents, which are seen in many organizations in free world these days, are a sign that a corrective balance against dogmatic conformity is working. Of course until one side of the dispute wins with indisputable evidence, such process would continue and nobody admits an error. When indisputable evidence is established, the dispute eventually settles and the error, if any, will be corrected.

## Re: Re: Re: Are they really reformers?

1 February 2001



**Osamu Muramoto,**  
Regional Ethics Council  
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*USA*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Re: Re: Are they really reformers?](#)

Email Osamu Muramoto:  
[muramoto@aracnet.com](mailto:muramoto@aracnet.com)

Dave's comment concisely summarizes the core tenets of the JW religion. In that sense his letter probably helps other readers to understand what loyal JWs believe, and how they react to dissenting views. However, what he did not mention is the fact that, in reality, there are so many variations in commitment of the followers to the JW religion. I have seen many patients who identify themselves as a JW and refuse blood and who do not meet the criteria Dave mentioned. For physicians who treat a JW patient who refuses blood, it has little relevance whether he or she is active or inactive, or even current or former JW. I have personally seen many inactive or former JWs who still adamantly refused blood even if their life style was totally different from what the WTS teaches. We respect their personal wishes regardless of their status in the Watchtower organization. At the same time, they are also subject to the organizational influence of the WTS, directly or indirectly, regardless of their status. In my opinion, all Jehovah's Witness-related people, active or inactive, current or former, and even family members should be involved in this debate. After all the policy affects all of them in one way or another.

## Re: Re: Re: The conundrum...

2 February 2001



**Joseph Watine,**  
Eur Clin Chem  
*Hôpital de Rodez*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Re: Re: Re: The conundrum...](#)

Email Joseph Watine:  
[j.watine@ch-rodez.fr](mailto:j.watine@ch-rodez.fr)

One can agree with Osamu Muramoto [1] when he concludes that "When indisputable evidence is established, the dispute eventually settles and the error, if any, will be corrected".

The problem is that, in our feudal system of health care, when the dispute settles, thousands of victims may have been injured and even killed. This was clearly the case with the recent scandal of contaminated blood in transfusion medicine, not to mention the numerous other recent or current medical scandals.

[1] [http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters?lookup=by\\_date&days=1#322/7277/37/EL31](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters?lookup=by_date&days=1#322/7277/37/EL31)

## Conundrum unsolved and [tenuously] connected matters

2 February 2001



**Peter Morrell,**  
Hon Research Associate,  
History of Medicine  
*Staffordshire University*  
*ST4 2DE*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Conundrum unsolved and \[tenuously\] connected matters](#)

Email Peter Morrell:  
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Sir,

In summary, I still do not accept that the main justification for JW refusal of blood is based upon scripture, I still believe it arises from a form of anti-contagionism - the idea of placing vaccines, foreign matter or the blood of another into one's veins is wrong. This belief does not stem from scripture, but it is supported by scripture. In essence, the basis is the underlying contention that the blood of another is foreign matter, contains the sins of that person and it is thus an unclean, unholy and fundamentally contaminating practice on the spiritual level. I still believe that is the underlying basis of this matter. Saving of souls is far more important to the religious than saving bodies. And blood contamination is clearly construed as a form of 'soul contamination'. Secondly, as I previously stated, the practice also serves the secondary [minor?] social function of demarcating the JWs from other people, and especially other religious groups who do not refuse blood.

With regard to Muramoto's answers to my previous questions, I do not think he has explained very much. Though the nature of the knowledge in each flask is different, the beliefs, the conformity with beliefs and the mutability of belief are much the same in each. Muramoto now contends that the major difference between JW religion and science/medicine is the nature of the authority that is respected as an arbiter of truth in each. This rather weak argument does not distinguish the three, precisely because 'dogma' is respected in them all.

If Muramoto was right, then we should be able to discern little adherence to dogma in science and



medicine and little or no reason in religion. Unfortunately, neither is observed. Religion contains a lot more reason than most scientists or medics are prepared to see, while medicine and science contain a lot more assumption and inference than they realise. Let us start with religion.

As no-one can state with certainty that God exists, religions do not base themselves upon God as an authority, as Muramoto contends, but their ultimate basis of authority is scriptures. This is true in all the main religions. Furthermore, they do not just have scriptures but also many later additions, comprising the teachings of later prophets, saints and highly realised members of the church plus long commentaries and interpretations by devotees. Thus, an extensive canonical literature exists in all religions, which, forming a corpus, comprises the truth of the religion and is always consulted as the authority on all points of doctrine. Perhaps Muramoto can pinpoint a single religion in which this is not the case? Do the things he says about religions stem from much close study of them?

Nor is it true in any religion that this corpus is regarded entirely with pure devotion; in fact, it can be taken piecemeal by devotees and meditated upon, only rarely I should say, being accepted in blind faith, and usually being digested and absorbed after some evaluation by the faithful. When it is compared to life experience and found to be useful, it becomes a particle within the belief of the faithful follower. Thus it is not really a form of dogma as Muramoto contends. It is more like an idea that is absorbed and then evaluated before being incorporated into the fabric of an individual's belief. On balance, I think it is fair to say that some assessment and absorption of beliefs occurs alongside pure devotional belief. And the very same is true in science...

In science, there exists only a tiny minority of people who have all the sophisticated apparatus to make actual observations and measurements, and a vast array of 'faithful followers' [I know they do not like to be referred to in that way] who do not read the original research papers, but who obtain their views almost entirely from the 'canonical literature' of science - the commentaries and interpretations done by lesser scribes. It is exactly like religion. Stated simply, many 'scientists' do not make primary or even secondary observations of their own; they follow the 'elders', 'saints' and 'prophets' who generate the primary literature. They follow dogmas.

I do not have a mass spectroscope or Hubble telescope to hand to make the observations and measurements I would need in order to formulate scientific truth for myself. Instead, I am entirely reliant on others to do that for me, and I rely on their judgement. I trust their judgement. Therefore, science is just as based upon faith as religion. What is the difference between that and religion? Very little, is the answer. Although, clearly, the 'observations' in religion are not made by using complex instruments and nor are they 'objective' in the same sense as those in science, I shall return to this point below.

If we turn to medicine, the situation is very similar, because much medical knowledge is taught as received knowledge which no-one is invited to debate, negotiate or discuss, critique or contribute to - maybe by professors, but certainly not by the plebs. Clinicians are notoriously unable to debate the finer points of any rationale behind their techniques and ideas; they are mostly taught how to apply their knowledge skilfully and to the best of their ability, but mostly without question. In science, there is possibly more discussion and negotiation of the methods of obtaining knowledge and the ideal is always that ideas and knowledge are obtained inductively through research conducted neutrally, that is objective and free from bias or interference. Thus, scientific knowledge is generally superior to that in the other two flasks. I shall merely mention in passing that the power of financial corporations and drug companies may serve to corrupt the neutrality of research BOTH in science and medicine to some degree. And even in science there is considerable deference to the authority of Elders:

"...experts like me commit two sins that retard the advance of science and harm the young. Firstly, adding our prestige to our opinions gives the latter far greater persuasive power than they deserve on scientific grounds alone. Whether through deference, fear, or respect, others tend not to challenge them, and progress towards the truth is impaired in the presence of an expert...reviewers face the unavoidable temptation to accept or reject new evidence and ideas, not on the basis of their scientific merit, but on the extent to which they agree or disagree with the public positions taken by experts on these matters. Sometimes this rejection of "unpopular" ideas is overt (and sometimes it is accompanied by comments that devalue the investigators as well as their ideas, but this latter sin is by no means unique to experts). At other times, the expert bias against new ideas is unconscious. The result is the same: new ideas and new investigators are thwarted by experts, and progress toward the truth is slowed." [1]

However, the wedding between medicine and science is just as founded upon belief and adherence to the dogma of received views as was its previous matrimony to theology in times before 1650 or so.

The break-up of that previous marriage was arguably caused by the general disintegration in respect for the medieval world view at the same time, and the arrival of figures like Galileo, who spawned not just sporadic, isolated challenges to the Church, but inspired an irreversible stampede of heresy and denial of the Church's continued authority and power, especially in the Protestant north European lands. The general revolution in outlook that saw the unquestioned power of the Church crumble also saw science wrestle the focus of epistemology free from the pedantic complexities of deductive theological logic, and place it onto the 'firm bedrock' [?] of the external world.

However, having established physical events as the only way to arrive at truth, this inevitably meant that philosophy would henceforth remain shackled in a subordinate relationship to science - which it very largely has. Thus, the core dogma of science is materialism - a materialism that excludes any

'nebulous thing' that cannot be universally demonstrated. Apart from chemicals, forces and objects of varying tangibility, science recognises the existence of nothing else in the entire universe. If something cannot be materially demonstrated then according to science, it does not exist, and cannot exist. Therefore, no God, no soul and no life force, and thus no meridians, and no 'potency energy'. In actual fact, this is an ideal. Scientists do believe in a considerable number of non-demonstrable entities that fill the conceptual gaps of their perfectly material paradigm.

The chief aim of this materialism seems to be [a] to deliberately exclude religion and any 'subjective experiences' from the solemn business of truth creation; and [b] to maintain 'truth' as only that which, by common agreement, we can all see, hear and touch – a consensus of truth based upon a generalised average. This blatantly denies any reality to all subjective phenomena and also to any 'one-off' event. If a UFO lands in my garden and I communicate with an alien who crawls out of it, then the event did not happen according to science just because no-one else saw it; it is written off as a subjective event of freak imagination partly because I alone saw it and partly because it cannot be repeated for all to see. Therefore it is a forbidden event.

A similar example is provided by the artist and poet, William Blake, who met and conversed with Angels all his life, initially from his visits to Westminster Abbey in London as a young child. Scientists portray him as mad precisely because this cannot happen. Such an event is disallowed because it is a subjective event. It is disallowed solely by the rules of science - thus science has rendered itself incapable of encompassing all life experience. Subjective and one-off events happen on a regular basis, and thus the veracity of science has become a casualty of its own pedantry, much like the Church before it.

As with religion, many things in medicine are 'established truth' solely because so-and-so says that is how it is done, and as no-one bothers to question this sorry and imprecise state of affairs, so it never changes very much. Though medicine is keen to be seen snuggling up to science, yet not very much in medicine is proven at the same level of certainty as in science. Much is left to assumption and inference. It is a heterogeneous hotchpotch of ideas and techniques, many borrowed from science and therefore assumed to carry the same cache of scientific objectivity. Only very recently has there even commenced a genuine attempt to base medical theory and practice upon sound objective evidence [EBM] - such a huge project has barely even got started. And even though it has got underway, it has many critics within medicine itself. Is that not completely bizarre? Not really:

"...the science of today...is run by slaves, slaves of institutions and slaves of 'reason'..." [2]

Unlike science, medicine lacks a homogeneous, underpinning philosophy, as anything 'that works' is kept, and anything that doesn't is abandoned. 'What works' is worth asking more deeply about. It is engaged purely in an activity called 'the removal of symptoms' and is inclined to call that the 'conquest of disease', even though 'diseases' are fictional entities that are only partially co-extensive with another category - 'patients'. Diseases are constructs of the reductionist allopathic mind, limited in space and time by the those who believe in and define them, so their 'cure' is also limited solely to methods that will induce their disappearance. Anything that can make such entities 'disappear' is called cure. Obviously, this can only be 'respected' as a form of sleight-of-hand juggling and not true cure of patients, which is what we might more truly call cure, and which is only attempted in the holistic therapies.

The fact that 'diseases' are merely chased around the body from one physiological arena to another, never seems to occur to people, and, because medicine is bereft of any principles other than 'what works', focused on parts rather than wholes, and its practitioners never look closely enough at patients, either holistically in space or longitudinally in time, therefore they never see the ill-effects of their doings. They never see the illusion of their so-called 'cure' for what it is.

The ignored though important philosophical challenge that holism and vitalism represent to modern medicine is just as valid today as in 1800 - possibly even more valid, as the edifice of allopathy is disintegrating - which is what patients are fleeing. And those complete fools who say 'we need more time'. Well, you have had 150 years of snuggling up to science and if you still cannot cure patients, then how much longer do you need? And those wise patients who place their bets elsewhere can be understood precisely as that - very wise punters indeed. So-called scientific medicine is a contradiction in terms - it does not exist outside the holistic therapies, which comprise the only truly scientific medicine in existence.

I therefore repeat my previous assertion - the differences between religion and science are far more imagined than real. The nature of the knowledge in each flask is different, but the beliefs, the conformity with beliefs and the mutability of belief are much the same in each. And they all defer to dogma too - the regard for authority cannot be used as a differentiator between them, and Muramoto has still failed to solve this riddle. I would say that the mode of generating knowledge [epistemology] partly distinguishes them, and the function that knowledge serves in each. Even here there are problems, however. The function of knowledge in science is to know things and to use that knowledge to invent and change things. The use of knowledge in medicine is to manipulate and alleviate symptoms. The function of knowledge in religion is to improve folks' happiness and sense of meaning as individuals, as spiritual beings.

#### Sources

[1] PERSONAL VIEWS, The sins of expertness and a proposal for redemption David L Sackett, BMJ

2000; 320: 1283 [6 May] <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/320/7244/1283>

[2] P Feyerabend, 1981, How to Defend Society Against Science, in Ian Hacking, Ed, Scientific Revolutions, OUP, Chapter 8

## Re: Conundrum unsolved and [tenuously] connected matters

2 February 2001



**Lee Elder,**  
Founder  
*AJWRB - Associated  
Jehovah's Witnesses for  
Reform on Blood*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Conundrum unsolved  
and \[tenuously\] connected  
matters](#)

Email Lee Elder:  
[leeelder@ajwrb.org](mailto:leeelder@ajwrb.org)

I won't attempt to address the "heart" of your argument but believe that as a Jehovah's Witness I may be able to shed light on a few points to help clarify things. While analogies can be helpful in making a point, they have their limitations. In this case, that general rule is applicable since Jehovah's Witnesses are quite extreme in many of their views.

While a doctor or scientist may be indoctrinated and pressured to conform to accepted norms or medical "dogma", your analogy breaks down, in my view, because of Watchtower extremism. As a Jehovah's Witness, not only is a member subjected to indoctrination and Watchtower dogma, he must accept it or face excruciating consequences, namely loss of association with Jehovah's Witness family members and friends. It is true that most members accepted these restrictions when they joined. However, many others have had them forced upon them simply by being born to parents of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Perhaps scientists, physicians and Jehovah's Witnesses are all "compliant conformists in their belief of established doctrines" but to what degree? If a scientist or physician chooses to disagree or challenge "established doctrines", he may jeopardize his standing in his particular professional community but even if the community rejects and ostracizes him, the community does not unite and attempt to somehow cut him off from his spouse, children, parents, friends, etc. In this sense, I believe your analogy breaks down - a comparison of apples and oranges. It fails to accurately illustrate the intensity of the coercion employed by the Watchtower Society to insure compliance and squelch dissent.

You also stated, "I still do not accept that the main justification for JW refusal of blood is based upon scripture, I still believe it arises from a form of anti-contagionism - the idea of placing vaccines, foreign matter or the blood of another into one's veins is wrong."

Historically, there is a basis for your comments in the view of C.J. Woodworth, an early editor of the Watchtower Society's "Awake!" journal (previously called "Golden Age" and then "Consolation"). He fashioned the Watchtower Society's ban on vaccinations under the theme of contamination and I believe that this view coupled with a general distrust of medicine contributed to the ban on blood transfusions. Note the following:

"The public is not generally aware of how large an industry is the manufacture of serums, anti-toxins and vaccines, or that big business controls the whole industry.... the boards of health endeavor to start an epidemic of smallpox, diphtheria, or typhoid that they may reap a golden harvest by inoculating an unthinking community for the very purpose of disposing of this manufactured filth.... Vaccination summed up is the most unnatural, unhygienic, barbaric, filthy, abhorrent, and most dangerous system of infection known. Its vile poison taints, corrupts, and pollutes the blood of the healthy, resulting in ulcers, syphilis, scrofula, erysipelas, tuberculosis, cancer, tetanus, insanity, and death." - The Golden Age, January 3, 1923, p. 214

"Vaccination is a direct violation of the everlasting covenant that God made with Noah after the flood." - The Golden Age 02/04/1931 p. 293

"The Journal of the A. M. A. is the vilest sheet that passes the United States mail.... Nothing new and useful in therapeutics escapes its unqualified condemnation. Its attacks are generally ad hominem. Its editorial columns are largely devoted to character assassination.... Its editor [Morris Fishbein] is of the type of Jew that crucified Jesus Christ." - The Golden Age, September 26, 1934

A few brief months after the death of C.J Woodworth, the following appeared in the Watchtower, Questions From Readers section:

Is vaccination a violation of God's law forbidding the taking of blood into the system? - G. C., North Carolina.

The matter of vaccination is one for the individual that has to face it to decide for himself.... our Society cannot afford to be drawn into the affair legally or take the responsibility for the way the case turns out.... all objection to vaccination on Scriptural grounds seems to be lacking.... We merely offer the above information on request, but can assume no responsibility for the decision and course the reader may take. - The Watchtower 12/15/1952 p. 764

In the following years the Watchtower position on vaccination grew more supportive and positive and today practically all Jehovah's Witness children are vaccinated even when the vaccine contains elements of blood.

You went on to state, "This belief does not stem from scripture, but it is supported by scripture. In essence, the basis is the underlying contention that the blood of another is foreign matter, contains the sins of that person and it is thus an unclean, unholy and fundamentally contaminating practice on the spiritual level. I still believe that is the underlying basis of this matter."

While C.J. Woodworth would no doubt agree with you, no fully indoctrinated Jehovah's Witness would. Rather, they would argue that blood is holy, it belongs to God and it must be poured out on the ground to show respect for life. The WTS has made great efforts to indoctrinate members on the dangers of blood transfusions and most have come to think of blood as a contaminated, death dealing substance wholly unneeded in medicine. However, the accepted basis for rejection of whole blood and some components are the biblical injunctions regarding "eating" blood.

You wrote that the "saving of souls is far more important to the religious than saving bodies. And blood contamination is clearly construed as a form of 'soul contamination'". Jehovah's Witnesses reject the commonly held view of the "soul" which we view as simply the living, breathing person. We believe the soul dies at death.

Finally you stated that "the practice also serves the secondary [minor?] social function of demarcating the JW's from other people, and especially other religious groups who do not refuse blood." This is a more controversial point but I tend to agree with you. The evidence is pretty good that J.F. Rutherford, second president of the WTS, and N.H. Knorr, third president of the WTS, sought ways to demarcate the Witnesses from Christendom. When issues or circumstances presented an opportunity to demonstrate the "uniqueness" of the organization and its members, they seized them to show that they were "no part of the world". When blood transfusions came into wide use during WWII, such an opportunity presented itself and the WTS acted upon it. They had no way of knowing the long term implications of the position. Interestingly the WTS had previously been supportive of early transfusion efforts:

"In New York city a house wife in moving a boarder's things accidentally shot herself through the heart with his revolver. She was rushed to a hospital, her left breast was cut around, four ribs were cut away, the heart was lifted out, three stitches were taken, one of the attending physicians in the great emergency gave a quart of his blood for transfusion, and today the woman lives and smiles gaily over what happened to her in the busiest 23 minutes of her life." - Consolation 12/25/1940, p.19

Early in the history of this policy, the Watchtower took a clear and definitive stand on the use of blood:

"Whether whole or fractional, one's own or someone else's, transfused or injected, it is wrong." - The Watchtower 09/15/1961 p. 559

Today the policy has become so watered down that no informed Jehovah's Witness can defend it since the Watchtower now permits something like 97% of the contents of blood and even cow blood may be collected, stored and processed to make blood products permitted by the organization.[1]

"...when it comes to fractions of any of the primary components, each Christian, after careful and prayerful meditation, must conscientiously decide for himself." [2]

The reason for these sweeping policy changes seems clear. The biblical arguments against blood transfusions are untenable and the Watchtower is phasing the policy out as it did with previous bans of vaccines and organ transplants. If you want to learn more about the policy I suggest that you visit the Watchtower Society's web site at [www.watchtower.org](http://www.watchtower.org) where you will find quite a bit of information about the "official" view. For critical analysis of the policy visit the dissident's web site at [www.ajwrb.org](http://www.ajwrb.org).

1 Sacramento Bee. Life spared, faith preserved: Accident victim gets experimental therapy. Dorsey Griffith. Sept. 24, 2000) [http://www.sacbee.com/news/news/old/local08\\_20000924.html](http://www.sacbee.com/news/news/old/local08_20000924.html)

2 Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. Questions From Readers. The Watchtower 2000; June 15:29-31.

## Re: Are they really reformers?

3 February 2001



**Chris Hazard,**  
Active Jehovah's Witness  
-

I am an active Jehovah's Witness. I am not a member of the AJWRB, although I follow their progress and directly attribute recent changes in WT doctrine to their efforts. I exclusively disagree with the scriptural foundation of our Organization's stand on blood transfusions.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Are they really reformers?](#)

Email Chris Hazard:  
[scsi@cmpmail.com](mailto:scsi@cmpmail.com)

Why do I remain a member? Unlike many Jehovah's Witnesses, I realize there is more to our brotherhood than official WT doctrine. The blood policy is not the only official doctrine that I have disagreements with. However, being apart of a group of people, a congregation, who have sincere love for each other and for learning about the Bible - is an attraction for me. So while WT doctrines change time and time again, the loving association remains the same. The experience continues to assist me in my spiritual journey, a journey that is apart of every person's life.

Why do I remain active? I go door to door to spark interest and motivation in our neighbor to question life. There are many people in this world who live life day to day, year to year, without seriously asking themselves and meditating on the questions - Does an Almighty Creator exist? And if so - Are His thoughts contained in a written word? I am not out to "convert" anyone to be a Jehovah's Witness, as I have respect for anyone's personal beliefs; so long as they've seriously contemplated what they truly believe and don't just go through the motions. So that I don't violate my own conscience, I refuse to teach the WT's stand on blood in the door to door work, and from the platform during our local meetings. For this reason, I have not felt the need to become inactive, although I respect the decisions of such ones as Lee Elder, who feel it necessary to become inactive.

If I were in a situation that required a blood transfusion, and I were alone, I would readily accept the transfusion. If I were in the company of my family, or friends, or congregation members, and asked if I would accept a transfusion, I would not be so quick to accept. The consequences (being total disassociation and shunning from friends, and potential serious family problems) would almost not be worth the acceptance of blood, and would be worth the gamble of refusing. For this reason, I applaud Dr. Muramoto's efforts towards medical confidentiality and AJWRB's efforts towards informing Jehovah's Witnesses who are ignorant of our true stand on blood, and the questionable motivation of the WTS.

Chris Hazard

## Information exchange is the key

3 February 2001



**Osamu Muramoto,**  
Regional Ethics Council  
Kaiser Permanente,  
Interstate Medical Office  
East, Portland, OR 97227,  
USA

I agree with Joseph Watine[1] that there have been many tragedies caused by errors and scandals which were not corrected promptly inside health care system. But again, I am not convinced that this is unique to health care system. Recent news reports show that tobacco, gun, airline and auto industries, among others, all have similar scandals and tragedies. And in my view, some of the organized religions are in the same category. The bottom line is that, whether in religion or in health care, public disclosure of all the information and free exchange of opinions by all the participants are key to reduce such tragedies in the future.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Information exchange is the key](#)

Email Osamu Muramoto:  
[muramoto@aracnet.com](mailto:muramoto@aracnet.com)

1. Watine J: Re: Re: Re: Re: The conundrum... <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL33>

## A flask, a bucket and a bathtub - not the three flasks

4 February 2001



**Osamu Muramoto,**  
Regional Ethics Council  
Kaiser Permanente,  
Interstate Medical Office  
East, Portland, OR 97227,  
USA

Regarding Morrell's assertion[1] that the differences between religion and science are more imagined than real, I have repeatedly accepted[2][3] that "compliant conformity to the accepted norms of beliefs" exists in science, medicine and religion. When he asked[1] whether there are differences which are "more real than apparent" between science and the JW religion, I replied that the "dogma" in the JW religion is generated by someone who assume the role of "God's representative" who do not accept peer review and criticism, whereas the "dogma" in science is generated by tangible evidence which is openly evaluated and debated by the peer.[3] Morrell now thinks that this difference is "weak" and I "failed to solve this riddle." [4] While I do not feel I can solve his "riddle", nor am I interested in doing so, I maintain that the difference I stated is real and significant in my opinion.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: A flask, a bucket and a bathtub - not the three flasks](#)

Email Osamu Muramoto:  
[muramoto@aracnet.com](mailto:muramoto@aracnet.com)

Morrell seems to create his "riddle" by merely focusing his attention to similarities between science and (JW) religion. He states, "this rather weak argument does not distinguish the three, precisely because 'dogma' is respected in them all." As I stated repeatedly, "dogma" is respected everywhere, whether science, medicine, religion, corporation, industry, class room or court room. In that sense, all "flasks", not just the three, are the same. While Morrell is creating his "riddle" out of this obvious and ubiquitous fact of life, I have been focusing on differences. Our difference is that of viewpoint and emphasis. In my view, we are not dealing with "the three flasks", but a flask, a bucket and a bathtub. They have one thing in common, each holding liquid (dogmatic conformity), but they are all different in other respects.

I agree with Morrell in principle that science is just as based upon faith as religion because very few actually verify scientific truth by themselves. Because our life has become so complicated, trust and faith in science and technology is another fact of life. After all, if we are skeptical about science behind aviation and automobile, how can we travel by air and by car? Most of us do not understand and verify the rationale and validity of science behind these technologies, but most of us feel comfortable traveling by these means. Are we all faithful followers of the "dogma" of technologies? We may be. Likewise, clinicians may rely on "dogma" when they make their clinical decisions. Morrell argued "clinicians are notoriously unable to debate the finer points of any rationale behind their techniques and ideas." As a clinician myself, I admit that I cannot explain every scientific rationale of every treatment I prescribe. Despite this fact, we as patients still trust our health to most clinicians, as much as we trust our lives to a bus driver who cannot explain every scientific rationale of how the bus works. In that sense, Morrell is again merely stating obvious and universal fact of life.

But are clinicians following the "dogma" in the same way as JWs are following the blood refusal policy? Each clinician is different, but I don't think I am. I and most clinicians maintain our liberty and right to evaluate and question the source of the "dogma" we follow, readily change our attitude toward "dogma" based on our evaluation as well as others, and I may go against the "dogma" after all. In that sense, I wholeheartedly agree with Morrell that our judgement and attitude as clinicians may be influenced by the pressure from drug companies, biotechnology industry, peer pressure and financial incentives etc. At least I am keenly aware of this problem, and I have a liberty to fight against such pressure to conform. In contrast, JWs have no liberty to critically evaluate and debate the rationale behind the blood policy by themselves, nor do they have a liberty to adjust how to use blood products by themselves, to say nothing of going against the policy. All the evaluations and adjustments are done for them by the leadership under the name of God. There is no alternative but to follow what the leadership has decided. Does Morrell still think this difference in the dogmatic approaches is unreal and only "imagined"?



Suppose Morrell is travelling from London to Paris. He goes to airport, trying to catch a flight. Then he meets a man who promises he can safely fly Morrell to Paris on a piece of flying carpet with divine power. Does he put his faith in the "dogma" behind the aviation technology, or the "dogma" behind the flying carpet? Whichever means of transportation he chooses, he is following a "dogma" because he does not know everything about aviation technology and everything about the flying carpet with divine power. Yet he has a freedom to evaluate and choose. He has an option to take an airplane, as most of us do, by following the "dogma" of aviation technology, or he can choose the flying carpet by following the "dogma" of "nebulous thing that cannot be universally demonstrated." However, suppose Morrell has no option but to take the flying carpet even if he already heard that the divine power was misguided, and the carpet is unsafe. Suppose Morrell will be severely punished if he publicly criticizes the carpet, or if he chooses a regular airline flight instead of the carpet. Does he still think that the difference is unreal? Does anyone say anything about you if you decide not to follow the "dogma" of aviation technology, and instead you want to take a train, boat or even the flying carpet? Nobody cares!

Regarding his argument that religions do not base themselves upon God as an authority, but their ultimate basis of authority is scriptures and canonical literature, I can only discuss the JW religion here. The WTS has its own extensive literature over a century, but the final authority rests on the CURRENT literature and the CURRENT leadership who are the sole "channel of communication with God." As confirmed by an active JW here[5], the followers always look for "brighter new light" coming from God through the leadership rather than relying on "darker old light" in their old literature. Morrell's contention that "their ultimate basis of authority is scriptures" is only true if he adds a qualifier "as interpreted by the CURRENT leadership." The scriptures alone have little authority for JWs, as most "false religions" (which means, in JW terminology, all the religions other than the WTS) use the same scriptures. The unique authority of the scriptures for JWs comes from the unique interpretation by the current leadership who are the sole "channel of communication with God." That is why hemoglobin was prohibited by God in 1998 but now permitted by God in 2000, as I discussed in my article. There was no change in the scriptures regarding how to use hemoglobin between these two years. The only change is how God spoke through the WTS leadership on the use hemoglobin. And this God's message coming through the current leadership is the "brighter light" and their final authority.

I will not address the issue of "anti-contagionism" as Lee Elder reviewed this subject extensively.[6] As I stated above, differences between Morrell and I are based on different emphasis and different viewpoint. I do not think I can solve the Morrell's "riddle" to his satisfaction, but that does not mean that I accept his "three flasks" theory. I conclude this debate by saying that there are no three flasks, only a flask, a bucket and a bathtub.

[1] Morrell P: The conundrum of the three flasks <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL20>  
 [2] Muramoto O: Re: Who is really defending dogmas? <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL16> [3] Muramoto O: Re: The conundrum of the three flasks <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL23> [4] Morrell P: Conundrum unsolved and [tenuously] connected matters <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL34> [5] Bartlet C: A Response <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL5> [6] Elder L: Re: Conundrum unsolved and [tenuously] connected matters <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL35>

## Re: Conundrum unsolved and [tenuously] connected matters

5 February 2001



**Thomas Daniels**

Peter Morrell has stated:

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Conundrum unsolved and \[tenuously\] connected matters](#)

Email Thomas Daniels:  
[ocotillo50@hotmail.com](mailto:ocotillo50@hotmail.com)

"In summary, I still do not accept that the main justification for JW refusal of blood is based upon scripture, I still believe it arises from a form of anti-contagionism - the idea of placing vaccines, foreign matter or the blood of another into one's veins is wrong. This belief does not stem from scripture, but it is supported by scripture."

In this he disagrees with those individuals in this discussion, who while holding positions of responsibility within the community of Jehovah's Witnesses (hereafter JW's) have taught this doctrine at the congregational level and therefore are extremely familiar with JW literature and teaching. I have to confess that on the surface this seems to be a most unusual position for a non-JW to take and on this basis find it somewhat perplexing.

As Lee Elder has pointed out, it is true that JW's in the 1920's and 30's denounced vaccination as an unhealthy contamination of the human body that actually induced disease rather than preventing it. This attitude was communicated through a number of articles and illustrations, one of which depicted a sinister looking cow-like creature representing vaccination standing over mounds of dying pock-marked children. (1)

However this earlier condemnation of vaccination and the current position on blood are distinctly different and should not be confused. By the time the teaching on blood took hold to the extent that was enforced as a community standard among JW's, the arguments against vaccination both scriptural and otherwise had been renounced (2) and were in fact a source of considerable embarrassment. Today they are forgotten to the extent that the average JW is not aware that the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society (hereafter WTB&TS) ever taught such things and would likely argue with anyone that pointed this out.

It is also true that the WTB&TS for about the last forty years has taught JW's that their stand on blood



is not only scripturally correct, but medically viable as well. This also perhaps muddies the waters for non-JW's and diverts attention from the fact that the doctrine itself is based entirely upon Old Testament Law. As the JW's own official history book explains, the WTB&TS has over the years, published three separate treatises explaining their objections to transfusion medicine. Note the stated purpose of each of these:

"At first, physical side effects of blood transfusions were not discussed in the Watch Tower publications. Later, when such information became available, it too was published—not as the reason why Jehovah's Witnesses refuse blood transfusions but in order to strengthen their appreciation for the prohibition that God himself had put on the use of blood. (Isa. 48:17) To that end, in 1961 the carefully documented booklet *Blood, Medicine and the Law of God* was published. In 1977 another booklet was printed. This one, entitled *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Question of Blood*, again emphasized the fact that the position taken by Jehovah's Witnesses is a religious one, based on what the Bible says, and does not depend on medical risk factors. A further updating of the subject was presented in 1990 in the brochure *How Can Blood Save Your Life?*" (3)

From this, it can be seen that the literature of JW's definitely contradicts the idea that basis for the doctrine is anything but scriptural. All three publications mentioned in the above quote follow a very similar formula which can be typified by quoting from the 1977 publication *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Question Of Blood*. This publication begins by asking the following two introductory questions:

"Why, then, do Jehovah's Witnesses object to blood transfusions? Is there some rational basis for this conviction that they hold even in the face of death?" (p. 3)

It then states:

"Other persons may view the position of Jehovah's Witnesses as more of a moral or legal question.....Yet the stand taken by Jehovah's Witnesses is above all a religious one; it is a position based on what the Bible says." (p. 4)

Next it goes on to cite and expand upon familiar Old Testament texts forbidding the eating of blood and argues that these were reiterated to Christians in the Apostolic Decree. Following directly on the heels of this argument is the critical link between the eating of blood and the transfusion of blood without which the doctrine would topple:

"Some persons contend that the Bible forbids the eating of blood as a food and that this is fundamentally different from accepting a blood transfusion, a medical procedure that was not known in Bible times. Is that position valid?....."Doctors know that a person can be fed through the mouth or intravenously. Likewise, certain medicines can be administered through various routes. Some antibiotics, for instance, can be taken orally in tablet form or injected into a person's muscles or circulatory system (intravenously). What if you had taken a certain antibiotic tablet and, because of having a dangerous allergic reaction, were warned to abstain from that drug in the future? Would it be reasonable to consider that medical warning to mean that you could not take the drug in tablet form but could safely inject it into your bloodstream? Hardly! The main point would not be the route of administration, but that you should abstain from that antibiotic altogether. Similarly, the decree that Christians must 'abstain from blood' clearly covers the taking of blood into the body, whether through the mouth or directly into the bloodstream." (p.17)

Note how the doctrine is clearly presented to Jehovah's Witnesses as an affirmation of the idea that transfusion violates Biblical law. Note the emphasis on a "rational basis" for refusing blood and the quasi- medical argument that follows in support of the idea. This is a direct result of the fact that even within the framework Biblical literalism we are dealing with a technical rather than an overt violation of the "law." This conclusion finds substantiation even within WTB&TS literature as the following quote from the September 15, 1958 issue of *The Watchtower* shows:

"Each time the prohibition of blood is mentioned in the Scriptures it is in connection with taking it as food, and so it is as a nutrient that we are concerned with in its being forbidden." (p. 575)

As a result the doctrine is inherently technical in nature inasmuch as the adherent becomes obligated to bridge the gap between religion and medicine and/or science by demonstrating that the consumption of blood and the transfusion of blood are in some way, equivalent acts. The JW position on blood is, for want of a better analogy, like a child's tricycle. While the larger wheel rests squarely upon scripture, the two smaller wheels rest upon science and medicine respectively. Without the support provided by the other two "wheels," the purely religious notion that God forbids the eating of blood by itself does not necessarily have anything at all to do with transfusion and the entire structure topples over.

This necessity expresses itself in a number of ways. One is in "dave's" equivocal use of terms sufficiently generic to apply both to the consumption and transfusion of blood. The use of such terminology is rampant in WTB&TS literature and is even manifested in apologia from within the JW community. (4) Another can be seen in the bald-faced claims made in WTB&TS literature in the 1950's and 60's that intravenous feeding and blood transfusion accord to one and the same purpose physiologically. (5) Closely allied to this are casuistical analogies like the one from WTB&TS literature quoted above which make essentially the same assertion. Yet another reflection of this need is in the unqualified use of quotes from 17th century medical figures like Jean Baptiste Denys (6) and Thomas Bartholin (7) who handicapped by the state of medical knowledge of the day, based much of

their inquiry upon centuries old superstition. (8)

As a matter of Biblical statute, the JW stand on blood has nothing to do with of anti-contagionism - the idea that placing vaccines, foreign matter or the blood of another into one's veins is wrong, and everything to do with the scriptural injunctions against eating blood. This point can further be made by viewing the doctrine from another perspective; that of the allowance of certain blood components. Plasma fractions (e.g. gamma globulin, albumin etc.) were originally exempted from the prohibition on the basis that they did not "nourish the body" and therefore did not violate "God's expressed will forbidding blood as food." (9) This criterion for the determination of acceptability of blood components was eventually replaced with the maternal/fetal relationship as the "litmus test" and Witnesses subsequently based their decisions upon the transference (or the lack thereof) of the component in question across the human syncytial membrane during gestation. (10) This led to ridiculous extremes such as the differentiation between various blood proteins. As Dr. Muramoto has pointed out previously, preparations containing albumin were permitted while preparations containing hemoglobin were not. (11) Even more recently, the WTB&TS adopted blood-banking terminology as the basis by which acceptable and unacceptable blood components may be categorized. (12)

In addition to the fact that the JW refusal of blood is entirely based upon scripture, it should be apparent from the foregoing that the doctrine is wholly dependent upon the viability of the technical arguments that accompany and support the scriptural. Therefore I again have to wonder as to the applicability of the conundrum of the three flasks in this particular discussion.

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- (1) The Golden Age, People's Pulpit Association 1932, March 30: 409
- (2) The Watchtower, Watchtower Bible & Tract Society 1952, December 15: 764
- (3) Jehovah's Witnesses - Proclaimers Of God's Kingdom, Watchtower Bible & Tract Society; 1993: 184
- (4) Gregg Stafford, Jehovah's Witnesses Defended - An Answer to Scholars and Critics; 2000 Elihu Books: 428,434,441,445
- (5) Make Sure Of All Things - Hold Fast To What Is Fine; Watchtower Bible & Tract Society 1953: 47
- (6) Blood, Medicine and The Law of God; Watchtower Bible & Tract Society; 1961: 14
- (7) How Can Blood Save Your Life?; Watchtower Bible & Tract Society; 1990: 6
- (8) Douglass Starr, Blood - An Epic History Of Medicine and Commerce, 1998 Harper Collins: 5,10,11
- (9) The Watchtower; Watchtower Bible & Tract Society 1958, September 15: 575
- (10) The Watchtower, Watchtower Bible & Tract Society 1990, June 1: 30 - 31
- (11) Richard Bailey, Tomonori Ariga, The View of Jehovah's Witnesses on Blood Substitutes; Artificial Cells, Blood Substitutes, and Immobilization Biotechnology; 1998; 26: 571-576.
- (12) The Watchtower, Watchtower Bible & Tract Society 2000, June 15: 29 - 31

### Re: Re: Conundrum unsolved and [tenuously] connected matters

6 February 2001



**Dr TLP Watts,**  
Senior lecturer and  
consultant in  
periodontology  
*GKT Dental Institute*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Re: Conundrum  
unsolved and \[tenuously\]  
connected matters](#)

Email Dr TLP Watts:  
[trevor.watts@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:trevor.watts@kcl.ac.uk)

The question of Jehovah's Witnesses and blood transfusions has fascinated me ever since one visited me soon after I became a Christian 40 years ago. I understand they base the prohibition on Leviticus 17:10-14, slap bang in the middle of the Jewish ceremonial law (which Christians believe Christ abrogated).

What I now would like to know is this: do JWs strictly adhere to all the Jewish food laws? Do they avoid blood-containing foods such as rump steak and black pudding, for instance? If they do, I understand their religious interpretation of this text as prohibiting blood transfusions. But if not, I fear they are sadly confused.

### Muramoto's Flying Carpets

6 February 2001



**Peter Morrell,**  
Hon Research Associate,  
History of Medicine  
*Staffordshire University,  
ST4 2DE*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Muramoto's Flying Carpets](#)

Sir,

While I accept that JWs might well regard blood refusals as their merely following the dictates of scripture, their own consciences and thus a form of internal conformity with the beliefs of their Church - a very unremarkable claim in the light of the previous discussion - however, I also regard it more fundamentally as a form of 'soul contamination'. Indeed, what else in essence can it be? Why should anyone - on solely religious grounds - object to the blood of another person being released into one's veins? It cannot be on physical or chemical grounds, as everybody else approves it, and they

Email Peter Morrell:  
[peter.morrell@tesco.net](mailto:peter.morrell@tesco.net)

themselves approve use of many blood products. It cannot be on biological grounds. Therefore, it must be based somewhere, wayback upon some spiritual suspicion that it is wrong and bad. No argument has yet been proposed to invalidate this view and so I retain it. At one point they were even opposed to vaccinations, presumably for the same reason.

Regarding Muramoto's flying carpets, I'm afraid that amusement, politeness and pity restrain me from expressing my frank opinion. On the point of buckets and bath-tubs, well, I'm sorry, but I had credited Muramoto with greater mental powers than he appears to manifest. As he should know, an experiment is not uniform once you start changing the containers as well as the contents. I made that very clear at the start. Nor are the '3 flasks' or this 'riddle' my property, as he claims - they are his - it was he who started claiming that these three subjects were radically different from one another, and me who claimed otherwise. The analogy of 'the three flasks' is merely a device for comparison purposes and I have no emotional attachment to the concept. I cannot see why he chooses bath-tubs and buckets. What useful purpose is served by this new aberration? I disagree that science, medicine and JW religion are sufficiently different to warrant such massive differences in size of container.

To summarise yet again, Muramoto and I seem to agree on most aspects of the three subjects, but he contends that their differences are more real than apparent, but has not said how or why. I argued that the differences must be more apparent than real because dogma, conformity and fluidity of belief apply in all three. I alone contended that the function of beliefs in the three are different and also the mode of generating truth. I also said that the function of truth in religion generally is to obtain inner contentment and meaning; that in medicine is to alleviate sickness; and that in science is to know things, to invent and change things - to gain manipulative and predictive power over objects.

However, as I alone stated, the mode of generating truth [epistemology] is radically different in all three. In JW religion and medicine, it is largely dogma-driven, scripture-driven and elders-driven, while in science it is based mostly upon induction through observation and experiment with a small dose of dogma too. In medicine, science also plays a part and thus observations, evidence and experiment play an increasing role. Solely on this basis, it is clear that the contents of the three are different.

Finally, I do not regard the analogy of 'getting from London to Paris by flying carpet' a very useful analogy at all. Well, if by this further weak argument, Muramoto is implying, as I think he is, that the knowledge in religion, as 'a magic carpet', is somehow inferior, deeply flawed or untrustworthy in some manner, by comparison with that in science and [dare I say] allopathic medicine, then I think he is profoundly mistaken. But by this statement he has also revealed his true colours.

As I previously said, serving very different functions, each must be judged by their individual 'function outcomes', and NOT by measurement against the arrogant standpoint of materialist science. While science has enjoyed a dominant mode of understanding in the modern world, its obvious lack of universal application cannot allow it to invalidate other modes of apprehending reality. The purpose of any religion never has been 'to gain manipulative and predictive power over objects'. Indeed, as I previously said, religions are somewhat dismissive of the value of 'objects' and many deny their reality. If Muramoto reads what I said more carefully he will see this point made very clearly.

If the outcome that any religion confers upon its followers, are greater peace, inner contentment and life meaning for a person - which is its purpose - then I can see nothing wrong with that. Indeed, it is a big plus for people, that few other things can supply. Science cannot supply that and nor can allopathic medicine. To borrow Muramoto's language, then this certainly 'takes one safely to Paris'. In the case of science, then again that is a valid view of life and also guarantees a safe journey. In relation to allopathic medicine, I personally would not trust such an overtly damaging medical system with my own health, except in a last resort, life-and-death situation, if no better and safer alternative was available.

I hope these small fragments help to clarify and possibly conclude my previous remarks on this topic.

## Re: Muramoto's Flying Carpets

7 February 2001



**Joseph Watine**  
*Hôpital de Rodez, France*

According to Peter Morrell, "science or allopathic medicine (contrary to religion) cannot supply (...) greater peace, inner contentment and life meaning for a person" [1].

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Muramoto's Flying Carpets](#)

It seems difficult to understand what Peter Morrell means. After all, isn't allopathic medicine able to relieve us from many of our sufferings and thus to help us to find "greater peace, inner contentment and life meaning"?

Email Joseph Watine:  
[j.watine@ch-rodez.fr](mailto:j.watine@ch-rodez.fr)

[1] [http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters?lookup=by\\_date&days=1#322/7277/37/EL41](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters?lookup=by_date&days=1#322/7277/37/EL41)

## Re: Muramoto's Flying Carpets

7 February 2001



**Lee Elder,**  
 Founder  
 AJWRB

Peter Morrell stated:

"If the outcome that any religion confers upon its followers, are greater peace, inner contentment and life meaning for a person - which is its purpose - then I can see nothing wrong with that. Indeed, it is a big plus for people, that few other things can supply."

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Muramoto's Flying](#)

[Carpets](#)

Email Lee Elder:  
[LeeElder@ajwrb.org](mailto:LeeElder@ajwrb.org)

Greater peace, contentment and life meaning are indeed very important "outcomes" or benefits associated with most belief systems. I would hope, however, that you and other outside observers would pause and consider the costs associated with these benefits for a Jehovah's Witness (JW) and more particularly a JW child or mature minor.

The cover of the May 22, 1994 Awake! magazine (a JW publication) features the photos of 26 children, ages varying up to 17 years, with the caption: "Youths Who Put God First." Inside the magazine proclaims: "In former times thousands of youths died for putting God first. They are still doing it, only today the drama is played out in hospitals and courtrooms, with blood transfusions the issue." (page 2) The feature article on page 9 titled "Youths Who Have "Power Beyond What Is Normal"" tells the stories of three of these children who died after refusing blood treatment.

My question to you sir is this: Is the sacrifice of hundreds, perhaps thousands of JW children a justifiable price for "greater peace, inner contentment and life meaning?"

The Bible records that some Israelite parents offered their children up in sacrifice to the God Molech. "And they have built the high places of To'pheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hin'nom, in order to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, a thing that I had not commanded and that had not come up into my heart." (Jeremiah 7:31) Biblical Archaeology confirms that such sacrifices were common, [1] and even today reports of child sacrifice are still heard. [2,3]

You may end up reevaluating your position after the WTS publishes your comments as someone supportive of their tragic and misguided policy. While "greater peace, inner contentment and life meaning" are in themselves positive outcomes, I think we can agree that at least in this case, the end does not justify the means.

[1] Biblical Archaeology Review, January/February, 1990, pp. 52-60.

[2] Lindsay Mackoon, Reuters [http://www.nandotimes.com/newsroom/ntn/world/120497/world20\\_3592\\_noframes.html](http://www.nandotimes.com/newsroom/ntn/world/120497/world20_3592_noframes.html)

[3] The Time of India News Service - <http://timesofindia.com/130400/13mban2.htm>

## Re: Muramoto's Flying Carpets

7 February 2001



### Thomas Daniels

Dr. Watts has asked:

Send response to journal:  
 Re: Re: Muramoto's Flying Carpets

Email Thomas Daniels:  
[ocotillo50@hotmail.com](mailto:ocotillo50@hotmail.com)

"What I now would like to know is this: do JW's strictly adhere to all the Jewish food laws? Do they avoid blood-containing foods such as rump steak and black pudding, for instance?"

Jehovah's Witnesses do not comply with all of the Jewish food laws. They see nothing wrong with eating pork for example. However no JW would eat black pudding or for that matter any other food that they knew to contain blood. They believe that this particular requirement actually predated the Law (Genesis 9: 3,4) and was made of perpetual obligation by being reiterated in the Christian era. (Acts 15:20)

The blood of a slaughtered animal was not to be eaten, and for a believer, this is arguably still the case. From a Christian perspective therefore, it does make sense after a fashion to teach that the symbolism involved with blood is profaned or desecrated when it is eaten. Without equivocating at some point though, it's very difficult to make the same argument when the blood in question has been freely offered for the express purpose of saving life through the performance of the common set of functions for which it was designed in the first place.

Peter Morrell has asked:

"Why should anyone - on solely religious grounds - object to the blood of another person being released into one's veins?"

As I've attempted to explain, the conceptual basis for the doctrine was the archaic notion that blood itself is the food upon which the body is sustained. To further illustrate what I mean by this, consider the following quote. Denys of Montpelier writing in the year 1677 stated:

"In practicing transfusion one can only imitate the example of nature which, in order to nourish the fetus in the uterus of the mother, makes a continuous transfusion of the blood of the mother into the body of the infant through the umbilical vein. In performing transfusion it is nothing else than nourishing by a shorter road than ordinary--that is to say, placing in the veins blood all made in place of taking food which only turns to blood after several changes." (1)

For reasons no one can begin to fathom today, JW's in the 1940's, 50's and 60's accepted this viewpoint as factual and valid, even going so far as to quote the last sentence from the above excerpt on three separate occasions in support of the doctrine. (2)(3)(4)

The reasoning here was simple:

A. The Bible forbids the eating of blood. B. Transfusion is simply a more modern way to eat blood.

QED - The Bible forbids transfusion.

In illustrating this point, perhaps it would be more helpful to actually reproduce some of the (many) quotes from JW literature rather than simply providing them as references:

"Just because the blood is transfused directly into the donee's blood stream instead of directly into his stomach to find its way eventually into his blood stream does not say it is not eating blood and is hence no transgression of the Noachian covenant against taking creature blood into the human organism. It is eating another's blood in order to replenish a depleted blood stream and to do so in a hurry." (5)

"A patient in the hospital may be fed through the mouth, through the nose, or through the veins. When sugar solutions are given intravenously, it is called intravenous feeding. So the hospital's own terminology recognizes as feeding the process of putting nutrition into one's system via the veins. Hence the attendant administering the transfusion is feeding the patient blood through the veins, and the patient receiving it is eating it through his veins." (6)

"Modern medicine's transfusing of blood amounts to the same thing as eating blood, only the mouth and digestive system are bypassed as in intravenous feeding." (7)

"The Society does not endorse any of the modern medical uses of blood, such as the uses of blood in connection with inoculations.....If a person did this, he may derive comfort under the circumstances from the fact that he is not directly eating blood, which is expressly forbidden in God's Word. It is not used for food or to replace lost blood." (8)

The argumentation is more polished today, and more apt to rely on sophistry and equivocation rather than flatly claiming that the purpose of a transfusion is to nourish the body, but the fundamental basis for the Witnesses refusal of blood remains the same.

Peter Morrell stated:

"It cannot be on physical or chemical grounds, as everybody else approves it, and they themselves approve use of many blood products."

These are valid objections, but it is important to remember that initially the doctrine covered any use of blood whatsoever. No exceptions were made. The allowance of various blood fractions was introduced incrementally over a period of decades. As I've explained previously, (and can be seen in the last quote above) this was initially rationalized on the basis that while some parts of blood nourished the body and because of this, the acceptance thereof would violate "God's express will forbidding blood as food", other parts of blood did not nourish the body and therefore there was no violation.

Peter Morrell stated:

"Therefore, it must be based somewhere, wayback upon some spiritual suspicion that it is wrong and bad."

This may also be a valid observation, but it's one that is impossible to verify at this point. Those who originally formulated the doctrine have been deceased for years now. JW's are governed in a hierarchical arrangement where the ultimate control rested in the hands of a small group of men. It could well be that initially there was some spiritual suspicion on the part of one or more of these men that transfusion is wrong or bad. However this suspicion if indeed it did exist was never communicated as such to JW's at large. The doctrine has consistently been presented as a technical violation of the Biblical prohibitions against eating blood.

#### References

- (1) G. W. Crile; Hemorrhage and Transfusion: An Experimental and Clinical Research; 1909, D. Appleton and Company: 153
- (2) The Watchtower; Watchtower Bible & Tract Society; 1945, July 1: 200
- (3) The Watchtower; Watchtower Bible & Tract Society; 1961, September 15: 558
- (4) Blood, Medicine and The Law of God; Watchtower Bible & Tract Society; 1961: 14
- (5) The Watchtower; Watchtower Bible & Tract Society; 1949, December 1: 368
- (6) Awake!; Watchtower Bible & Tract Society; 1960, April 22: 8
- (7) The Watchtower; Watchtower Bible & Tract Society; 1951, July 1: 415
- (8) The Watchtower; Watchtower Bible & Tract Society; 1964, November 15: 682





**Osamu Muramoto,**  
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Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Muramoto's Flying  
Carpets](#)

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I would like to propose Peter Morrell to finish this debate respectfully. Despite his claim that I started this debate, "three flasks", "riddle", "experiment" etc were all introduced by Morrell, not me. I have never thought of such a viewpoint and never dreamt of such an "experiment." He set up all this paradigm and now he claims "nor are '3 flasks' or this 'riddle' my [Morrell's] property, as he [Muramoto] claims - they are his - it was he [Muramoto] who started claiming that these three subjects were radically different from one another, and me [Morrell] who claimed otherwise." Any reader can examine the above exchanges and see that Morrell first started this "experiment" by first alleging "differences between science/medicine and JWs are more apparent than real." [1] In response, I used "a flask, a bucket, and a bathtub" [2] to illustrate that there are so many variables among those three subjects that his very assumption on which he built up his "experiment" - "the conditions in each flask are near identical save one condition" [1] - simply does not exist.

While I enjoyed his unique ideas and logic, and agreed with him in many points, I do not find any further debate in this line fruitful. One can argue that the difference between the dog and the table is "more apparent than real" because both have four legs. One can put a dog and a table in "two flasks" and argue that "the content of each flask" is different because such and such are different between the two, but one thing is common, both have four legs. Is the difference between the two flasks "apparent or real"? My answer is maybe yes, maybe no. It all depends on how you look at them. But my truly honest and sincere answer is I am not interested in solving such a "riddle."

[1] Morrell P: The conundrum of the three flasks. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL20>

[2] Muramoto O: A flask, a bucket and a bathtub - not the three flasks. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL38>

## No desire to understand JWs

9 February 2001



**Peter Morrell,**  
Hon Research Associate,  
History of Medicine  
Staffordshire University,  
ST4 2DE

Send response to journal:  
[Re: No desire to understand  
JWs](#)

Email Peter Morrell:  
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Sir,

Lee Elders incorrectly interprets my position - I wish neither to support nor condemn JWs policy on blood, I merely wish to understand it. Perhaps I was guilty of speaking too generally, but I still think that religions are more concerned with spiritual matters than temporal ones. I thank Thomas Daniels for explaining what he calls 'the conceptual background' to the issue of 'soul contamination' - which I still think is an accurate depiction of it, even though he claims the JWs prefer to see it as some 'haemotrophic' matter. That is still baffling. Whatever scriptures you generate to justify JW blood refusal, still no complete explanation has been offered for this phenomenon. Justifying things through scripture is not enough. There is always an underlying spiritual rationale for such matters - in this case about soul contamination. Please tell me what I am missing?

Regarding Joseph Watine's remark about peace and contentment, I would say that any peace and contentment offered by medicine is of course to be welcomed by the sufferer, but that is not the primary concern, more like a secondary off-shoot of medicine, whose primary concern is the cure of disease. However, it is the primary concern of a religion to establish some peace, contentment and inner meaning for a person. That was the only distinction I was making - stating what seem to be the primary functions in science, medicine and religion. These differences in function clearly differentiate between the three subjects - a point of some importance still thusfar left by the wayside..

When Lee Elder asks: "My question to you sir is this: Is the sacrifice of hundreds, perhaps thousands of JW children a justifiable price for "greater peace, inner contentment and life meaning?" - then the answer is of course 'yes'. That same answer would have been given by first war soldiers going 'over the top' at the front; it would be the same answer for a Japanese suicide pilot; same answer for a Moslem suicide bomber; same answer for an Aztec being killed by having his heart cut out at sunrise; same answer for those who perished in the Tombs of the Pharaohs of Egypt buried alive; same answer...in any number of religions down the ages. Such is the nature of belief. The sacrifice they make is their own business and is clearly in their view worth making. Does anyone have the right to tell them what they should believe? They choose what to believe and their parents choose. And if any 'payment' is to be made it is not to you or me or anyone, but to their own consciences, or to God, or to whatever you believe about the hereafter.

And so when Lee Elder says: "You may end up reevaluating your position after the WTS publishes your comments as someone supportive of their tragic and misguided policy." I will say that my comments are fair words from someone sitting in the middle, who neither supports nor condemns them for their beliefs and practices - they are free to believe whatever they like and do what they like - such is human birth. Good luck to them, I say. I may marvel at what they say and do but have no opinion about it, for I recognise and defend their right to choose their own beliefs, which must afterall be one of the most sacred and inalienable rights we all have.

I have consistently given respectful replies and I do not regard the idea of the three flasks as mine and mine alone - indeed, it is a good slant on this matter. The flying carpets idea was patently absurd. Furthermore, it is Muramoto who personalised the last exchange, and it is he who has consistently declined to explain the basis for what he contends are 'real differences' between the three topics in the discussion. Presumably he has no answer to give. Nor has he deigned to acknowledge the alleged differences I offered about function of truth and its mode of generation in each - which I thought was some help for him to climb out of a hole of his own digging. Presumably he is 'not interested' in that either. A claim of being 'not interested' is plainly astonishing for someone who has published on this very subject so prolifically in the last 15 years.

I have no fundamental desire to be disrespectful to Muramoto, but as soon as he starts to personalise things, then people will feel the need to do the same. As soon as he says it is 'my flask', I 'set up this whole paradigm', that my 'views are unique', then he places things in a new pattern that denigrates me as a human being, that marginalises, isolates and deviantises me - just he would do to JWs. I refuse to stand back and allow anyone to do that to me. We are supposed to be discussing ideas, not individuals.

The major difference between me and Muramoto - and it is fundamental - is that he seeks to condemn JWs while I seek to understand them. Truly understand them, not just view them through the distorting filter of science - a conformist medical science that condemns them as deviants. I refuse to condemn them as deviants and will always seek instead to find similarities and underpinning ideas that support their position. I do this in the knowledge that deviants generally can be understood by this simple anthropological approach. Their differences from the common herd are always more apparent than real, and what is more, they serve a very important social function in their orientation towards any conformist system of beliefs - such as medicine.

How many of Muramoto's many articles would have been approved for publication in the medical journals if any one of them suggested, even in the subtlest way, that JWs might have a valid issue? None of them. That shows what his real game is - isolating and deviantising a group of people who choose to disagree with a major central dogma of medicine. Talking about dogma, belief and conformity - here we reach the centre of this whole issue. How dare they disagree with medicine? All Muramoto's work, as far as I can tell, and his whole academic reputation sits upon this insistence, to a believing medical community, that these JWs are freaks and weirdoes. That is a reputation built NOT upon trying to understand these fellow humans, these who are our brothers and sisters, but upon condemning, marginalising, isolating and deviantising them at every turn. I presume that is why he is 'not interested' in the fundamentals of this subject..

My position is simple - I have used what critical faculties are at my disposal to try and neutrally understand them - and am condemned by all concerned for such an attempt. To be condemned as one of their 'supporters', 'one whose words they will use in support of their views'. I regard it as a far more noble and worthy gesture to try to understand our fellow brothers and sisters in the human family, no matter what they say or believe, than to systematically condemn them and point - always point - to their differences, and never even seek to find any similarities upon which might be built some understanding. He does not seek to understand them, but to condemn them at every turn.

He probably knows that to acknowledge some of the valid points I have made would be - God forbid - to go some way towards acknowledging that JWs are not that different from the rest of us afterall. An admission that to him is probably as preposterous as it is unimaginable. That completes this matter, because it lays bare the fundamentals of my approach to this subject, and also his.

## Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses

14 February 2001



**Mrs Anne Sanderson,**  
Medical Secretary  
*Falkirk Infirmary, FK1*  
*5QE*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses](#)

Email Mrs Anne Sanderson:  
[annesan@lineone.net](mailto:annesan@lineone.net)

### HOW TO UNDERSTAND JWS

My word! What a long way we've come! We started out with Dr Muramoto's article wherein he called for help for JW patients whose consciences permit them to accept blood-based treatments to secure confidentiality sufficient to obtain it without fear of congregational recriminations. From there we proceeded to myriad e-letters debating supposed rights and wrongs of the WTS ever-changing blood policy. Then, along the way, we somehow got enmeshed in an intriguing philosophical debate about three flasks that ended up with ridiculous accusations that Dr Muramoto's "real game" is "isolating and deviantising a group of people who choose to disagree with a major central dogma of medicine." We are told that Dr Muramoto insists "these JWs are freaks and weirdos" and that he is intent on "condemning, marginalising, isolating and deviantising them at every turn."

Well, I've read Dr Muramoto's article and all of his e-letters here to date, and it's someone else's "real game" we ought to be concerned about. Dr Muramoto is fighting for the right of individual JWs who dare test the WTS claim (on paper) that they have a right to choose for themselves. History proves that, in practice, individual JWs who voice a difference of belief about blood are treated badly by the WTS. This most sacred and inalienable right - for individual [JWs] to choose their own beliefs - is trampled upon by the WTS which insists it alone can make the right choices on matters of beliefs, and seeks to autocratically impose its choices on all members. Now, granted, some people like to have their choices made for them, but nobody here is out to stop that. Nor is anyone suggesting the WTS should be gagged or not listened to. But once the WTS has been listened to, and its theory compared with its practice, legitimate debate must be encouraged for the WTS actively discourages it.

The only way to understand this debate is to grasp the underlying spiritual rationale. For those who have missed what this is, may I explain? I spent the first 30 years of my life in the JW faith, utterly convinced of its correctness. I left the JW faith upon realising this undergirding principle was being abused.

First it is vital to get out of whatever mode of thinking we normally use - be that clinical, post-modernist or ethical - because the WTS uses none of these. They use (or abuse?) the theocratic way of thinking - rule by God. Now, I endorse that principle and strive to achieve it in my own life, but when that principle is used as a vehicle to control the thinking and actions of others, to their detriment, God's good name is brought into disrepute.

For the unaware, let me point out that it's vital to differentiate between sincere, rank and file members (JWs) and the tiny core of men who dictate what "God" says they should all believe and do (the WTS). We're only talking double figures out of six million members. Everything I am saying here is about the WTS leaders. I have no quarrel with the 99.9%

The leaders' spiritual rationale is that they alone in all the earth today are God's mouthpiece. Everyone else is controlled by the devil. To understand what God's written word means, one must go to the WTS, read its literature, accept its interpretations, and that includes supporting its current blood policy even if that results in losing one's life. If JWs want to believe that, fair enough. I used to. But then, I had no choice. You see, once the lie is believed - that salvation depends upon obedience to the WTS, God's only approved channel or organisation - all choice has been eliminated. You either stick with the WTS or you're damned. If you disagree with the current blood policy (or any core belief) you are disfellowshipped if you don't repent of such a 'sin'. Note - you don't have to unrepentantly accept a 'disapproved' blood treatment to be put out; you merely have to persist in voicing disagreement, as testified to by AJWRB people. If you take such treatment you are viewed as having disagreed with a core belief so you have dissociated yourself and can be shunned equally as are the disfellowshipped. Heads the WTS wins, tails you [JWs] lose. Either way you are effectively silenced. The WTS refuses to dignify divergent opinion with the right to voice it with a view to reform. Why? Because its totalitarian authority is being challenged.

That is why viewing JWs through a window of medical science gives a fuzzy view. The blood debate actually has nothing to do with medicine. It's purely a theological matter. The WTS admits that it's their interpretation of "abstain from blood" that is the reason for their blood policy. Because that interpretation is tenuous they have created a diversion by arguing medical points. Yet they know full well that if not one single medically sound reason existed for refusing blood treatments, they would continue to refuse them! Heads the WTS wins, tails you [the medical profession] lose. See who's playing games now?

Anyone who knows the history of the WTS sees they are into detours and distractions designed to keep their members marginalised, isolated, and condemned to sacrifice their lives on the WTS altar of blood rather than give them their right to choose for themselves. It is a wonderful con trick to persuade others you are courageously challenging established medical science in the name of freedom of choice when, all along, the pawns you lost in the process had sacrificed all choice to uphold a system of spiritual dictatorship that is only using medical science as a blind. The WTS has achieved stale-mate.

## Apology to Dr Muramoto

19 February 2001



**Peter Morrell,**  
Hon Research Associate,  
History of Medicine  
Staffordshire University,  
ST4 2DE

Sir,

I would like to offer an apology to Dr Muramoto, for suggesting that his entire academic career was founded upon a greater desire to deviantise JWs than to understand them. I unreservedly withdraw that comment, as on reflection I think it is untrue and probably unnecessarily insulting to him as a person - which was never intended anyway. I sincerely hope he will be able to forgive me for making such a suggestion.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Apology to Dr Muramoto](#)

Email Peter Morrell:  
[peter.morrell@tesco.net](mailto:peter.morrell@tesco.net)

I also notice a probable error in my reasoning in the last piece. Most religious people probably do not grasp the fine conceptual background of a subject, but more typically accept their beliefs and methods on face value. In which case, my remarks defending JWs as people who follow the anti-blood practice because they fully understand it conceptually as a form of soul contamination, rather than because they are told to conform by a dictatorial church of elders, was probably wide of the mark.

Again, on deeper reflection, I think it is more likely that the vast majority of religious people, of any faith, do tend to follow the system of their church somewhat blindly, adopting beliefs and practices largely on trust from a corpus created by others. For example, even in oriental religions, with which I am much more familiar, faith and acceptance of doctrines on trust, is extremely widespread, even in the most intellectually oriented religions like Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, and where personal immersion in religious practice is highly regarded.

I also thank Dr Muramoto for his patience in most skilfully dealing with the numerous twists and turns of what was a very good-natured discussion.

## Why I accept minor blood fractions

23 February 2001



**Patrick J. McShea III,**  
Director of Systems and  
Software Development  
National Alliance for  
Insurance Education and  
Research

Why can I conscientiously accept minor blood fractions, yes even hemoglobin? Oh, by the way... I am one of Jehovah's witnesses. I am an elder in my congregation. I am a member of the PVG (Patient Visitation Group)

First of all it should be obvious that I would rather never be in any situation where I'd have to have a lot of contact with the medical community, it would mean I am unwell. Going to the doctor for me is almost as pleasant as a visit to the dentist. (I'm sure a lot of doctors and dentists feel this way too, maybe even Dr. Muramoto)

However, if I were to completely "refuse" to see a doctor, (or a dentist) when I needed a doctor [ "Persons in health do not need a physician, but the ailing do."-Mt. 9:13] this could indicate:

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Why I accept minor blood fractions](#)

Email Patrick J. McShea III:  
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1)That I felt it was pointless and hopeless (I could be wrong, then again we all die, don't we?...Am I still wrong?)

2)That I didn't appreciate life

(It could be that I don't which raises questions doesn't it? Like If I don't appreciate life, why don't I just take my own life?... (Perhaps out of cowardice, perhaps out of of indolent apathetic indifference, perhaps because I just wanted to "see what was going to happen")

So because of the possible negative indications that might be implied should I "refuse" to see a doctor...(regardless of my feelings about things being hopeless, not hopeless from a medical perspective) and because I do in general find a bit of happiness here and there in this world and I do respect Jehovah and I do respect the conscience of other people ( If I make a decision one way or another it affects more than just me, it affects all who know me and depend on me as well as all the people in my downline that I might meet and affect in the future) – See Pauls discussion of conscience in 1 Cor. 9:23-31... So for these reasons I will go to a doctor and seek treatment...

I really would rather NOT accept ANY blood of ANY kind, however

because of my wanting to strive to "be peaceable with all men"- Ro. 12:18 (Many would want to litigate and fight with me over a complete "refusal" of blood),

because of wanting to "prove [my] reasonableness to all men" – Phil. 4:5 (Many in the public whom I might try to reach with the good news, many of them in the medical profession, I feel would (and have been) be turned off to the good news because of intransigence in the blood issue) Paul had Timothy circumcised "because of the Jews" he was going to preach to, though it wasn't required anymore...(Had God changed? Or was it "Just the First Century congregation making things up as they went Along"...hmmm Depends on how you view the Bible, doesn't it?);

because there has been a weakening of the faith of many, in particular, Jehovah's Witnesses in Westernized Countries , I want my actions to "make it easier on them", to "lighten their load" of worries as it were so they can concentrate on other issues that relate more to building their own faith instead of seeming to be "unreasonable"...There was a "change" as it were that Jesus spoke of when it came to divorce on occasion that was not Jehovah's initial purpose .. ["2 Pharisees now approached and, to put him to the test, began questioning him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. 3 In answer he said to them: "What did Moses command YOU?" 4 They said: "Moses allowed the writing of a certificate of dismissal and divorcing [her]." 5 But Jesus said to them: "Out of regard for YOUR hardheartedness he wrote YOU this commandment.] – Mk. 10:2-5 I would say that perhaps part of this change has been the result of a concession "out of your regard for your lack of faith"...

Finally the reason I might accept fractions has to do with the question "When is it that the components of a thing become that thing?".... Some may feel the term "blood" doesn't apply once you've taken the blood to the chop shop as it were and taken it to pieces.... Others may feel that this is just equivocation. That's where the conscience comes in..... Everyone has to be able to explain themselves. All things considered, I feel that acceptance of minor blood fractions is the lesser evil considering all the consequences...

Oh, and thanks for posting these things, it's served to clarify MY reasons.

## The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness as a basis for refusing blood 23 February 2001



**Rolf J. Furuli,**  
Research fellow in  
Semitic languages  
*University of Oslo, Norway*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness as a basis for refusing blood](#)

Email Rolf J. Furuli:  
[furuli@online.no](mailto:furuli@online.no)

As a member of the hospital liaison committee in Oslo, Norway for the last ten years the question about medical ethics and the use of blood is very important for me. When I stand at the bed of a critically ill person who has called for my assistance, I feel strongly the responsibility for building on a firm Biblical foundation - life is not something with which to play. Dr. Muramoto's article presents several facts regarding Jehovah's Witnesses, but its setting has a certain twist which may harm the relationship between the doctor and the Witness patient. Every researcher knows the importance of seeing the subject of research from the inside, and the fact that his informants are opposers, and that he lacks personal experience from inside the Witness organization, can perhaps explain why the article sends several wrong signals to doctors. There are also several misunderstandings in the comments to Muramoto's article in BMJ, so allow me to present the ground on which I stand.

### PROPHETS VERSUS TEACHERS AND PRESSURE VERSUS INFLUENCE

I and my fellow Witnesses believe that each person should decide which ethical values he or she wants to follow without being pressed by others. However, it should be stressed that in all areas of life, our choices are very much influenced by others; this is simply unavoidable! If we want to use the Bible as our sole ethical foundation, still we are dependent upon knowledge accumulated by other human beings: We are dependant upon those who wrote the autographs, that they did a faithful job, we are dependent upon those who copied the text, and upon those who made the modern critical editions of these text copies. Further, we are dependent upon those who made lexical and grammatical studies of the Greek and Hebrew text, and we are dependent upon those who translated the Bible into our modern tongue.

But this is not all. In connection with any subject which has to be learned, there is a need for teachers

to guide us through the knowledge which is accumulated by others, and to point out important data for us. Similarly, there is a need for guidance when we are going to work out our ethical principles on the basis of our English translations of the Bible. And here is one area where Muramoto errs: the responsible persons among Jehovah's Witnesses who organize the world-wide community are portrayed as prophets who force their arbitrary decisions upon the individual Witness, while they are no more than teachers, whose teaching can be checked by the individual Witness. There can be two reasons why the individual Witness is very receptive to what is written in the literature from the Watchtower society and what is said in the congregation: 1) Each member is brainwashed and does not use his or her thinking ability, or 2) what is written and said accords with his or her Christian conscience and viewpoints based on the Bible. As an example why I advocate 2) I will point to an incident some years ago: At a gathering of members of many hospital liaison committee members a particular understanding of a side of the blood issue was presented, and my reaction was: «This simply is not correct, and it cannot be accepted!» Fortunately it turned out to be a mistake. So it is possible to be sympathetic to a source which I have experienced allways has given true information without being slaves of men!

#### TO TAKE OR NOT TO TAKE BLOOD

As a linguist I am painfully aware of the fact that language is ambiguous. One reason why teachers of the Bible are needed, is that most people do not master lexical semantics (word meaning), particularly not as far as Greek and Hebrew are concerned. To illustrate why I see our standpoint regarding blood as consistent and not arbitrary, I will use an example as to word meaning from a text where blood is also mentioned.

Acts 15:29 in the New Testament gives the law «to keep abstaining from things sacrificed to idols and from blood (Greek haima) and from things strangled and from fornication (Greek porneia)». A person who wants to base his ethics on the Bible may logically ask: «What is the meaning of the Greek word porneia which is translated by the English word fornication? Any lexicon will show that immoral sexual practices are involved, but this is rather vague. The word evidently involves sexual intercourse between a married person and one who is not one's mate, but does it involve sex between persons who are unmarried? And does it include homosexual acts and bestiality? The sexual drive of some persons may influence their answers to the questions, so it is not guaranteed that we can get a good answer just by reading definitions in lexicons.

Witnesses who knew the Biblical languages struggled with the word porneia for a long time; it can seem strange for non-linguists, but sometimes it is extremely difficult to pinpoint the semantic range of a single word. The study concluded that 'fornication' is an immoral use of another person's (or an animal's) sexual organs, and it includes all the four areas mentioned in the last paragraph. Apart from this, there may be 'grey' areas, such as how unmarried persons will show affection for one another, but such cases are a matter of the individual consciences, where each person must bear his or her own responsibility.

Just as the ethical interest of Jehovah's Witnesses in the law 'to abstain from fornication' revolves around the question «What is included in the concept porneia?», similarly the ethical interest in the law 'to abstain from blood' revolves around the question «What is included in the concept haima?» Thus what Muramoto calls a 'policy change' which allows 'a wider selection of acceptable blood products' (p. 38) is hardly more than a clarification of the important ethical question of what the Greek word haima really includes in a situation where ever more new products are manufactured from blood.

The Encyclopedia Britannica, Micropedia II (1974) p. 89 defines the major blood components as «plasma, red blood cells (erythrocytes), white blood cells (leucocytes), and platelets (thrombocytes)». I can see no reason to exclude any of these components from the concept haima, and therefore, from the second World War<sup>1</sup> when blood transfusions became common, Jehovah's Witnesses have abstained from whole blood and from any of the mentioned components. However, in the last few decades fractions and extracts have been synthesized from the aforementioned components, and naturally questions have arisen: Immunglobulins, coagulation factors, albumin, stem cells, interleucines etc, are they included in the concept blood (haima)? We cannot answer this question with certainty because these factors did not exist as products in Biblical times, and therefore the answer has been that the use of these components is a matter of conscience. This does not mean that the Watchtower Society or a group of humans has authorised the use of these components, but rather that they have pointed out that they represent a grey area where each Christian conscience must decide.

There has been a steady development of the use of blood from vaccines to the transfusion of whole blood, and to the extraction and synthesizing of components from blood which occur at present. Because the witnesses all the time have been continually faced with new products and new uses, a continual study of the blood issue has been necessary. In the course of the study several roads have been explored, such as which components of blood can be said to be nutrients, the role played by particular blood components in the body<sup>2</sup>, and whether we can differentiate between erythrocytes and hemoglobin when 95 % of the dry weight of an erythrocyte is hemoglobin<sup>3</sup>. The answer to such questions may influence some person's choice of using or not using a particular component, but the fundamental position has all the time been the same: What clearly is blood (haima) we do not accept! So the conclusion of the study which was published in The Watchtower June 2000 June 15:29-31 is in my view logical and consistent; everything except the major blood components is a matter of conscience.



## A THIRD PARTY CAN HARM THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DOCTORS AND THE WITNESS PATIENT

To abstain from blood is deeply rooted in Jehovah's Witnesses; so deeply that even many persons who no longer are Witnesses stick to it in situations of crisis. Because of this and because of actual experience, my estimate is that less than 1 % of the Witnesses would accept blood in a situation of crisis.<sup>4</sup> Thus the situation painted by Muramoto of Witnesses who will accept blood in secrecy is virtually nonexistent.

A good relationship between doctor and patient is mandatory for a good outcome of the treatment. It is fine that the doctor should ask the patient about his or her decision to refuse blood, in order to be sure that this is the final decision on the part of the patient. However, Muramoto's suggestions that the signed card expressing the patient's decision should not be accepted, and that the doctor should try to make the patient accept blood because this is what many Witnesses want but are afraid to do, may really harm the patient. First, the signed medical document is a legal document which should be accepted by doctors. Second, the standpoint of the patient is an example of the principle of 'informed consent', and it is not the duty of the doctor to try to change the will of the patient.

The standpoint to abstain from blood was reached when the patient was fit and well, but the Witness patient will defend this decision when he or she is weak from blood loss or pain as well. But it is my experience that there is one thing the patient wants more than anything else in such a situation, namely, an assurance from the doctor that blood will not be used and that the best possible treatment will be given. Such an assurance will help the patient get mental strength which will contribute to his or her recovery. Suggestions from a third party work against the patient achieving this feeling of security, because the doctor unnecessarily can become suspicious about the motives of the patient.

## CONCLUSION

Bloodless surgery is standard procedure in many hospitals, and the Witness patient in most cases does not pose a challenge for the doctor. The realisation that infusion of blood components may be dangerous, and the work of the hospital liaison committees in conveying information to doctors and assisting the Witness patient when they are called to do so, have contributed to a cordial relationship between the Witnesses and many doctors. Third party articles such as the one written by Muramoto, do not represent the interests of Witnesses but rather those of the opposers, and may harm this good relationship.

My hope is that doctors will respect the autonomy of each patient, not by trying to breach the relationship between the patient and fellow believers and by asking cunning questions, as Moramoto suggests. But instead: ask the patient clear questions to make sure that the standpoint regarding blood is his or her own. And then, assure the patient that blood will not be given, thus giving the patient the feeling of security that he or she is seeking.

1 Even before World War II the sanctity of blood was stressed in connection with vaccines. One reason why vaccination was not recommended was that a great part of those vaccines which were administered in the 1920s and 1930s was blood.

2 The blood system of a pregnant woman is separate from that of the fetus in her womb. The fact that the mother's major blood components do not under normal conditions cross the placental barrier into the fetus' blood, while some protein fractions including albumin do move naturally into the blood system of the fetus (albumin moves less efficiently), has led some Christians to believe that only the major components represent haima.

3 It should be noted that only 35 % of the erythrocyte is dry weight, so depending of the point of view it can be said that either 95 or 33 % of the red blood cell is hemoglobin.

4 The experience of a professor at one of the University hospitals in Oslo was that 1 % of the Witness patients accepted blood (personal communication).

**Re: No desire to understand JWs ... motives and belief mechanisms explored**

23 February 2001



**Mike Parsons,**  
Jehovah's Witness  
*Supporter of AJWRB*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: No desire to understand JWs ... motives and belief mechanisms explored](#)

Email Mike Parsons:  
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Peter Morrell has stated:

"Whatever scriptures you generate to justify JW blood refusal, still no complete explanation has been offered for this phenomenon. Justifying things through scripture is not enough. There is always an underlying spiritual rationale for such matters in this case about soul contamination. Please tell me what I am missing?"

Sir,

I wish to add some light as to the matter of "soul contamination", that you were seeking to explore.

Although it has been said earlier that JWs do not believe in continuity of life after death, as a spirit form, but rather the soul itself dies at death, there are other matters of belief that are a near equivalent.

The issue here is one of "purity of worship" and loyalty to God. To go against what they believe the bible to say is in effect being unfaithful to God. Thus even under risk of death they often hold to their beliefs.

JWs do believe in the life hereafter. At some point in future time they believe that God will resurrect (or rather re-create) those who have died faithful to Him. This re-creation is not a second instance of someone (as would be a clone), but the original instance. Bridging the time between a person's first and second existence is not a soul as such, but rather God's memory of them. From this memory they are re-created, but under a better environment than before ... a new heaven and earth. This new earth is considered to be the planet we currently inhabit, but cleansed of wickedness. Others view heaven as their destination.

They reason that the day of one's death (although unpleasantly traumatic for all involved) can (in a spiritual sense) be better than one's day of birth if one has died faithful to God. Throughout one's life-course, a "name" (a good reputation) is acquired due to faithfulness to Him. To disobey God's commands is therefore seen as contaminating a person's good name with God.

Having said the above, it must also be stated that people with such high ideals are fallible humans, and much consideration must be given to just how they arrive at their specific beliefs (their "laws", rather than their ideals or aspirations, since many people outside the group share similar aspirations). For they are not self-derived from scripture, but rather through a "study" and indoctrination process from people who are already JWs.

I applaud your ideal that "they are free to believe whatever they like", but in reality this is not so. As soon as one accepts a particular doctrine, perhaps you could call it the "master" doctrine (although JWs do not attach special importance to it), namely that the WTS or "organisation" is God's channel of communication, freedom becomes enslavement of obedience to that channel for fear of offending God. The teachings of that channel are what one is forced to adopt, irrespective of what one's personal ideas or convictions would be if one were to analyse things from first principles independently.

It is this important concept that lies at the heart of understanding JWs from "outside of the group". From within the group, only a minority become aware of the underlying control system and its spin-off implications.

Some who attend a study with JWs, whether on a 1:1 basis, or in their gatherings arrive at the conclusion that the study is not an open discussion, but is quickly funnelled towards a fixed conclusion. There is no freedom for debate or disagreement with the discussion material.

Although the JWs would be quick to deny that they are members of a "cult", there are similar mechanisms of belief formation and control involved. Most people who are at odds with the blood issue are likely not to wish to discuss such a topic and have differing points of view on this matter. Their concern is not on labelling a group in a manner that would bring some to condemn them, but rather to demonstrate some of the forces at play.

There needs to be an awareness that once certain rules come into play within the belief system of a group, positive feed-back occurs, and the belief becomes increasingly stable by self-reinforcement. In addition, certain filters within the JW organisation structure and practices exist which ensure that it is populated only by those who continue to support its established legacy of beliefs. Further filters reject ideas which conflict with the established legacy of beliefs.

In principle, I would agree with you that JWs are no different to anyone else in the population. At least, this is the "start position".

As with any group of the population, there are those who wish to think for themselves, and those who want to adopt answers handed to them on a plate. This is where things move away from the starting point.

Tragically, those who do raise questions and have thought things out for themselves are exposed to the squelch mechanisms of the organisation. This is far from being "fair play" with these individuals. For it is not as if the community as a whole would object to their views on the grounds of their being incorrect, but that the originating source of the views was not the WTS, has not been endorsed by the WTS, and is different from the current WTS teaching.

In this one sense, one of intellectual freedom, and exchange of ideas, high control groups like JWs differ from science. If science, or any other discipline, were to adopt such an approach ... to squash all ideas from its community, except that which is in support of the status-quo, even if the new ideas are a better approximation to reality, then stagnation ensues and there is no room for progress. It is not that science does not have its constraints, for example experiments certainly have to fit within the legal and moral framework of the global community, but it has considerable freedom intellectually. This is not the case with JWs.

Note also, the perceived "ultimate authority" ... the bible ... is not in the above formulae. The acting authority is the WTS. The community is shielded from the full internal debate and reasoning mechanisms.

In contrast to the above, the average JW believes that freedom does exist within the group, and that anyone with "a bit of common sense" and a love for God would arrive at the same beliefs. Here is indeed opportunity to discuss what is apparent and what is real.

The freedom of belief is only apparent, as it stems from the WTS teachings, and is not personally derived. No deviation is permitted. External ideas and viewpoints that cast a new light on existing teachings is an apparent threat to biblical teachings. The full understanding of the WTS blood policy by JWs is only apparent. The basis of the WTS policy as being the only arrivable conclusion from the bible is only apparent. Indeed, the distinction between what is real and what is apparent, a demonstrable misconception in the JW mind has been made in many of the previous comments.

I would particularly like to focus on your opinion of "I recognise and defend their right to choose their own beliefs, which must after all be one of the most sacred and inalienable rights we all have".

This is ironically what the very issue that Dr Muramoto has been defending on behalf of those who have not entirely handed over control their belief systems to the dictates of an organisation.

There are those from within the JW community who have escaped from the notion of "the organisation knows best", and have re-seized control of their belief system. Having done so, they are potentially exposed to defence mechanisms of the organisation causing trouble in their life unless they remain "hidden" from its detection and wrath.

The blood issue is one of prime concern to them due to the vulnerable position such ones are in whilst needing treatment and the exposed nature of hospitalisation. Quite often confidentiality can be broken merely by a relative visiting during treatment, or a casual conversation with hospital staff. In some cases hospital records of treatment are kept on a clipboard at the end of a patient's bed.

Whilst the beliefs of the JW community are largely enigmatic to the medical community, the case has been put forward that it is not entirely a united one. It has been pointed out that there are internal dissidents who's voices are suppressed by the controlling organisation. Indeed, whilst the medical community struggle to understand the JW position, it is impossible to do so without touching on the underlying controlling agent. It is perhaps recognising that this is so that has made Dr Muramoto's comments appear negative. I am sure that those who have commented here have no wish to attack the community of JWs in general, but the attacks are made on the grounds of the policy and actions of the controlling agent of that community.

It has also been pointed out that rejection of the WTS blood policy can be made on the basis of two grounds:

Firstly, an alternative view exists, which the WTS has not yet acknowledged, in which transfusions do not infringe upon loyalty to God or pure worship (the "soul contamination" issue). Such a position is defined on the 2 websites in previous comments.

Secondly, it can be demonstrated that the WTS policy is not fully understood by the JW members (although they perceive it is), is inconsistent within itself, and has no basis within scripture for certain features. The question is therefore an issue of whether consent or non-consent is given on the grounds of being fully informed or whether the community of JWs have been misled to believe they are fully informed.

The WTS teaching regarding itself is in some ways a paradox, relying in trust that it is "God's channel". It declares itself as not being infallible, that it is subject to error. Yet it demands loyalty to itself and allegiance to its teachings as if that were not so. It's defence mechanisms more or less negate the possibility of error being acknowledged, and corrected even if the detection of error originates from within its own membership. It is not without good reason that those within its membership who recognise the inconsistencies are concerned regarding their own fate, and are duly concerned for the welfare of their fellow members. Such a level of controlling influence can open the way to exploitation or abuse of its members, and such abuse is unable to be regulated from within the community due to it's expulsion mechanisms. The seat of power always holds the trump card, namely its perceived position of authority by the JW community.

To answer your question "Does anyone have the right to tell them what they should believe?", your view "They choose what to believe and their parents choose." is not a complete picture. In adopting the "master" doctrine of JWs, they have at least in part sold their right to make autonomous choices in some matters. Whilst some issues under WTS control may be reasonably be described as benign or harmless, others can be damaging to what could be described as universally accepted human rights. Perhaps equal to the right to freedom of belief is also the will to live and the freedom to make choices regarding one's continuity of life, and perhaps (although this is more debatable) including such choices in an "immortal" sense behalf of one's future descendants.

Here, freedom of choice for such universally accepted human rights is playing in competition with the WTS control over the community of JWs. It is however not a level playing field, and the rules of play within the rule-book are different for each side. Perhaps that condition, if any, is where moral judgement should be made. This is particularly so when the WTS itself, in dealing with those outside of its community (e.g. governments and legal institutions) insists upon rules of fairness.

The WTS may reason that it has a forum in which suggestions for change can be made and

questions asked. This system however seems to be able to deal out stock answers that can leave the original question unanswered. Some who have approached the WTS in this manner and received meaningless replies have repeated the question more specifically to them. After just a few exchanges, and still with meaningless replies, the WTS ceases to respond to further requests. This demonstrates that it's forum is inadequate to cope with some issues, even those which are of its own making and that can be a life and death matter. Furthermore, it can be demonstrated (See WWW.AJWRB.ORG for instance) that those who have entered into such an exchange with the WTS have been exposed to secret hearings from WTS representatives (with no witnesses to the hearing permitted) resulting in their being expelled from the JW community and both defamed and rejected by that very act of expulsion. This tribulation is brought upon them simply for their troubles of asking questions and using freedom of speech about an issue that the WTS was not willing to resolve. This procedure has recently changed, possibly because of the potential spread of awareness of the issue or to improve the perception of the religion to the outside world, from such draconian methods to a simpler one. Rather than go through the trouble of giving a hearing to the issues in question locally, the "offender" is now considered to have dismissed himself merely by expressing such thoughts and a wish to resolve the issues. The net effect of tribulation is still the same, he is treated as though he has been expelled, and is still defamed and has to be both ignored and rejected by the JW community. The judgement is now simply automatic. The issue, which may be a life and death one, is still unheard and un- contemplated by the JW community as a whole. Would the WTS wish for such a summary dismissal of itself by any entity? I think not! It is completely alien from the concept of fairness, succinctly summarised by Jesus' advice to "treat others as you would have them treat you".

These issues are perhaps more generalised than the specifics of hospital practices that may need review with respect to treatment of JW patients. I believe that my degree of openness regarding the wider issues involved will be useful to those read them to understand the setting in which the current WTS blood policy and the JW community stand, whether they agree with it or not. Such wider issues cannot be addressed by a medical community, but knowledge of them can offer insight into understanding the JW community in general, their motives, and the mechanisms that translate their motives into practical behaviour.

I hope that I have shed some light on the "soul contamination" issue, as well as demonstrated why the JW community rely heavily on the WTS for their beliefs. The dissidents JW's are simply those who acknowledge that there is no good reason for the WTS position, and that an alternative viewpoint exists that would be acceptable to the community, if only it could achieve a hearing.

It is somewhat ironic that what started as a tokenary acknowledgement for the sanctity of life has become a real life and death issue. Surely it would be reasonable, as a mark of respect for the sanctity of life, to allow the issue to be fully explored.

About the Author: The author has only a lay interest in biological and medical issues. He was raised from early childhood by JW parents, baptised (thus becoming a JW) at 17 years, and still continues as a member almost 20 years later. His career is one based upon control systems, and thus is familiar with feed-back paths and control mechanisms. He recognises the existence of similar control mechanisms and filters within the biological world, such as "natural selection" within species and also patterns of thought behaviour. He sees the existing authoritarian control within the JW group to be maintained due to a "vicious circle" of positive (reinforcing) feedback with gain, due to its internal filtering, promotion and recruiting mechanisms. He considers that the group has drifted away from its initial ideals of being a "bible study group" to its current condition and that this situation has led to potentially dangerous outcomes.

## Re: The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness as a basis for refusing blood

24 February 2001



**Marvin Shilmer,**  
Elder  
*Jehovah's Witness*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness as a basis for refusing blood](#)

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As a fellow Witness of Jehovah, I find Furuli's response to Dr. Muramoto's article interesting because it represents probably the best defensive posture available for us as Jehovah's Witnesses, that an individual's sincere conscientious views should be respected. While I wholeheartedly support a defense of conscience it does not amount to a defense of the bases of our beliefs as Jehovah's Witnesses but rather only a defense of our right to sincerely believe as we wish.

I am not an opposer of my fellow Witnesses. I do have an inside view of and experience with the subject of research in question here. On the other hand, if on my part there is some misunderstanding of the subject then I appeal that it be highlighted and criticized accordingly by whomever feels so compelled. My interest is not in a person's disposition in relation to Jehovah's Witnesses, the Watchtower Society or the medical establishment. Rather, my interest in this subject is toward on thing, what is right for Christians.

Upon examination I cannot avoid wondering why Furuli's response avoids certain issues critical to his arguments. For instance, the assertion is made that Witnesses are very receptive to what is written in the literature from the Watchtower Society because, as he puts it, "what is written and said accords with his or her Christian conscience and viewpoints based on the Bible." That answer is given as the only alternative from being brainwashed yet it completely avoids the admitted fact that Witnesses were not universally in agreement with the Watchtower Society from the beginning on the Biblical significance or acceptability of blood transfusion. Indeed some Witnesses actually petitioned that the Watchtower Society authorize the practice of blood transfusion from practically the beginning of its import being scrutinized in our publications! (The Watchtower, May 1, 1950, page 143) Did those persons' convictions evaporate simple because the Watchtower Society chose its eventual

course of opposing the practice to the point of shunning those who accepted it? Indeed that cannot be the case because afterward quite a few were disfellowshipped (excommunicated) for conscientiously accepting blood transfusion. Even today this happens and is evidenced in the Watchtower Society recently instructing elders that such persons should be considered to have disassociated themselves from our company. That our fellow Witnesses back nearer the beginning of this issue of debate did not simply receive the Watchtower Society's viewpoints in accord with his or her own Christian conscience is further evidenced in that admittedly there were some Witnesses who would yet receive transfusions of blood even after more than a decade of it being harshly denounced in our publications. (The Watchtower of August 1, 1958, page 143) Such evidence refutes assertions that what the Watchtower Society writes and says accords with the individual conscience of individual Witnesses.

Furuli asserts that persons who remain associated with Jehovah's Witnesses do so because they agree with the Watchtower Society or else they are brainwashed. However, there are alternatives in addition to those two. For example, in spite of personal reservations, a person might remain associated with Witnesses because of the personal circumstance of aging in conjunction with a family that is entirely made up of Witnesses. With my inside view I know that such a person has good reason for fearing that they would not receive the same attention if they expressed outrightly a view on blood transfusion that was contrary to what the Watchtower Society backs. The same could be said for many other circumstances of a personal nature. If these circumstances are real then Furuli's assertion is not true that those remaining in association with Witnesses are either a testimony of conscientious support or else brainwashing. There could be other, more practical and down to earth reasons for continued association.

Regarding Acts 15:29 and blood (Greek haima), Furuli remarks that "the ethical interest in the law 'to abstain from blood' revolves around the question «What is included in the concept haima?»" That is a legitimate question. Another legitimate and perhaps more important question is, What haima is included in the concept of abstention for Christians? (This question is not addressed here by Furuli)

In answering the question of what is included in the concept haima, Furuli offers some comments from The Encyclopedia Britannica, Micropedia II (1974) p. 89 that is said to define the major blood components as plasma, red blood cells (erythrocytes), white blood cells (leucocytes), and platelets (thrombocytes). He goes on to say, "I can see no reason to exclude any of these components from the concept haima..." While I do not take issue with Furuli holding his view, I must wonder what defense it provides for a view intended to be Biblical. That is, correspondingly the Watchtower Society (or anyone else) could just as easily say that "there is no reason to exclude ANY component of blood from the concept of haima" and such an expression would have as much merit as that offered by Furuli. (This is exactly what the Watchtower Society once taught on the subject. See The Watchtower of February 15, 1963 page 124) My question is this, how does simply holding a particular view amount to evidence that a view is correct, or Biblical in this case?

Furuli goes on to speak of fractions and extracts from blood that more modern technology can better identify, extricate and make use of, even mentioning a few by name such as immunoglobulins, coagulation factors, albumin, stem cells, interleucines. He then asserts that we cannot know with certainty that blood fractions such as these are in the Biblical concept of haima (blood). Why is it that for some blood fractions Furuli can know that the concept of haima is applicable yet with other blood fractions he cannot know this? Is this because The Encyclopedia Britannica catalogs blood components as it does? Is that sound Biblical exegesis? As a Witness, am I supposed to teach Bible students that because Encyclopedia Britannica catalogs blood components as it does that this is an indication of God's will on the subject? Where does this thinking come from? Are we supposed to conclude that what God intended millennia ago is somehow determined by how people later catalogued components of blood or how today's modern technology can better identify and extricate components of blood? Again, where does this thinking come from? As a Witness, am I supposed to use this as sound Biblical reasoning? Why is it that when blood is cataloged one way Furuli is satisfied with having no reason to exclude particular components from the concept of haima yet when it comes to blood being cataloged a different way he suddenly depends upon the idea that we cannot know with certainty that the concept of haima applies? Certainly either of those views could be applied with equal weight in either direction!

On the subject of haima, Furuli's final assertion is that, for Witnesses, "the fundamental position has all the time been the same: What clearly is blood (haima) we do not accept!" This assertion is very frustrating to read because it is not explained except to mean that what is clearly blood (haima) as far as the Watchtower Society indicates is not acceptable to that entity. Beyond that facts run contrary to the opinion that this issue has been one among Witnesses where the fundamental position has always been the same; this is true for at least two reasons. From the historical perceptive of teachings from the Watchtower Society, that entity once taught "anything that is derived from blood and used to sustain life or strengthen one" came under the concept of haima, but that is not the case today. (The Watchtower of February 15, 1963 page 124) Today the Watchtower Society teaches that any part of blood may be transfused as long as it is processed into a cataloguing other than red cells, white cells, plasma or platelets. That is, as long as it is extricated and catalogued other than how the Watchtower Society indicates, regardless of uniqueness there is no part of blood that for sure should be abstained from by Christians. From the historical perceptive of individual Witnesses, as attested to in citations above, the fact remains that the fundamental position of Witnesses was not universally in agreement with the Watchtower Society from the beginning.

In the end Furuli's comments do not serve the effort of defending our beliefs as Biblical. Along that



line the argumentation employed boils down to: My view is more correct because it is the view I agree with. Notwithstanding, Furuli's overall reply appears to argue that the medical establishment should respect the views of the individual Witness because it is his or her conscience at work and that should be respected. I agree with that argument as far as it applies to each individual Witness. But if an individual's choice is a conscientious one then I fail to see why asking a person to think over that conviction or to explain it themselves is an intrusion. If our conscience is determined by a personal checking and examination of information and reasoning, then how can it be that continuing on that same path becomes a threat to our conscience if that conscience is indeed our own rather than a transplanted one. I would also ask, should the Watchtower Society be as accommodating of each individual Witness's sincere conscientious views as we would ask of medical professionals whom we rely on for sound medical advice and who must personally live with what we ask of them?

Marvin Shilmer

## More on Blood

24 February 2001



**Peter Morrell,**  
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Send response to journal:  
[Re: More on Blood](#)

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Sir,

The blood contamination issue moves on. I had originally proposed that religious people are not very different from everyone else, and in 'the three flasks' analogy I tried to show that the slavish mentality associated with religious people is just as apparent in science and in medicine - people adopt and draw on a corpus of ideas and practices created by others - they are mostly conformist believers. I still think that approach correctly lifts the rabbit up by its neck rather than its tail. I also think that the vast majority of people are conformists in their beliefs and that only a tiny minority of original thinkers [= Martin Luthers and Galileos] who actually challenge the status quo or think things over for themselves based upon first principles.

Having said all that, some differences are apparent. For example, it is probably true that science is slightly less slavish than religion, and medicine is intermediate in this slavishness. However, the vast majority in each is still of a strongly slavish tendency, maybe 90%, being unable to think things through for themselves from first principles, or being disinclined to do that. Do they prefer the comfort of the herd? Are they simply lazy? In relation to JW religion specifically, I also stated that in my opinion the blood issue probably arose NOT from some scripture but from the notion someone had that blood is a pure substance, unique to each person, is close to the life-force of that person and is thus precious, holy and pure in some spiritual manner. If that notion then spawns the idea that 'mixing blood is wrong', then it is hardly very surprising.

"Scottish-born but London-based, John Hunter proposed a 'life- principle' in the blood to account for the properties which distinguished living organisms from inanimate matter." [1]

"...the [ancient] Hebrews did develop teachings about the body and its well-being. Blood was probably regarded as the vehicle for the soul [one rationale...for the refusal of blood by Jehovah's Witnesses]." [2]

"Harvey having demonstrated the circulation of the blood, Wren and others proceeded to transfuse it from one animal to another, and even from man to man." [3]

"[Dr Benjamin] Rush held that every illness was a form of hypertension in the blood vessels..." [4]

There seems little doubt that ancient peoples most certainly viewed the heart and the movement of the blood as evidence for the vital principle that differentiates a living person from a corpse.

That scripture can then support such a view does not invalidate it. One could just as easily validate killing someone using scripture, as one could validate forgiveness and 'turning the other cheek'. Scripture is always only an expression of the underlying concepts of a religion. It is subordinate to concepts, not the ultimate source. Well, maybe it is 'the bread and butter' of slavish believers, but not for the most conceptually gifted followers.

This is often described as the inner [esoteric] and outer [exoteric] teachings debate common to all religions. An example is provided by those slavish followers in ancient Europe, and at the Chinese new year celebrations, who built winter bonfires, and who still build them, not knowing that their inner significance is to purify the passing year of all impurities and refresh one's soul for a good new year ahead, uncontaminated by the errors of the past. Such a practice can be regarded either exoterically as 'scripture' - this is what you do because your religion says so - or esoterically as a form of mental alchemy, which you understand and empathise with at a deeper level. The same can be said of the taking of the Eucharist in Christian worship where the bread and wine represent the body and blood of Christ - which, when assimilated, purify one's soul of all sin. Some people do this because they believe it is the right thing to do, while others see its deeper meaning.

It is probably also true, in regard to JW religion, that they are more conformist and slavish than most other religious people. Their slavish mentality was described in a private email to me as 'I am part of an organization which claims to "love" me. And yet it is willing to require me to sacrifice my life on the flimsiest of evidences and arguments' That is very clearly a church that only continues to 'love' someone as long as it can tell them what to do. Does that not describe the essence of all religious sects? Thus, the whole blood issue returns to its origin - it revolves again around the concept of conformity and deviance. The most interesting aspect of science is those who challenge it and that is

where it grows, e.g. cold fusion. The most fascinating topic in medicine is in the fringe where people challenge it and heresy breaks out - holistic therapies; the most interesting area of religions are those parts where pockets of heresy break out and challenges to orthodoxy emerge - religious sects.

Therefore, I return to my original thoughts on this matter - it is made sense of best by regarding this as an issue relating to conformity and deviance of beliefs. Therefore, it comes down to the psychology of people and what motivates them to be conformists or to be deviants. What security and comfort does the majority get from their conformity? What stimulus and 'nourishment' does a minority of people get from deviance and heresy? These questions inevitably lead us to consider aspects of group identity, social pressure, and group norms. I do not see how you can get 'the big picture' on this whole issue without bringing these all back into the equation.

#### Sources

[1] Roy Porter, 1998, For the Benefit of all Mankind - A Medical History of Humanity, Norton New York, 252

[2] *ibid.*, 85

[3] Richard H Shryock, 1936, The Development of Modern Medicine, Univ Pennsylvania Press, 10

[4] *ibid.*, 27

## Re: The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness as a basis for refusing blood

25 February 2001



### Helen Descombes

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness as a basis for refusing blood](#)

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Furuli discusses what he believes is included in the concept of "blood" (Greek, haima). He says that this includes both whole blood and the major blood components. The only basis he presents for including the components is his own opinion: "I can see no reason to exclude any of these components from the concept haima". Interestingly Furuli's intuition coincides exactly with current Watchtower teaching.

In answer to the question of whether blood fractions and extracts can be included in the concept of "haima", Furuli says: "We cannot answer this question with certainty because these factors did not exist as products in Biblical times, and therefore the answer has been that the use of these components is a matter of conscience." His basis for not definitely including these fractions within the concept haima is that "these factors did not exist as products in Biblical times." But surely the major blood components did not exist as separate products in Biblical times either. Therefore, on the basis of Furuli's own argument, their use should also be a matter of conscience.

If the deciding factor is their existence "as products in Biblical times", then Jehovah's Witnesses either:

(1) ought to view both blood components and fractions as all being within the concept haima and thus forbidden;

or,

(2) since neither blood components nor fractions existed as products in Biblical times, they should be free to accept or reject both blood components and fractions as a matter of individual conscience.

As Jehovah's Witnesses do not seem to want to maintain (1) then Furuli unintentionally makes a rather good case for Jehovah's Witnesses to remove their prohibition on the use of the principal blood components and move in the direction of the position advocated by the Associated Jehovah's Witnesses for Reform on Blood.

## Re: Why I accept minor blood fractions

25 February 2001



**Osamu Muramoto,**  
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Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Why I accept minor blood fractions](#)

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I appreciate Mr. McShea's comment for the reasons he would accept minor blood fractions. I am sure most doctors will respect his well-reasoned choices. I only wish he had addressed more crucial questions: what is the definition of "minor" components? Who decides what is major and what is minor? God, the Bible or men? And why is the distinction between major and minor components not made based on individual conscience? McShea wrote he would accept "yes even hemoglobin" because it is minor. But hemoglobin is about 15% of blood weight, whereas platelets and white blood cells are less than 1% each. If he thinks hemoglobin is acceptable because it is minor, does McShea think it reasonable to conscientiously accept much smaller fractions such as platelets and white blood cells because they are even more "minor"? Or at least, can some of Jehovah's Witnesses conscientiously receive platelets and white blood cells based on this reason and remain as a Witness in good standing? If not, I appreciate his well-reasoned explanation.

## Reply and questions to Rolf Furuli Re: The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness

26 February 2001



**Osamu Muramoto,**

Mr. Furuli[1] expands the explanation given by the Watchtower Society as to why some of the blood

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components are unacceptable whereas others are acceptable. As a physician, I can assure Furuli that his well-reasoned wishes to refuse certain blood components will be fully respected. While Furuli's decision is his own, views and opinions of other Witnesses can be different. As a member of the hospital liaison committee, does Furuli also fully respect views and opinions of fellow Witnesses who disagree with him as to which blood products are acceptable? If Furuli truly believes "the conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness as a basis for refusing blood", why are Witnesses who conscientiously receive certain blood products disassociated or disfellowshipped, ostracized and shunned by following their own conscience? I appreciate Furuli's reply on this first important question.

Some Witnesses believe that there is no biblical reason to abstain from certain blood components that the Watchtower Society teaches to abstain from. Furuli states that some fractions are acceptable because (in his words) "we cannot answer this question with certainty because these factors did not exist as products in Biblical times, and therefore the answer has been that the use of these components is a matter of conscience." But the very same reason can be applied to any blood fraction or component. For example, platelets, which is another fraction of blood, did not exist as a product in Biblical times, and therefore some Witnesses conclude the use of platelets is a matter of conscience. Furuli cites The Encyclopedia Britannica as the authority on which he bases his reason to abstain from "major components." He is free to use any information to base his decision, but other Witnesses believe that their decision regarding spiritual matters should be based on the Bible, not on the opinion of the "teachers" or "The Encyclopedia Britannica". Is their thinking wrong in light of Jehovah's Witnesses' teaching? I appreciate Furuli's reply on this second important question.

In Biblical times, "blood" only meant whole blood, not any blood fractions or components, major or minor. In Biblical times, "abstain" from blood meant from eating blood, not from using it to treat medical conditions. Are not such views of some Witnesses as valid as the views expressed by Furuli? He wrote, "what clearly is blood (haima) we do not accept!" Except for whole blood, "what is clearly blood" may not be the same for each Witness. What is wrong, then, for some Witnesses to conclude that a fraction of the blood other than those Furuli is willing to accept is also "a grey area where each Christian conscience must decide"? This question has never been answered by the Watchtower Society. I would greatly appreciate it if Mr. Furuli would address this third important question.

In case Furuli argues that this is my opinion, I emphasize that this is not an "opposer's" view, as Furuli tries to portray. These are genuine and valid questions raised by some Jehovah's Witnesses. I believe such individual views and decisions should all be respected. Does Furuli agree that each Witness can have different views on such a conscientious matter and that every Witness may decide on the use of blood products based on their personal views without any punishment even if the view is different from Furuli's? Since Furuli's letter is titled "the conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness as a basis for refusing blood", I expect he would not deny the conscience of dissenting Jehovah's Witnesses. I would appreciate Furuli confirming this fourth important question.

I totally disagree with Furuli in his comment "Witnesses who will accept blood in secrecy is virtually nonexistent." However, I fully understand the reason why he has not seen such cases. The reason is quite simple: those Witnesses will seldom if ever disclose their heart-felt conscience to loyal Jehovah's Witnesses such as Furuli who serve in an official position in the religion. They are fully aware of the consequences of having dissenting views on the blood components prohibited by the Watchtower Society. I have personally seen several Witnesses who altered their advance directive to select different blood products from what the Watchtower Society permits. Of course, they rightly keep their advance directive confidential, disclosing their true wishes only to doctors, not to fellow Witnesses such as Furuli.

The dissident Witness group, AJWRB, held an educational exhibit at the annual meeting of the American Society of Anesthesiologist in San Francisco in October last year. Interestingly, some anesthesiologists revealed that up to half of their Jehovah's Witness patients had been willing to re-evaluate their position on blood when a private conference was held with them. This was especially true of younger Witnesses who frequently expressed their desire to live and willingness to accept blood treatments if necessary and if kept confidential. Such anecdotal cases are also described in medical literature.[2] Unfortunately, Furuli is not in a position of knowing the reality of those cases.

I wholeheartedly agree with Furuli that "a third party can harm the relationship between the doctors and the witness patient." Who is the third party then? I have been advocating to limit the participation of any "third party" in decision-making on the use of blood products by Jehovah's Witnesses.[3] Who in fact is most intrusive in the physician-patient relationship in Witness cases? Most physicians have experienced enormous pressure applied by the local Witness community, mainly family, friends and elders who belong to the same congregation. They insist on bloodless treatment even before the patient himself expresses his own understanding and wishes. They hand out the Watchtower Society's literature, as a guideline to treat Witness patients, even before the physician has a chance to find out the patient's personal views. It is well known to the medical community that the congregation members even maintain an overnight vigil in the hospital to prevent the patient from receiving blood. Such "a third party" should be restrained from interfering in the confidential physician-patient relationship.

Speaking of the third party intrusion, I would like to ask Furuli to discuss his views on the medical confidentiality of Jehovah's Witness patients who receive blood products which are currently

prohibited by the Watchtower Society. As an active Witness, I am sure Furuli is aware of the Watchtower Society's teaching on "Mary" who works in a hospital and has an access to medical information of her fellow Witnesses. As written in the Watchtower magazine,[4] the Watchtower Society encourages Witnesses who have access to confidential medical information to breach confidentiality and report such cases to the congregation. There has been no teaching from the Watchtower Society to reverse this position since this publication. The dissident Witnesses feel enormous psychological pressure from such insider informants who may violate medical confidentiality. If Furuli genuinely believes that "the conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness" should be respected and "the third party" should not harm the physician-patient relationship, is Furuli willing to write a letter to the Watchtower Society, a major third party, to advise a reversal of the current policy to breach medical confidentiality of fellow Jehovah's Witnesses? I appreciate his reply on this fifth and final question.

In summary, I have no disagreement with Furuli in his principle "the conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness as a basis for refusing blood." Our differences relate to how to respect the conscience of individual Witnesses, particularly those who dissent to the Watchtower Society's current policy. As a Jehovah's Witness who is loyal to the Watchtower Society, Furuli failed to address several important points I have been discussing in my publications. I would greatly appreciate if Furuli addresses the five questions I raised in my reply above. To summarize, they are as follows:

1. Does Furuli fully respect views and opinions of fellow Witnesses who disagree with him as to which blood fractions are acceptable? Is disfellowshipping/disassociation justified for those who have different views on acceptable blood fractions?
2. Are those Jehovah's Witnesses wrong who base their views on blood products only on the Bible which says nothing about the fractions? What is wrong with them if they strictly rely on the Bible, but not on the Watchtower "teachers" or "The Encyclopedia Britannica"?
3. Why is it wrong for some Witnesses to conclude that a fraction of blood, such as platelets, which is different from those Furuli is willing to accept is also "a grey area where each Christian must conscientiously decide", because there is no reference to such a fraction in the Bible?
4. Does Furuli agree that each Witness can have different views on such a conscientious matter as fractions of blood and that every Witness may decide on use of blood products based on their personal views without any punishment?
5. If Furuli genuinely believes that "the conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness" should be respected and "the third party" should not harm the physician-patient relationship, is Furuli willing to write a letter to the Watchtower Society - a major third party - to suggest a reversal of the current recommendation that JW health care workers breach medical confidentiality of fellow Jehovah's Witnesses and to refrain from intruding on the physician-patient relationship?

I would appreciate Mr. Furuli addressing these questions item by item. Unfortunately, as seen in these responses here, all the loyal Witnesses who wrote their opinions here never returned and followed up their comments, nor did they answer any of my questions. I sincerely hope that Furuli does not follow in the footsteps of those fellow Witnesses whose communication is only one-way traffic. I look forward to his genuine dialogue on this controversial issue.

#### References

[1] Furuli R: The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness as a basis for refusing blood. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL52>

[2] For example, refer to the case in this article: Davis P, Herbert M, Davies DP, Verrier Jones ER. Erythropoietin for anemia in a preterm Jehovah's Witness baby. *Early Human Development* 1992;28:282.

[3] Muramoto O. Medical confidentiality and the protection of Jehovah's Witnesses' autonomous refusal of blood. *J Med Ethics* 2000; 26: 381-386

[4] The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. "A time to speak"-when? *The Watchtower*; 1987 Sept 1:12

## Reply to Furuli on "The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness"

26 February 2001

**Lee Elder,**  
Founder  
AJWRB - Ass. JWs for  
Reform on Blood

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Reply to Furuli on "The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness"](mailto:Re: Reply to Furuli on 'The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness')

Email Lee Elder:  
[LeeElder@ajwr.org](mailto:LeeElder@ajwr.org)

Thank you for contributing to this discussion. I see this as a positive development. Though your comments are directed to Dr. Muramoto, I am going to respond to them to provide the viewpoint of dissident Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs).

I can recall a time not too many years ago when I would have simply scratched my head and chuckled if someone talked about dissident JWs. Now I refer to myself as one. If you are sincerely interested in understanding what this debate is about, it will be necessary for you to dispense with the notion that anyone who disagrees with you is an "opposer" of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The fact of the matter is that there are thousands of otherwise "loyal" Jehovah's Witnesses who have carefully studied the scriptures and the available scientific and historical data and have conscientiously concluded that the Watchtower Society (WTS) policy is wrong. Many of these are

elders, HLC members, circuit overseers, district overseers and Bethel family members.

In many cases they would never personally accept a blood transfusion themselves but they are heartsick over the fact that other JW's are pressured into refusing blood or medically necessary blood components. Many of them believe that the policy is being dismantled piece by piece to prevent uproar in the organization as well as litigation. These people are not "opposers" as you suggest. They are your Christian brothers and sisters and the reason that you are not familiar with their views is because they have so much to lose by expressing those views to you.

You stated, "I feel strongly the responsibility for building on a firm Biblical foundation - life is not something with which to play". I agree with you and thus ask you to reconsider whether the biblical foundation for a partial blood ban exists? Consider:

The Bible verses against "taking in blood" refer to eating or drinking it. What scripture extends this to blood transfusion?

If the scriptures ban blood transfusion why does the WTS allow transfusion/injection of all blood fractions while banning transfusion of whole blood?

Why does the WTS permit JW's to accept all the separate components of plasma, yet forbid plasma itself?

Why are components such as platelets (0.17% of blood volume) and white cells (1% of blood volume) forbidden whereas a larger component like albumin (2.2%) or hemoglobin (14.8%) is allowed?

What sort of ethics allows JW's to accept numerous WTS-permitted blood products and benefit from the donated blood of non-JW's, yet not allow them to contribute to the blood supply?

Since permitted hemophiliac treatments require collection and storage of massive quantities of blood (up to 2,500 units for a single treatment), why does the WTS forbid JW's from storing their own blood? Why the double standard?

The Bible tells us that each of us will have to "render an account to God." I'm sure you believe this to be true. How would you answer such questions if Jehovah God called you to account for encouraging a teenage Jehovah's Witness with leukemia to refuse a platelet transfusion with the result that chemotherapy had to be stopped and the child died? If you cannot answer such questions from a fellow Christian, is it really possible to conscientiously encourage other JW's to potentially sacrifice their lives to support this "theological position?"

You stated, "I and my fellow Witnesses believe that each person should decide which ethical values he or she wants to follow without being pressed by others." If that is the case, how can you support the current policy which mandates enforced shunning sanctions against any JW who conscientiously rejects the WTS' partial blood ban?

Your comments on "porneia" beg the following question: Should the WTS also break down the act of fornication into primary components and secondary or minor components that would be acceptable? The context of the apostolic decree also cautions against idol worship. By extension of such reasoning a little idol worship too would be permissible, would it not?

You should appreciate that linkage is required to transfer the biblical injunctions on eating and drinking blood to transfusing blood, an unknown technology in Bible times. Since a blood transfusion does not involve digesting blood and there is no nutritional benefit, how can it really be said that a blood transfusion is the equivalent of eating blood? The WTS is fond of saying the Bible prohibits "sustaining" one's life by means of blood but this expression cannot be found in the Bible, can it?

The June 15, 2000 WTS discusses changes in technology that permit the further breakdown of blood into smaller components and the need for guidelines and clarification as a result of these medical advances. You echo these same arguments. Are they valid? Consider the following published statements from the WTS:

"While this physician argues for the use of certain blood fractions, particularly albumin, such also come under the Scriptural ban. - Awake! 09/08/1956 p. 20

"...various tonics and tablets sold by druggists show on their labels that they contain blood fractions such as hemoglobin. So it is necessary for one to be alert... if they are to keep themselves 'without spot from the world.'—Jas. 1:27." The Watchtower, 9/15/61, p. 557. (See also The Watchtower, 10/15/92 - Questions From Readers.)

As demonstrated above, the WTS' has had established policies on blood fractions for over four decades. Note the following published statements:

"...regardless of whether it is whole blood taken from one's own body or that taken from someone else, whether it is administered as a transfusion or an injection, the divine law applies." - The Watchtower 09/15/1961 p. 558



"Whether whole or fractional, one's own or someone else's, transfused or injected, it is wrong." - The Watchtower 09/15/1961 p. 559

These comments dispel any notion that the fractionating of blood is a new technology that the WTS had not previously provided crystal clear rulings on.

The part of this that is most disturbing to dissident JW's is the fact that some lost their lives trying to support a policy that has changed so many times it was nearly impossible to keep up with. Bans on vaccines, bans on organ transplants, bans on blood serums, bans on blood fractions, etc. These have come and gone with dizzying speed. The policy on blood serums, for example, was changed four times in seven years. [1]

Were you aware that three components of blood account for approximately 97% of blood volume. They are water, hemoglobin and albumin. All permitted by the WTS. To this we can add other WTS permitted blood products like fibrinogen, immunoglobulins, clotting factors, etc. Technically the new policy permits all of blood in fractionated form, so in what meaningful sense do JW's "abstain from blood?" The WTS policy has become largely symbolic, yet remaining prohibitions make it a deadly shell game.

The policy aims to permit artificial blood (hemoglobin solutions like HemoPure and PolyHeme). While the leadership waits for the new blood products to hit the market, members continue to reject medically necessary transfusions of red cells.

I believe the WTS policy on red cells defies logic. Consider that the red cell is basically a donut shaped bag of hemoglobin without even a nucleus. If we remove the water that surrounds packed red cells we are left with zoma (the red cell membrane, about 3% of dry weight) and hemoglobin – about 97% of dry weight.

For the WTS to ban red cells and permit hemoglobin is the equivalent of saying to someone, "see that plastic jug of milk over there...you can drink the milk from the jug, but I will report you to the police if you actually take jug with the milk in it."

This is something I believe you should consider the next time you are holding the hand of a JW who is exsanguinating as a result of trauma or disease. On the other hand it may be that by then HemoPure [2] will be available and you can simply try to explain to them why cow's blood doesn't have to be poured upon the ground but rather can be collected, stored and processed to make artificial blood for JW's.

If in your view, all of this is "logical and consistent", I will once again have to pause and scratch my head. Perhaps your suggestion that some Jehovah's Witnesses are "brainwashed" has some merit. It has been my experience, however, that when HLC members are presented with AJWRB's position in a private setting, they frequently change their minds.

You express concern about doctors not breaching "the relationship between the patient and fellow believers". In my view, it is the WTS and HLC members who need to avoid breaching the doctor-patient relationship. This is a widely recognized confidential relationship and I suspect that failure to respect the confidential nature of the relationship may lead to litigation.

Despite the contradictions in the WTS' policy, I remain an advocate of blood conservation therapy and free and informed choice. The bottom line, in my view, is that the WTS has a long history of dispensing what amounts to bad medical advice. I hope that they will shortly remove themselves completely from the private medical decisions of JW's. I believe this is a crucial step the WTS must take to demonstrate that it respects the conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness.

[1] Watchtower database: <http://ajwrb.org/watchtower/data3.shtml>

[2] Elder, L Watchtower Approves HemoPure for Jehovah's Witnesses, <http://ajwrb.org/basics/hemopure.shtml>

## Why I accept minor blood fractions-Further clarification

1 March 2001



**Patrick J. McShea III,**  
Director of Systems and  
Software Development  
*National Alliance for  
Insurance Ed. & Research*

For me, the aspect of defining minor blood fractions is a medical one. If I mark on my Medical Power of Attorney form that I accept all minor blood fractions, this needs no further definition for the doctors, hospitals and administrators to know what kind of treatment I'll accept. As to the issue of why I don't accept other "minor" components and the hows of my decision-making. I try to keep the following things in mind.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Why I accept minor blood fractions-Further clarification](#)

My overall objective is to show respect for Jehovah, for life and what the bible defines as representing life, namely blood.(Lev. 17:14;Lev. 7:26,27) Granted, we're not under the Mosaic law, yet the principles which predated the law were repeated to Christians at Acts 15:28-29;21:25.

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While attempting to fulfill the above, I keep in mind certain things about blood. (As I know it) Whatever is in blood, that naturally occurs without physical intervention, physical intervention of the sort that is necessary to produce "minor blood fractions" like chopping the cells to their components like in some kind of atomic particle accelerator. I will not accept. For me, for my conscience, this is blood. I abstain. For me, a "minor" component has to be one that does not naturally occur, or exist by itself

without the use of the kind of technology used to produce fractions(I mean minor blood fractions, not the mathematical equivalence of a fraction, which is anything not the whole). Platelets occur without this kind of technology, white blood cells too, red blood cells too. These things are MY definition of blood. Shatter the platelet into its biochemical constituents and give me a piece of it. It isn't the same thing as accepting a platelet. The whole thing. As I said before, some may consider this needless equivocation. That's their opinion.

As I said previously, my acceptance of any blood product is not entirely without some pain of conscience. For the reasons I mentioned previously, as well as the fact that blood was not treated with respect to produce these minor blood fractions (Is it necessary for me to iterate that this is my opinion? It should be obvious that it is).. So in a sense, I feel that if I were to be in a position to need to decide on acceptance of minor blood fractions (the medical definition). I would feel that I was the beneficiary of a crime committed by those who produced the minor blood fractions. It would not "make me happy" to receive them. I would, though for the reasons previously listed, the lesser evil.

The question comes up, (naturally) as to how I can accept a treatment which is only possible because of a crime committed against blood/life/Jehovah?... Good question... I have a few biblical precedents which suggest that I can benefit from criminal acts of this sort while remaining "relatively" blameless.

1)Jesus, when questioned about the issue of paying taxes said the famous "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God, the things that are God's"(Mt. 22:21). Note that this was NOT an endorsement of the Roman government or of its practices. Neither did this make the individual personally responsible for what the government did with that tax, whether for good or for evil. No doubt Christianity flourished in good part because of the "Pax Romana", a peace brought about by a government that in many ways brought about such peace in brutal, immoral ways. Yet the peace allowed for the spread of Christianity. The individual Jew or Christian who paid the tax was not held responsible for the behavior of the taxing entity. Nor were they enjoined to stop them by means of force.

2)Paul, when under arrest appealed to the authorities on the basis of his Roman citizenship. (Acts 16:37;Acts 23:27) Though this was no endorsement of the authority either.

3)Eating of meat (Some of which might not have been properly bled) 1 Cor. 10:25-28 – "Everything that is sold in a meat market keep eating, making no inquiry on account of your conscience; for 'to Jehovah belong the earth and that which fills it.'" If anyone of the unbelievers invites you and you wish to go, proceed to eat everything that is set before you, making no inquiry on account of your conscience"

As an aside, think of the medical information acquired by the Nazis in WWII that's been used to save lives by those in the medical community. Should the people who are recipients of this information feel guilty because the information was acquired in an immoral way, through painful, tortuous human experimentation? I don't.

The above passages, (more could be offered, these were just the ones in my head at the time) indicate that there is a division, in terms of responsibility for criminal acts (biblically speaking). There is individual responsibility. Certainly it might be argued by some, and perhaps it's true (at least to a degree) that the acceptance of minor blood fractions by Jehovah's Witnesses "encourages" the committance of crimes against blood to produce these fractions, however this area is rather gray (there IS money in blood, and the blood banking interests concerns are not merely humanitarian, the fact that the sales of blood and blood products produces no small revenue suggests that the fractionating of blood would have been undertaken anyway at some point). And so "I make no further inquiry" on account of my conscience. Why? Because my motive, the principles behind my actions show that I do respect blood.

Now Dr. Muramoto asks a good question. Whose conscience gets to decide on such matters? "God, the Bible or men?" I'm glad this question was asked as it brings up the important matter of conscience.

It should be obvious that we don't have ultimate proof of a Creator's existence, although we might produce an inductive argument that super- intelligence must of necessity be responsible for the universe and life in it. All arguments are ultimately inductive and only artificially deductive. See Goedels incompleteness theorem.(Yes, I actually took the time to read it and understand it. I had little choice growing up in a household dominated by mathematicians.)

So if I say that "God makes the decision", what is it that I mean by this?

That I heard Gods voice in my head or was walking down the street when a burning bush commanded me to approach and told me what did and what did not constitute a "minor" blood fraction?...

Or that when I attempted to accept a component that was unacceptable that the "invisible hand of the Almighty" prevented it from being administered (much to the anesthesiologists chagrin)?

Or that an angel of the Almighty appeared to me and told me?

Or that I have deduced from a book or communication of some source that I deem to be divine, that certain components that are used to "make blood" are "acceptable to the Lord"...

If I say the Bible, then it may be assumed that I believe it to be inspired by the Almighty, or that I've arbitrarily decided to do what I think it says regardless of what I believe about the existence of a creator (You could follow the Bible without believing it to be inspired, you could even be an atheist and do so, though I'd hardly know why an atheist would bother (having been one myself))... One would reasonably expect that there would be passages that I might cite in support of my decision, one way or the other. One would also expect that there would be others who wouldn't read these passages in the same way that I do. There would need be discussion (or not, just depends on whether we're capable emotionally and mentally able to justify our position...We might just have a "strong feeling". That's a reason too. Not a verbal one, yet definitely to be considered)

Ultimately the individual must take responsibility for making the decision, or rather, should unless it's clear that divine intervention took place, like an angel preventing the administration of one component in favor of another. Whether they make it in good conscience or not, they have to take the responsibility. Or their parents make their decisions for them. Or the state makes it for them. Still, not choosing is choosing too, with consequences.

So the individual Jehovah's Witness let's their God-given, Bible- trained conscience decide how they will proceed.

Now comes the \$64,000 question.

Where does the congregation's responsibilities as a group and the individuals responsibilities as a member of that group, or any group for that matter come in?

The Bible makes it clear that the individual decision has consequences for the group, and that God exacts penalties from the group for failure to self-police (See Joshua chap. 7 in the case of Achan, the culpability of his family and the death of 36 men as a result of Achan's sin; See 1 Cor. 5:5)

The Bible is also clear that the congregation has a responsibility to keep the congregation spiritually clean and that any who are willfully gross sinners should be removed from the congregation, i.e. disfellowshipped (1 Cor. 5:9-13)

The Bible is also clear that abuse of blood is in the same category of sin as fornication. (Acts 15:28-29) It then logically follows that those who willfully show a lack of respect for blood should be removed from the congregation and that the congregation has a responsibility to remove such ones.

Can people in all good conscience accept whole blood and remain an active Jehovah's Witness "in good standing". That depends a lot on the circumstances. (I know this may seem evasive, yet there is no black and white rulebook that gives a listing of theocratic offenses and the subsequent penalties).

Showing a gross disrespect for blood is a disfellowshipping offense, as is fornication, adultery, homosexuality, drunkenness, drug abuse, smoking, murder, acts of violence, thievery, slander, loose conduct... (this last one is vague and again depends on the circumstances)... However the "doing" of something that is wrong is not the issue. The issue is the "attitude" of the one doing wrong. If I have whole blood "forced" on me, have I done wrong? No. I have been raped. It is the perpetrators who will have to answer for what they've done to God. So too, if I've done something that I consider to be wrong with regard to blood, then I really need to do something to cleanse my conscience as it were. The scriptures charge the elders in the congregation to assist such ones to regain their spiritual strength. Now if, on the other hand my attitude is one of "I'll do whatever I darn please, and I have no need whatsoever to answer to anyone in this matter but God!", then we'll still try to help this one to appreciate the magnitude of their decision, and how they really aren't alone in this matter of conscience, however if the reaction is still violent and disrespectful after attempts have been made to assist this one, then there's really nothing that can be done at this point, it's clear that the individual has by dint of his own choice "chosen to cease being" one of Jehovah's Witnesses. It should be noted the before becoming one of Jehovah's Witnesses this matter is discussed in detail. It would be the same as if a member of the congregation decided that they were going to live the promiscuous life. You can't do that and still be considered by the congregation to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Now is the time to talk about conscience.

Conscience is a matter of co-science, or co-knowledge as it were. Knowledge that you have with yourself. "Proving ourselves reasonable", though, means that we can explain ourselves. Why we do one thing as opposed to another thing. Generally speaking, it seems that the conscience works to reject, not initiate certain things. Perhaps that's why the Bible is full of "thou shalt not's". It is my experience that when we go over the Medical Power of Attorney form, that the "friends" (that's what we call each other at times) generally don't understand these issues very well. They usually just want to "knee-jerk" reject anything to do with blood. So we have to ask them questions about conscience. What conscience is, and can you truly say that you've made a conscientious decision on the matter of blood fractions if you haven't given it any thought, if you haven't read and studied up on it. If you don't understand it. If you can't explain in your own words why you accept one treatment, but not another. Prayerfully, trying to keep in mind how "no man is an island" and how to discern "the more important things" (Phil. 1:10).

I have yet to hear an argument presented in favor of whole-blood transfusions and how those accepting them are showing respect for blood. (So that I might respect such conscience, or co-knowledge as it were) If the hypothetical situation were to occur that someone who was one of Jehovah's Witnesses were to approach me with a confession that they had accepted a transfusion of whole blood, then I'd have to talk to them about it, wouldn't I? My fellow elders would be concerned too. We'd want to talk with them about the whole situation. Would my objective be to sanction the individual? No. I would want, certainly to understand why they did it. (How can I diagnose if I don't have full information?) How they felt about what they did. Etc...

Do I feel the need as an elder to "hover" and "pry" into congregation members personal affairs? No. People will do what they will, however it's been my experience that the truth always comes out. Sooner or later the truth always comes out.

How would I behave if I came into a hospital and found a red-bag of whole blood being pumped into a congregation member? I would find out whether this was being done with or without the patient's consent. If this was being done without his consent then I would make sure appropriate actions were taken. If this was being done with his consent, I would wait until the patient was out of the hospital and well enough physically to have a serious conversation with them about what transpired at the hospital. Again, it should be repeated, it isn't "what" a person does, but what their "attitude about what they've done" is what counts. My objective wouldn't be to "sanction" but to "recover" such an individual. I might find that they don't want "recovering" as it were. If that's the case then they've made their decision to separate themselves from the congregation, and I'd treat them as such. They could always change their mind later, but the choice is theirs.

I think the crux of the complaint comes down to the distasteful business of disfellowshipping. People seem to equate it with a Catholic excommunication, a final judgment of the soul as it were. It isn't. It's just a sequestering of a spiritually sick person until such time as that spiritually sick person recognizes their illness and makes moves to get the treatment needed. And it isn't administered like some kind of theocratic slide rule. It's not about "what" you do, it's about "how you feel" about "what" you do.

I know some will feel it's "unfair" for groups to influence individuals and their decisions, yet isn't that routinely done in the medical community? (And the world at large) Don't doctors face pressures to conform to normative "moral" standards as defined by the medical community in the practice of their profession? Certainly so. Sometimes you have some doctors that become renegades as it were, "Dr. Kervorkian's". Doctors with views that may be conscientious views, yet the medical community is unwilling to embrace as a group their particular viewpoint. They may indeed be correct, yet correct and in the minority. And yet, these doctors must deal with the consequences if they choose a different path. They may even be barred legally from practicing medicine. They deal with the consequences. So must we all. Influence, however is unavoidable. Consequences are unavoidable, as well.

This is something that all Jehovah's Witnesses understand. (Of course there are those who say they're Jehovah's Witnesses and that they disagree, however I feel the same way about those people as the people who say that they're Catholic, yet "blow off" everything the Pope says, (Are the really Catholic, or just enamored of the label "Catholic", perhaps these people are enamored of the label "Jehovah's Witnesses", who knows, (or cares, really))

I hope this clarifies things further.

## Re: More on blood - Conformity, the lost meaning, a darkening tunnel, rewards, the prickly nettle.

1 March  
2001



**Mike Parsons,**  
Jehovah's Witness  
*Supporter of AJWRB*

Peter Morrell has raised some interesting questions regarding the "big picture" as to whether JW's are different to any other group, and regarding the rewards and motivators each party has in taking their position.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: More on blood - Conformity, the lost meaning, a darkening tunnel, rewards, the prickly nettle.](#)

Email Mike Parsons:  
[m\\_parsons8@hotmail.com](mailto:m_parsons8@hotmail.com)

Sir,

C.T. Russell, founder of the JW religious community (although they had no name at that time) held the belief that "religion is a snare". He held this belief on the basis that some of the teachings of Christendom were not based upon the bible, and that some people did indeed follow them slavishly. He was in no way ashamed of denouncing certain beliefs, and this trend continues in a toned-down form today in the preaching work done by JW's. Anyone who is called upon during such work will likely receive the invitation to re-examine how well their particular church holds true to what the JW's consider to be the biblical viewpoint. If only the same principle were to be applied to themselves, the opportunity for re-alignment would exist.

I agree with you that many people are mere conformists in their religious beliefs, at least to some extent. Even with those who are actively trying to develop their knowledge and ideas, the very fact that they have not explored every avenue of thought gives opportunity for conformity - such is learning and reasoning.

There exists a certain type of conformity, namely as a student following what is taught, for the WTS see themselves as being teachers. This is indeed fine if both the "do this" and "why we do this" is following in perfect step with what is considered to be the ultimate source that we have today ... the scriptures. As with science, we stand upon other people's shoulders to see as far as we do, and

teachers can be useful.

There also exists another type of conformity, perhaps it could be called a "defensive conformity", in which people are so attached to their teacher's thoughts that they consider it their duty to defend those thoughts, and reject any thought from any other source. Indeed, even if their teacher changes his mind about something, the student follows track also. Such a style of conformity exists in the JW group. Each member considers it his duty to "make a defence of his beliefs" to any who ask about it or challenge it. "The Truth" (a JW term for their beliefs, as defined by the WTS) must be defended at all costs.

So we have a group of people who ask others to reconsider their beliefs, rather than be closed-minded, but there is no reciprocation or good-will shown to those who would likewise ask for a reconsideration of certain beliefs. Instead, they face expulsion from the group. It is a filter, much like a ratchet, that only allows movement one way - toward greater and greater support of the existing beliefs. The net affect of this is that it is in danger of resembling a snare (trap) that holds existing beliefs captive.

This is indeed different from Science, where people are taught of classic experiments, are free to repeat them and draw new conclusions if they so wish. Those so inclined (albeit only a minority) may freely challenge any belief, and perhaps overturn established dogma, where text-books have to be re-written.

So whilst conformity can exist in both groups, it is multi-level in the JW group. The first level is acceptance of and adoption of teachings. The second level is the control mechanisms that leap out from the first level.

A consideration of the "blood issue" will demonstrate that point.

Ask most JWs about the subject of blood, and most of the conversation will revolve around the apostolic decree to "abstain from ... blood"[1]. You are quite right in your perception that it is very difficult to describe in text the true meaning of things, which is why legal documents become so long and tortuous, and yet can still contain both loop-holes and uncovered areas. Very often, it is difficult to understand "what's this all about?". Underlying both law and scripture is the deeper meaning, the intent or significance of it.

Most JWs will point to the origination of the "what to do with blood" topic as being the law given to Noah [2]. The concept that blood "is close to the life-force of that person" goes back to this account.

It should be noted that the real underlying issue here is not "what to do with blood", but that life belongs to God.

Prior to this account, God had only given vegetation to man as food. Now He was making a further gift of animals as food. Eating an animal, however, also involved taking the life of an animal. Here the sanctity of life ... a gift that only God can give ... was highlighted. As an acknowledgement that we had no natural right to take life, and that it was only done with divine permission, a tokenary part of the kill, it's blood, was not to be ate. It was tokenary inasmuch as it was a minimal part of the mass of the kill, and still left an abundance to eat. Nevertheless, as a token of the life, God put much significance on it, and it came to symbolise life itself. That loss of life was the real issue is further shown by the extending of the discourse into man killing his fellow man (no permission to eat was granted here). Instead, God will call all who do so into account. In fact, man himself will call murderers into account. [2]

The symbolism, that blood was connected to life, was God's choice. Obviously an animal in which blood had been completely drained out could not live. He could have equally used any other essential organ (heart, brain, etc), and it is not for us to question His choice. That indeed is where the link of blood and soul (life) originated for JWs and other groups within Christendom.

Note that the account [2] does not specify how to deal with the blood removed from an animal that was killed for food. JWs have adopted the position from the (much later) Mosaic Law (which they consider not binding on Christians) that blood should be disposed of by being "poured out onto the ground" and covered with dust [3]. I don't think anyone in the JW community is too specific about the exact method used in disposal, but disposal seems as good as any other method of dealing with blood removed from a carcass.

In some ways, the JW community have indeed triumphed over other groups in the position they take on such removed blood. Knowing that it should not be ate, they do not return it to the food-chain by, for instance eating blood-sausage, or "black pudding" as it is commonly known. In other ways, they (the WTS) have fallen foul of misunderstanding the issue, and the community generally slavishly following the views of the WTS.

Somehow, the underlying concept, that life is sacred to God has dropped out of focus, and the issue of "what to do with blood" has come into focus, particularly with the Apostolic Decree stating to "abstain from ... blood" [1].

That is why re-analysis of the underlying meaning of the various texts is important. An interesting question was posed by Marvin Shilmer regarding "what blood should Christians abstain from?" [4].



Most nominal Christians who are familiar with the account are aware that it is only the blood of animals that have been killed for food. The WTS for whatever reason seems unable to publicly acknowledge that they grasp this point.

This is interesting, in today's medical setting from the following standpoints:

1) The use of blood in a medical situation may no longer of negligible importance to the patient, as in the case of the tokenary part of a potential meal, which should be returned to God. The scriptural text has a meaning which concerns the value of, and appreciation of life. The WTS has inverted this meaning to say that blood (from any source) is sacred, and that God denies anyone use of it as a means at their disposal for preserving their life.

2) Blood of an animal killed for food was not to be ate. It was quite acceptable for it to be poured out onto the ground as an acknowledgement that one had taken a life that belonged to God. Blood was the token of the life taken. In the case of freely donated blood tissue, no life is actually lost (few would donate if there were risk of this!), and the source of the blood is not ate (we are so civilised!). This being the case, does God still require the token of a lost life?

Part of the issue has been expressed by the dissident group as to whether a blood (component) transfusion constitutes a meal, or whether it is simply a transplant of a fully functioning fluid tissue.

It would appear as if the WTS leadership has possibly become desensitised to the underlying issue, of the sacredness of life, and that it is a gift that only God can give, but instead has become over-sensitised to the token representing the underlying issue. All focus is on blood being sacred (although the scriptures actually limit this to only a certain kind of blood), and the real issue is overshadowed by this.

Instead of understanding this real issue, a deeper and yet even deeper hole is being dug consisting of yet more and more legalities which are laid down by the leadership for the JW community to adopt - even defend (due to slavishly accepting dogma, or coerced to follow ... it depends on how one's personal conscience sees it).

The issue has now become entirely illogical, based upon flawed reasoning that can easily be demonstrated.

The simplicity of the initial concept has been lost.

Whilst the WTS would acknowledge that the apostolic decree to "abstain from blood" was actually just an affirmation of a previous standard, and was nothing new, they simultaneously ignore what meaning there was behind the original standard and treat the words as if it were a blanket statement (something expanding the original requirement).

This is the crux of the diversion to their unique path.

By choosing their unique path, they have headed into a dark tunnel, and are now focusing on debates over what bits of blood are acceptable or not acceptable. To those calling for a retreat out of the tunnel, for we have gone the wrong way, the WTS ignores them and punishes them. This is an example of the second level of conformity at work. A control system is at play, maintaining the status-quo. You quite rightly ask what social benefits each party obtains from this situation.

You asked: "What security and comfort does the majority get from their conformity?"

This is the belief that they are pleasing God by following the WTS policy. They believe that this policy is just one of many unique features that demonstrates that they rise above other groups and please God. It is a demonstration of their loyalty. (It escapes the notice of many that an account of Jesus addressing those with not dissimilar attitudes exists within the bible [5]).

You asked: "What stimulus and 'nourishment' does a minority of people get from deviance and heresy?"

The dissidents generally show some appreciation to the WTS as a teacher, but in this one respect they have come to believe that what is being taught (even enforced) regarding blood is in error. The very fact that there is a misunderstanding of scripture, and that lives are lost through it is the prime driving force.

I think it is also worth considering just what benefits and risks the WTS as an entity in its own right has in maintaining this situation.

To change from current situation would be a very prickly nettle for the WTS to grasp.

Over the years, its position on blood has become more and more entrenched, despite some opposing views. One has only to consider the amount of literature printed on the topic, none of which addresses the serious questions raised here, and the proliferation of this stand within its literature. Even it's bible has a "topics for discussion" appendix which overviews their current train of thought. A very significant amount ... perhaps around half of all publications currently in print would need to be amended to remove this teaching. A mammoth task indeed to purge the teaching from the literature in

circulation.

Again, it's advance directive literature would cease to be necessary, for indeed what business does it have in issuing legal documents related to medicine if there is no area of medicine that is restricted by the bible.

It would quite possibly have several discontented parties to deal with, where calamity arose because of following their "teaching" on blood. Whilst most would heave a sigh of relief at the reversal of the policy, some would become disillusioned as to how the policy had remained as it was for so long. Others would remain "set in their ways", having held that position for most of their life.

The WTS would lose one of its unique features that it points to as to why other religious groups are "false". The community of JW's would be disarmed of this feature in their preaching work. In fact, there may be some who they meet with a "told you so" attitude, leading to possible loss of face. The flip side of the coin however is that the position on blood is very often a major obstacle to others joining the group.

It can be seen that there are some benefits and some losses if the policy were to change, but that the impact to the group would not be insubstantial. It is perhaps for this reason that the WTS leadership themselves choose to not address the issues raised here by the dissident witnesses and affect the change in position en-mass. Perhaps they have chosen to "soften the prickles" somewhat before they choose to "grasp the nettle", to minimise the impact. That may explain why they have chosen to create the diversion about "which bits of blood" are excluded from the biblical requirement. This is what most people would call "damage limitation". A slow path of dismantling, possibly starting with withdrawing certain publications from print or making them only available internally... letting the issue secretly fade away from printed publications, but without obvious notification of withdrawal to the community.

I here ask the question regarding such a strategy, as to how God, and indeed mankind would view it. For by creating delay in addressing this issue, there are bound to be more fatalities - people who die unnecessarily by following the "teaching" of the WTS organisation (compare [6]). In fact it can be argued that not only did it teach such things, but it enforced conformity to that teaching, and actively obstructed those who sought to correct the teaching.

For some, this is indeed blood (life) that would otherwise not be shed. It remains to be seen what judgement God, or even a human agency (compare [2]) takes to this course of action. It is of no surprise that those who are aware of the issue in the JW community want no part in the promotion of beliefs that can indirectly lead to the unnecessary death of their fellow man.

References:

- [1] The Bible - Acts 15:19-21.
- [2] The Bible - Genesis 9:1-7.
- [3] The Bible - Leviticus 17:13,14.
- [4] <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL54>.
- [5] The Bible - Luke 18:9-14.
- [6] The Bible - James 3:1.

## Why do Jehovah's Witnesses abstain from blood?

2 March 2001



**Rolf J. Furuli,**  
Research fellow in  
Semitic languages  
*University of Oslo, Norway*

Sir.

I have carefully read Dr. Muramoto's article and all the letters commenting on it. There are many misunderstandings, and I realize there is a need to to show why Jehovah's Witnesses abstain from blood.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Why do Jehovah's  
Witnesses abstain from blood?](#)

### ACTION VERSUS MATTER

In the New Testament (Acts 15:29) there are four things which are governed by the one verb «to abstain from», namely: 'things sacrificed to idols', 'blood', 'things strangled', and 'fornication'. The first three are nominal phrases and the last is an action, so an important question is: Does the prohibition focus on each thing per se, indicating that there is some kind of taboo connected with each thing.? Or is the focus on particular actions, where the things are just 'tokens' by the help of which the wrong actions are done?

To illustrate the point I will use 'things sacrificed to idols' and a situation from the first century which was not uncommon, as an example. Emperor Nero has arrested a family of father, mother and child, and they are led before a great crowd of people in the theatre. In the middle of the theatre is an altar with a burning fire, and beside the fire is a censer with incense. The ultimatum to the father is: «Go to the altar and put some incense on the fire, thus sacrificing to the genius of the emperor, and your whole family will be released. If not, all of you will be killed.» Shall the father compromise his faith in order to save the life of himself and his family, including his child? Many Christians refused to do just that and were consequently killed.

Can we differentiate between action and matter in this situation? Yes! There was nothing particular with fire or incense as such - the family could in their home light a fire to cook their meal and even put

some incense on that fire because they liked the fragrance, but in the situation in the theatre the act of putting incense on the fire represented something special, namely, a sacrifice to a god different from their own. It was what the action of putting incense on the altar represented which was the issue, and not the substance matter (incense) by which the action was accomplished.

As a parallel, it is not the matter (fluid) blood that is important, but what the use of it represents. The principle on which the law against blood rests, is found in Psalm 36:9 «For with you is the source of life.» God has given life to animals and humans; he 'owns it' so to speak, and he has the right to make laws as to how life shall be used. In God's eyes the red fluid in the veins of living creatures represents the life - it is, or represents the soul.<sup>(1)</sup> Because blood represents life, God has given the law that his servants shall not take it into their bodies under any circumstances, and when an animal is slaughtered, the blood must be poured out on the ground. Thus the life of the animal is given back to God who owns it (Leviticus 17:10-12).

While fire and incense can be used for several purposes but not as means for sacrificing to a foreign god, there are no normal purposes for which blood can be used. To ascertain that the matter of which blood consists is not the focus, we can use 'things strangled' as an example. To abstain from this is logical because the animal has not been bled, so the blood is still in the meat. However, even when an animal is bled, a part of the blood is still in the meat, so why can a Christian eat 'some blood' (which is found in the meat of the bled animal) but not 'much blood' (which is found in the strangled animal)? The answer is that it is not blood as a fluid that is the issue, but obedience toward God. When an animal is bled, its life, represented by the blood - God's property - is given back to God. This is not done when an animal is strangled. Another situation illustrating that the matter blood is not what is important, is a baby who is sucking the milk of her mother. This milk contains immunoglobulins and components of blood but the mother does not violate the sacredness of life by allowing her baby to suck her breast.

#### IS THE PROHIBITION AGAINST BLOOD QUALIFIED?

Realizing that there are two lawful ways by which a Christian can get foreign blood or blood components into his or her body (through meat and mother's milk) it is natural to ask: Does the Bible give a total prohibition against taking blood into the body, or is the focus on the purpose of taking blood? The views of JW in relation to this are often misunderstood, so I will make a short historical review.

As far back as the nineteenth century, the holiness of blood was stressed by JW. The Watchtower of November 15, 1892, p. 352, said after quoting Acts 15:28,29: «The eating of blood was forbidden, not only by Jewish law but also before the law was given. The same command was given to Noah. See Deut. 12:33; Gen. 9:4»

Blood was rarely used for medical purposes in the nineteenth century. However, in the 1920's vaccination was introduced on a large scale, and this was the start of a medical use of blood. Vaccines were not taken orally, so the question was whether this use of blood was included in the Bible's command to abstain from blood. The magazine The Golden Age (2) 1931 Number 297, p. 291, 293 said: «Men of science (?), entrusted with the guardianship of the public health, have in recent years assumed the absolute right to mingle the blood of diseased calves and diseased horses with that of little children and others (...) Vaccination is a direct violation of the everlasting covenant that God gave with Noah after the flood. In Genesis 9:1-17 we read (...)» While The Golden Age had argued against vaccination from a quasi-medical point of view, the quotes above show that vaccination was viewed as a violation of the Biblical prohibition against blood.

In the 1920's and 1930's different vaccines contained quite a lot of blood. According to an article about the history of vaccination «the golden age of vaccine development began in 1949 with the discovery of virus propagation in cell culture.»<sup>(3)</sup> Vaccines made from dead or weakened bacteria are not problematic because they are not made from blood, but what about serum made from blood for immunological purposes, how should a Christian view such substances? This new generation of vaccines/sera was very different from what was administered twenty to thirty years earlier, so how should Christians view this? The matter was discussed in The Watchtower 1952, p. 764, and the conclusion was: «it does not appear to us [The Watchtower Society] to be in violation of the everlasting covenant made with Noah, as set down in Genesis 9:4, nor contrary to God's related commandment at Leviticus 17:10-14.» The reason set forth why vaccination did not seem to be a violation of the sacredness of blood, was that it cannot be «argued or proved that, by being vaccinated, the inoculated person is either eating or drinking blood and consuming it as food or receiving a blood transfusion.» (See also The Watchtower 1958, p. 575.)

The differentiation between blood used as a nutrient and blood used for other purposes could seem to be a qualification of the prohibition against blood; it could seem that the purpose of using blood was the important thing. It is true that eating and drinking blood is mentioned in the Old Testament in connection with the law against blood, and those attending the meeting of elders where the Christian prohibition against blood was written down (See Acts 15), would think of eating and drinking blood as well. Thus, to point to the fact that blood as a nutrient is expressly forbidden in the Bible, in connection with blood transfusions, is logical, since transfusion is tantamount to eating blood, but this is not all there is to the question. The words of Acts 15:29 is said to come from God, and neither the words nor the context contain any qualification! The result of an analysis of the passage based on a normal use of lexicon, grammar, and syntax, is that the prohibition against blood is absolute and without exceptions. The focus, therefore, should not be on the purpose of using blood, but rather on

the question: «What is included in 'blood' (Greek: haima)?». Everything which is 'blood' is forbidden.

In The Watchtower of 1964, pp. 680-682 we find a discussion indicating that the prohibition is absolute. The heading is «Keep free from blood». Beneath this heading we find the words: «Christians are told to abstain from blood (Acts 15:20,28,29). Just how far-reaching is that? What do the Scriptures require of a dedicated servant of God?» Three areas are shown to be included: 1) not to use blood from slaughtered animals, but pouring it out on the ground, 2) not to take a blood transfusion, and 3) not to use blood in different modern products such as adhesives, rubber compounds, water purification etc.(4) This shows that in Acts chapter 15 more is included than just using blood as a nutrient. However, in connection with vaccines and immunological sera the question about using blood as a nutrient is important. On p. 682 we find the following words:

«The [Watchtower] Society does not endorse any of the modern uses of blood, such as the uses of blood in connection with inoculation. Inoculation is, however, a virtually unavoidable circumstance in some segments of society, and so we leave it up to the conscience of the individual to determine whether to submit to inoculation with a serum containing blood fractions for the purpose of building up antibodies to fight against disease. If a person did this, he may derive comfort under the circumstances from the fact that he is not directly eating blood, which is expressly forbidden in God's Word.»

#### THE PERSONAL CONSCIENCE AND BLOOD FRACTIONS

The modern history of JW shows that the fundamental view of blood has been the same for more than one hundred years. In the last years of the nineteenth century only full blood was available, and we would not use that. New products containing blood or having been made from blood have continuously been introduced. What some interpret as inconsistency is simply that we as responsible Christians have needed time to consider each new product. First when it is clear that the use of a particular product does not violate the law of God, will the use of it be a matter of one's conscience. The fact that there is nothing special with blood as a fluid, and that we get fractions of blood into our bodies by eating meat, teach us that what is important is not to prevent any blood fraction to come into our bodies, but rather to respect the sanctity of blood. Since new products continuously appear, it is not we who change our principles, but rather that the principles are applied in new situations.

After having studied this subject for years, we have reached the following conclusion which we regard as consistent. What is expressly forbidden in the Bible is using blood as a nutrient. On this basis it is easy for me, and I estimate, for 99 % of my fellow believers, to reject oral and parenteral feeding (transfusion) by blood (haima). All other uses of blood (haima), even if not being mentioned in the Bible individually, are forbidden. Whether a Witness, when considering to use one or all of the major blood components, will apply the law against being fed by blood or the law against the use of blood, or both, is his or her privilege. However, I am quite sure that the mentioned 99 % of the Witnesses view the major blood components as haima. My previous quote from The Encyclopedia Britannica shows that our view of red and white cells, platelets and plasma as the 'major blood components' hardly is idiosyncratic - this is a normal medical viewpoint.

Regarding the grey zone, i.e. whether to use the minor blood components or not, each one's conscience must decide. By taking immunoglobulins or factor VIII etc. we are not using blood as a nutrient, but we are still using the components, which is forbidden as well. So we must return to the question whether a component is blood or not. The function of the placental barrier and the fact that immunoglobulins are found in mother's milk, may be taken into account. That we get fractions of blood by eating meat can also be something to consider. But the final decision must be based on each Christian's conscience, and such decisions should not be criticized.

#### MEDICAL ETHICS AND JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

With all due respect to those who disagree, we should keep in mind that what is being discussed in this forum is the faith and practice of JW regarding blood, and the ethical consequences of this for the doctor. However, more than half of the letters have been attempts to argue with JW and to show that they are inconsistent and that their view of blood really is bad. Some of these show a lack of knowledge of elementary scientific methodology, particularly the time element is ignored. The word 'kidnap' meant 'to steal children' in the days of Charles Lindbergh and a time thereafter. Today it means 'to steal any person regardless of age'. The words 'blood fraction' and 'vaccine' had one meaning or reference in 1931, another in 1961 and still another in 2001. To quote portions of JW literature with these words and compare them in order to show inconsistency without checking the semantics of the words, is a manipulation of the sources.

JW are admonished to take the conscience and feelings of doctors into consideration. We know that it is not easy to 'operate with one hand tied on the back', as one doctor expressed it when he could not have a unit of blood in store in case of emergency. However, we appreciate that doctors realise that greater harm can be caused by refusing to treat JW than to treat them on their own conditions. We want to understand doctors, and we hope that doctors will try to understand us. We therefore ask that doctors accept our signed statements, and truly believe us when we say that we do not want blood, rather than listening to a third party who questions our sincerity and determination.

(1) The Hebrew word nephesh is in many Bible translations translated both by 'soul' and by 'life'. (2) The Golden Age was published by JW. (3) Plotkin, S. A, and Mortimer jr., E. A. (1988) Vaccines, p. 5. (4) See The Watchtower 1964, p. 127, where it is shown that the use of blood as fertilizer would violate

the law that blood should not be used.

## Re: Why do Jehovah's Witnesses abstain from blood?

3 March 2001



**Marvin Shilmer,**  
Elder  
*Jehovah's Witness*

Again, as one of Jehovah's Witnesses I find Furuli's comments regarding blood most interesting because in each instance I have previously used the same arguments (and others) myself, yet upon closer scrutiny found them insufficient.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Why do Jehovah's Witnesses abstain from blood?](#)

Furuli begins by offering the example of a Christian father who would let his family perish rather than commit an act of idolatry by lighting incense to the genius of an emperor. Furuli asserts that as a parallel regarding our stand on blood transfusion by claiming that the illustrative Biblical use of blood for life is similar. The argument looks like this:

Email Marvin Shilmer:  
[mshilmer@hotmail.com](mailto:mshilmer@hotmail.com)

1. Life belongs to God 2. God uses blood illustratively of life 3. God forbids taking in any sort of blood by humans because it represents life

Conclusion: Taking a transfusion of blood is against God's will.

That is an interesting argument, but it has fatal problems:

1) The argument relies upon blood representing life as the SOLE reason for the Biblical prohibition found at Leviticus 17:10-12. In fact, as stated, the Levitical Decree depends upon more than just that one element. The text in question gives a combined reason for the prohibition, that combination being: A) blood represents life and B) Jews were henceforth required to use blood for the sacred purpose of sacrifices. Therefore, saying that one of those elements stands alone as the Biblical tenet for the Levitical Decree is a distortion. On this subject I think Furuli will contend that biblically the idea of blood representing life goes back to texts in the book of Genesis. Regarding any abstention of blood out of respect for life, I believe Furuli will contend that the text of Genesis 9 is of special import. (Gen. 9 is also known as the Noachian Decree). Significantly, regarding blood, the Noachian Decree required that people abstain from eating blood of animals slaughtered for food. [1] However, even though the Noachian Decree (and other texts in Gen.) establish Biblically that blood represents life there was no prohibition on Noah using blood except for one, he could not eat blood of animals slaughtered for food. So, in that instance we have actually a Biblical example of God SOLELY applying the idea that blood represents life, yet Noah was not required to entirely abstain from using blood. Noah was only required to abstain from one thing, eating blood of an animal KILLED for food. Naturally, any reader can see the difference between the blood used in modern blood transfusion and the blood of slaughtered animals; one results as a donation from a willing participant whereas the other results from killing a victim. [2] So, it becomes evident that "blood representing life" is not used as a SOLE basis for the Levitical prohibition, and for that reason Furuli's argument fails.

2) This argument of Furuli's also relies upon the Biblical prohibition found at Leviticus 17:10-12 being applicable to Christians. Interestingly, though the Watchtower Society makes the claim that the Christian requirement to "abstain from... blood" is NOT AT ALL based upon the Levitical Decree (or any other parts of the larger Mosaic Law), it does nevertheless use scriptures in Leviticus to defend its position relative to blood transfusion. (See the Watchtower publication, United in Worship of the Only True God, page 149, paragraph 8) Unless Furuli can demonstrate Biblically that Christians are required to abide by the Levitical Decree then Furuli's argument fails also for that insufficiency.

As part of his explanation Furuli asserts that "While fire and incense can be used for several purposes but not as means for sacrificing to a foreign god, there are no normal purposes for which blood can be used." That statement is patently false. Persons living during Biblical periods certainly had normal uses for blood. Examples include clothing dye (hemoglobin has natural pigmentation properties), painting material, animal food and adhesives. Interestingly, the Noachian Decree did not prohibit those uses of blood of slaughtered animals though the later Mosaic Law did. However, as shown, blood prohibitions in the Mosaic Law had their own basis. Would Furuli argue that Noah was prohibited from using blood to dye rugs?

I would agree with Furuli that the Apostolic Decree to "abstain from.... blood" applies to Christians out of obedience to God. However the question remains, just what was God requiring with that Decree? Was he requiring that Christians abstain from blood as Noah was required or as Jews were required? (Interestingly, though we can say that Noah had to abstain from blood we cannot say that he had to entirely abstain from blood) I would also agree with Furuli that Biblical standards to abstain from blood stem from respect for life. But what Furuli fails to account for is the distinction of using blood taken by killing victims versus using blood donated by a willing party, an act that does not require killing. (How do you symbolically give back to God a life that you have not taken?) Even the Mosaic Law contained a provision from God for letting non-Jews buy unbled carcasses from Jews expressly for the purpose of EATING them. (Deuteronomy 14:21) Since that provision was a unilateral provision from God, will Furuli argue that God was helping people violate a holy tenet? Will Furuli argue that abiding by the Mosaic Law was required for non-Jews to be acceptable to God? If so, then how do we explain the conspicuous absence of any requirement that Jews advertise the Mosaic Law and accordingly proselytize?

Of particular interest is Furuli's argument that nutrition is a primary concern associated with a Biblical tenet against eating blood. The argument looks like this:

1. God forbids eating blood 2. Eating blood is gaining nutrition from blood 3. Some components of



blood provide nutrition and others do not 4. Transfusion is eating

Conclusion: Transfusing some [read: nutrient] components of blood violates Biblical requirements to abstain from eating blood. Transfusing other [read: non-nutrient] components of blood may not violate Biblical tenets to abstain from blood.

That is an interesting argument, but it has fatal problems:

1) Regarding nutrition, the argument depends upon transfusion of blood being the same as eating blood. That represents a problem unless it can be demonstrated that transfusion is eating. Is it? If you give a starving person food he will not starve to death. If all you give a starving person are transfusions of blood he will starve to death. That pretty much ends the discussion of whether eating is the same as transfusing blood. For that reason alone this argument of Furuli's fails.

2) The argument also depends upon some components of blood providing nutrition and others not. Is that true? What is nutrition? Interestingly, Furuli includes the example of mother's milk transferring immunoglobulins to babies. Remembering that the argument in question intends to demonstrate that EATING blood is forbidden. Is an infant EATING when it sucks in the immunoglobulins found in its mother's milk? If so then that would entirely refute Furuli's contention that taking in immunoglobulins is less than nutritious, that it is less than EATING. On that subject I suggest that there is not one pediatric that will consider healthy immunoglobulins in the mother's milk as anything short of nutritious for the youngster! Otherwise Furuli apparently wants to apply a very strict definition of nutrition yet he fails to tell us just what that is and then evidence that tight definition as a scriptural one. In common usage the idea of nutrition includes promoting growth, sustaining, maintaining, etc. The idea, for example, that immunoglobulins used to bolster or build or body's immune system is not nutrition defies the common use of vitamin supplements used for the very same purpose! Can we argue that taking vitamin supplements targeting our immune system is less than eating? Just how is it that immunoglobulins are less than nutritious? Without evidencing that assertion in each instance then, at best, Furuli's conclusion is unfounded for that reason. At worst, any nutritional value of components like immunoglobulins stands as outright refutation of his argument here.

Furuli's reply also revisits the normal and healthy passing of blood components from mother to child of some blood components via the placenta. But, Furuli argues that the nutritional element of blood provides a logical basis upon which accepting some components of blood is wrong and accepting other components is maybe not wrong. What flabbergasts me is that in the discussion he completely overlooks the fact that every single bit of nutrition received by the child comes from its mother's blood! That means that, whatever the child gets from the mother's blood, it is nutritious! So, on one hand Furuli argues that certain components of blood are less than nutrition and for that reason they are maybe acceptable, yet those are the very same components that are feeding the child! Is that supposed to be logical?

My comments here are probably sounding critical of my brother in faith, Furuli, but they are not intending to. The real criticism is of the reasoning applied not the person. I happen to know that Furuli is indeed sincere in his efforts, and for that reason should be commended. But being sincere does not make a teaching or conclusion correct. Also sincerity does not minimize the end result that many Witnesses observe the Watchtower Society's teachings on blood transfusion for one reason, they fear being shunned for doing otherwise. If Furuli or the Watchtower Society feels otherwise then they have an easy enough way to find out. All they have to do is make it known that accepting transfusions of blood or components of blood is entirely up to each Jehovah's Witness without any threat of shunning. Only then will the true beliefs of all individuals making up Jehovah's Witnesses be found out. Many of us trust the Watchtower Society, so when it publishes its teachings we give credit out of that trust, sometimes without thinking through a subject entirely and soundly. Surely Furuli must admit that at some level we must accept things out of trust whether we have soundly thought through them or not. If each of us had to entirely rethink each of our leanings we would get nowhere fast! Healthy living requires trusting, and trusting can lead to mistakes in many instances. On this subject the Watchtower Society's actions have, I believe, been sincere. Nevertheless I think now that facts and sound reasoning have demonstrated that, at the very least, the Watchtower Society's conclusions regarding blood transfusion are debatable and for that reason we should not shun over them. At most the facts refute the Watchtower Society's teachings on blood transfusion and for that reason thinking persons should refuse them.

On a final note, I find comfort in Furuli's exhortation that, "the final decision must be based on each Christian's conscience, and such decisions should not be criticized." On the subject at hand, if that principle were to be taught and practiced by the Watchtower Society then much good would result and people like Furuli and I could spend more time doing what we really enjoy, preaching the merits of living according to the Biblical teachings such as those found in the famous Sermon on the Mount. I would ask Furuli for a direct answer to the question: Should the Watchtower Society (through elders or otherwise) respect without any sort of criticism (including shunning) the individual decision of a Jehovah's Witnesses who, after a sincere and thorough analysis, has decided that they were formerly wrong and that accepting a blood transfusion is indeed okay?

Marvin Shilmer

Endnotes:

[1] Watchtower literature is clear that the Noachian Decree addresses specifically the blood of

animals slaughtered for food. The volume *Insight on the Scriptures*, under the heading "Blood," on page 344 states:

"After the Flood, Noah and his sons, the progenitors of all persons alive today, were commanded to show respect for the life, the blood, of fellowmen. (Ge 9:1, 5, 6) Also, God kindly allowed them to add animal flesh to their diet. However, they had to acknowledge that the life of any animal killed for food belonged to God, doing so by pouring its blood out as water on the ground. This was like giving it back to God, not using it for one's own purposes.—De 12:15, 16."

[2] A scriptural distinction between blood of slaughtered animals versus blood of unslaughtered animals is also maintained in Watchtower publications. The volume *Insight on the Scriptures*, under the heading "Blood," on page 344 states:

"At Deuteronomy 14:21 allowance was made for selling to an alien resident or a foreigner an animal that had died of itself or that had been torn by a beast. Thus a distinction was made between the blood of such animals and that of animals that a person slaughtered for food. (Compare Le 17:14-16.) The Israelites, as well as alien residents who took up true worship and came under the Law covenant, were obligated to live up to the lofty requirements of that Law. People of all nations were bound by the requirement at Genesis 9:3, 4, but those under the Law were held by God to a higher standard in adhering to that requirement than were foreigners and alien residents who had not become worshipers of Jehovah."

## Re: Muramoto's reply R. Furuli, The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness

4 March 2001



**Rolf J. Furuli,**  
Research fellow in  
Semitic languages  
*University of Oslo*

Dear Dr Muramoto,

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Muramoto's reply R. Furuli, The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness](#)

Email Rolf J. Furuli:  
[furuli@online.no](mailto:furuli@online.no)

You end your letter by the words "all the loyal Witnesses who wrote their opinions here never returned and followed up their comments, nor did they answer any of my questions. I sincerely hope that Furuli does not follow in the footsteps of those fellow Witnesses whose communication is only one-way traffic."(1) D. Malyon, a member of the HLC of Luton, Bedfordshire has written an article with a thorough discussion of a previous article that you wrote.(2) If a Witness has not answered your previous questions, I can understand his or her reasons, because your letter is not an inquiry to get answers but rather an attempt to change the faith of the addressee and all other Jehovah's Witnesses. At least this is the case with your letter to me.

According to yourself, you are a "third party" because you are not a Witness. I do not consider it appropriate to discuss internal questions with an outsider who is very critical of our brotherhood of believers. However, you have by your article directed the attention of the readers of BMJ to the Witnesses in a way which can create unwarranted suspicion on the part of doctors, and this may result in an extra burden on an ill Witness patient. I therefore would like to correct some of your inaccurate claims and make comments on others.

### CONFIDENTIALITY OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES PATIENTS

If you as a physician had an HIV-positive patient who dated your daughter, and they wanted to get married, and you knew that your daughter was unaware of his sickness, would you tell her? This would be an extremely problematic situation - your professional confidentiality versus the health of your daughter - so I shall not advise you. For Witnesses as well, confidentiality is an extremely important issue. Confidential matters should not be revealed to others and promises made to one another should be kept.

Although an outsider may not understand it, the Witnesses learn to cultivate a love so strong for God and for fellow Witnesses that they are willing to die for one another and for God. So if a Witness definitely is on the point of destroying his or her relationship with God, another Witness will offer to help. In practically all instances, a Witness can be given spiritual help without revealing confidential matters. But in extremely rare situations there can be a serious case where a Witness faces a situation like that with the HIV-positive patient. Another person cannot give advice to the Witness, but it can happen that he or she views the situation as 'jus nessesitatis' as you might do with the HIV-positive patient. Such a situation occurs so rarely that to use the possibility of it as proof that Jehovah's Witnesses are willing to break their professional confidentiality is not honest. I am quite sure that among medical personnel who belong to the 15.000 Witnesses of Norway there is not a single example of this situation within the last ten years.

### IS THERE A DIVERSITY OF VIEWS REGARDING BLOOD AMONG JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES?

In a letter you write: "Mr. Elder testifies how diverse the views are on the issue among Jehovah's Witnesses."(3) In your letter to me you write: "I have personally seen several Witnesses who altered their advance directive to select different blood products from what the Watchtower Society permits" and, that according to L. Elder "some anesthesiologists revealed that up to half of their Jehovah's Witness patients had been willing to reevaluate their position on blood when a private conference was held with them." I accept your words regarding what you have seen, but am doubtful regarding the information you have gotten from opposers. I do not think that the statistics of persons who pretend to be something they are not, namely, loyal and cooperative brothers in the congregation, should be trusted, particularly not when their words are so dramatically different from what I know about Jehovah's Witnesses through 40 years, and from the information I get from doctors.

In Norway, we have a very good relationship with doctors. We give lectures and participate in discussions at hospitals; in addition, we have personal conversations with doctors. At the yearly meetings of anesthesiologists and surgeons, we are present for several days with our information stand, and we exchange information with individual doctors. At these occasions, some doctors are skeptical. They ask sweeping questions, and relate different cases to us (without revealing confidential information). If there were such cases where Witnesses reevaluated their stand, this would have proved to be a good argument for the skeptical doctors. However, we do not hear of such cases. In my first letter I quoted a professor, the head of a team of surgeons, who has operated on Jehovah's Witnesses for more than 30 years. His statistics show that one Witness out of every hundred accepts blood or its major components. This is about the same statistic we get from all the country and it is a figure that is very far from your figures.

#### DO" THIRD PARTY" JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES EXERCISE PRESSURE ON PATIENTS AND PHYSICIANS?

In a stressful situation, persons may behave differently than normal. Because they do not want blood, some Witnesses may not always do all things in a reasonable way, in spite of the fact that congregation members are advised time and again to be balanced, polite and respectful toward doctors. However, your description of hospitalized Witnesses is extreme, and differs significantly from my experience. You write: "Most physicians have experienced enormous pressure applied by the local Witness community, mainly family, friends and elders who belong to the same congregation. They insist on bloodless surgery even before the patient himself expresses his own understanding and wishes . . . It is well known to the medical community that the congregation members even maintain an overnight vigil in the hospital to prevent the patient from receiving blood."

It stands to reason that you cannot know what "most physicians" who treat Jehovah's Witnesses in the UK or in the US experience, and you cannot know the degree of pressure those who feel pressure experience. So the expressions "most physicians" and "enormous pressure" has nothing to do with reality, but are extreme exaggerations. The same is true with the claim of "overnight vigils" which is "well known." I am sure that such a situation has not happened in Norway in the last ten years, and that such precautions are extremely rare, if they happen at all, in other countries.

As to the feelings of doctors I will relate the following experience. Ten years ago, a young man who was badly injured called for assistance. Another elder and myself went to the hospital. With the help of the Hospital Information desk at the Watchtower Society in Brooklyn we contacted a professor in the US who had experience regarding the situation. We got his advice and several medical articles which we conveyed to the responsible doctors. We asked about a treatment found in these articles which was not used in Norway.

"Would you like to try this on the patient?" we asked the medical team. "Well . . ." "Will it harm the patient?" we asked. "No," the doctors answered. "So why don't you try it?" we queried.

In the end, the medical team did try the treatment, but the patient died. However, he died, not because of the lack of blood, but because he was badly injured.

Five years later, at a meeting of doctors and nurses regarding treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses, (and after an unfavorable article in a Norwegian medical journal) a doctor from the team spoke about two members of the hospital liaison committee who had exercised "improper pressure" in the mentioned situation. The truth was that we had not spoken with the young man because he was unconscious, and the only contact between us and the doctors had been to convey medical information and ask questions about the treatment. The father who lost his son was not a Witness, but he was so impressed by the love and kindness he saw - not pressure - that after the incident he became a Witness. Doctors are also humans, and it is easy to interpret the behavior of other persons in the way that you expect this behavior to be. This is the reason why articles similar to the one you have written may stir up suspicion, and therefore harm the good relation between doctor and patient. The family and congregation friends of a patient are not a dangerous "third party" but those who give wrong information about Jehovah's Witnesses and create suspicion certainly are.

#### WHO IS IT WHO DO NOT RESPECT THE CONSCIENCE OF OTHERS - JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES OR THE OPPOSERS?

As you will not reveal the epicrisis of your patients to others, I will not discuss internal congregational matters with you or others. I will, however, make the general remark that I would respect a position based on the sincere conscience of another Witness, whether or not it is different from mine. To respect the conscience of another person, however, does not mean that I admit that everything goes or that two diametrically different viewpoints are both correct. If the conscience of a person, for instance, says that it is right for a Christian to steal, it is time for him or her to adjust the conscience, as the Bible says (Romans 10:2,3; Hebrews 13:19).

As to those "Witnesses" to whom you give advice, and for whose sake you want me to write letters to the Watchtower Society, the question about conscience plays just a minor part. Their situation is not like a person who comes to his fellow Christians and says that because of his special illness he needs a solution including neutrophil leucocytes. He states that his conscience allows him to accept that and he asks that his conscience be respected. (4) No, those persons whom you represent and who have written letters in connection with your article actively oppose Jehovah's Witnesses and express false accusations. One of them wrote: "My question to you, sir, is this: is the sacrifice of

hundreds, perhaps thousands of JW children a justifiable price for 'greater peace, inner contentment, and life meaning.'"(5)

This is a serious accusation, but where is the proof behind it? Hundreds, perhaps thousands of children killed by Jehovah's Witnesses? The article in Awake! May 22, 1994, to which the writer refers, does not speak about children in general, but about youngsters with leukemia and similar deadly diseases. The lack of blood did not kill the youngsters mentioned in the article; their disease killed them. If a young person who already knows that he or she is going to die, does not want to try to prolong life for a short time with the use of blood but seeks alternative treatment, how can it be said that Jehovah's Witnesses sacrificed ("killed") this person?

In an editorial, C.D. Kitchens refers to 16 studies with 1404 Witness patients, and reports that the authors "... implicated a lack of blood as the primary cause of death in 8 patients (0.6%) and contributing to death in another 12 patients, yielding a total of 20 deaths (1.4%)." The author continues, "Other complications were not increased in Jehovah's Witness patients". Then he draws the interesting conclusion: "Less clear is how much morbidity and mortality are avoided by this practice [refusal of blood], but they probably exceed the risk of being transfused."(6) Because it can be more dangerous to accept a transfusion than to refuse one, a person who refuses one and dies for this reason or another, cannot rightly be accused of suicide, and it is even more illogical to accuse his or her fellow believers for killing the person.

JW respect the consciences of the opposers when they disagree, but what you and they ask for is not just that, but you ask for an acceptance of the correctness of your viewpoints, and that we cannot do. You, on the other hand, appear not to respect the consciences of the Witnesses when they abstain from blood, but claiming that many Witnesses do not really mean what they say in their own signed statements, you suggest that doctors should try to persuade sick Witnesses to change their minds. If you respect our consciences, why don't you not follow your own decision but leave us alone?

#### ARE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES BRAINWASHED OR DO THEY FOLLOW THE BIBLE?

You write: "The Scriptures alone have little authority for JWs"(7) and "The most important external factor is not physicians 'ruthlessly defending a cherished belief/dogma of modern medicine,' but the inconsistent and mutating policy of the controlling organization, the Watchtower society (WTS)."(8)

It is a bold and utterly false claim to say that the Watchtower Society is the authority for Jehovah's Witnesses and not the Bible. This is something which is the very opposite of what the Witnesses themselves say and believe. I have a mag. art. degree in Semitic linguistics, which is about the same as an American Ph.D.; in addition, I am currently doing research for the higher Norwegian doctoral degree. I teach the biblical languages Hebrew and Aramaic on the university level, and I have mastered the third Biblical language, Greek. I continually study the Bible in its original languages. Should I not know the basis for my faith and the faith of other Jehovah's Witnesses? Should I be brainwashed? My basis for being a Witness I find in the Bible and in the Bible alone, and this is the same for my fellow Witnesses. You have completely misunderstood the theocratic arrangement among Jehovah's Witnesses and misinterpret it as some form of spiritual dictatorship. However, the truth is that responsible persons function as teachers and not as prophets.

#### RESPECTING AUTONOMY AND PERSONAL DECISIONS

Your assertions that "In biblical times 'blood' only meant whole blood, not any blood fractions or components, major or minor. In biblical times 'abstain from blood' meant from eating blood, not from using it to treat medical conditions" are not true. The medical condition which caused the death of Jesus Christ, could have been that his heart burst. This can explain the words of John 18:34 that "blood (haima) and water came out" when the soldiers jabbed his side with a spear. If a volume of blood is allowed to stand undisturbed for a time, the red cells sink to the bottom. Evidently the red cells are called 'blood' in the quote, and the plasma, perhaps mixed with lymph is called 'water'.(9) A Biblical law can cover practices which are new and did not occur in the past; the law against 'porneia' can, for instance, be applied to a situation where a woman artificially is fertilized by semen from a man with whom she is not married.

When a Witness needs surgery, it is his or her conscience that matters, so the ethical question is whether the will of the Witness shall be respected or not. Whether you, who is not a Witness, or another person who claims to be a Witness, agrees with the beliefs of the patient is beyond the point. So all your words about 'Witnesses' who disagree just cloud the issue and shows that you have an agenda, namely to try to change the mind of as many Witnesses as possible so they accept those blood components which you think they should accept. You have the right to work for your own interests, the reason why I react, is that you paint a picture which does not represent reality, where extreme possibilities which almost never occur is portrayed as normal among the Witnesses. This also includes the claim that "many" Witnesses, in one context "up to half of the Witnesses" will change their mind regarding blood if the right questions are asked. I do not doubt that practically all Witnesses stick to their decision also in a situation of stress or when someone tries to persuade them to change their mind. My concern is that doctors get a false picture of the Witnesses and that a good relationship therefore can be hampered from the start. This is the reason for my present comments.

(1) Muramoto, O. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37>, 26 February 2001. All quotes from Muramoto without special reference is from this article.

(2) Malyon, D., "Transfusion-free treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses: respecting the autonomous patient's right", *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 1998, vol 24, No 5. pp. 302-307.

(3) Muramoto, O. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37>, 19 January 2001.

(4) I am using this as an example of different attitudes and not as a 'case'.

(5) Pseudonym, Elder, L. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37>, 7 February 2001

(6) Kitchens, C. D., "Are transfusions overrated? ", *American Journal of Medicine*, 1993, 94:117-119.

(7) Muramoto, O. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37>, 4 February 2001.

(8) Muramoto, O. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37>, 21 January 2001

(9) The Hebrew word mayim and the Greek word hydor are generic terms which can refer to liquids such as juice and urin. That the red cells were specified as 'blood' in this verse, would not necessarily, according to Semitic thought, rule out that the hydor (water) or a part of it could be called 'blood' in other contexts. Regarding the Hebrew word nephesh ("soul", "life") Leveticus 17:11 says that the soul is 'in' the blood while verse 14 says that the blood 'is' the soul. This does not mean that the rest of the creature is not 'soul', because verse 15 shows that men 'are' souls, and 19:28 speaks of a 'deceased soul', a creature which had been a soul. So in John 18:34 the red cells are specified as 'blood', without excluding that other parts could be specified as 'blood' in other contexts.

## Further question to Patric McShea

4 March 2001



**Osamu Muramoto,**  
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USA

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Further question to Patric McShea](#)

Email Osamu Muramoto:  
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I appreciate [Mr. Patrick McShea's reply](#) to [my questions](#). Let me ask a few more clarification.

### Definition of major and minor components

First he defines "minor component" as "one that does not naturally occur, or exist by itself without the use of the kind of technology used to produce fractions". To my knowledge, the Watchtower Society has never published such a view. I assume this is his unique and personal view. If McShea were seen as my patient, I would be very impressed by such a unique reasoning, which clearly shows that his view is personal, not merely repeating the organizational rules. As I stated earlier in my reply to him, I would certainly respect his unique views as a physician. I can reassure McShea that most medical ethicists would agree that doctors should respect patient's views and wishes no matter how unique or even how illogical they may appear.

However, I cannot help asking obvious difficulty in his definition of acceptable minor components. The problem is that all the components of the blood "occur or exist" naturally and that does not differentiate the two groups of blood products. Of course red and white cells occur and exist naturally as McShea stated, but so do albumin, globulin and hemoglobin. However, in order to obtain each component, "physical intervention" is required. This is true for all the components. For example, in order to obtain red blood cells, whole blood has to be first chemically treated with anticoagulant (without this artificial and chemical treatment of the blood, none of the fractions, major or minor, cannot be fractionated), then it is subjected to technological instruments such as centrifuge. Some red cell products require further chemical and physical procedures such as additional chemical treatment, washing, freezing and irradiating. In case of platelets, white cells, and plasma, further more complicated technology is utilized. Likewise "minor components" such as albumin also "exist" naturally in blood and fractionated by chemical and physical treatment such as cold ethanol fractionation. Is there any fundamental difference between the two groups?

Perhaps McShea may have meant to say that minor components are "naturally unavailable as products". For example, salt "exist and occur" naturally in sea water. Yet it requires "physical intervention" to separate salt as a product. Therefore salt is "naturally occurring" yet "naturally unavailable as a product". This definition seems logical for blood products, yet it does not differentiate between the major and minor components; all the blood products whether "major" or "minor" naturally occur yet naturally unavailable as a product, requiring physical and chemical intervention.

McShea stated "the aspect of defining minor blood fractions is a medical one", yet doctors, hospitals and administrators do not think of distinction between major and minor components when they order blood products. All that matters to them is to select a product which the patient needs to treat the medical and surgical condition. Unless the patient clearly says "I want this product, but not that product", doctors cannot decide what is "major" and what is "minor". If McShea really wants to leave this distinction up to doctors, he needs to clarify the definition of "minor" and "major" fractions in much clearer terms.

### Penalty of accepting blood products

I am glad that McShea finally addressed one of the most important issues of medical ethics in medical care of Jehovah's Witnesses. He states "the congregation has a responsibility to keep the congregation spiritually clean and that any who are willfully gross sinners should be removed from the congregation, i.e. disfellowshipped". He repeatedly gave accepting whole blood as an example of "gross disrespect for blood", and justifies removal of those "sinners" from the group. Suppose



accepting whole blood is a gross disrespect for blood, is accepting a fraction of blood also a gross disrespect? Or is it a "fraction" of disrespect? He repeatedly discusses whole blood, but physicians are most interested in various blood products which are all fractions.

McShea questions himself as follows: "how would I behave if I came into a hospital and found a red-bag of **whole blood** being pumped into a congregation member?" (emphasis mine) He then answers what he would do in this scenario. However, he does not address what he would do in the same scenario with the only difference being "a fraction of blood" instead of "whole blood". Let me ask McShea by paraphrasing his own question: "how would I behave if I came into a hospital and found a red-bag of **unknown fraction of blood** being pumped into a congregation member?" Let me ask him to choose from following possible answers: a) he will investigate what fraction he is receiving, and if it is a "major" fraction according to the Watchtower criteria, he would investigate the patient's "attitude"; b) he will be satisfied by knowing it is "a fraction" and would not investigate any further to find what kind of fraction it is because it is not a "gross disrespect for blood"; c) he will not do anything about it because it is his personal and confidential matter. I appreciate McShea's unambiguous answer to this question.

### Self-policing the group

Finally, McShea raises another important point. He argues that any groups influence and pressure individuals to conform to normative ?moral?h standards. He argues that this practice is seen in "the world at large" including the medical community. He implies that, because other groups self-police the moral standards, Jehovah's Witnesses are also justified to do the same. It is true that the medical community has its own judicial and disciplinary system to weed out non-compliant members. However there are crucial and fundamental differences between disciplinary rules of medical community and disfellowshipping of Jehovah's Witnesses who conscientiously accept prohibited blood fractions.

First, there are no rules in the medical community which requires members to choose between disciplinary action and potential death or serious illness. Is there any rule in the medical community which requires doctors to do something which can cause their death, and the penalty of non-compliance is isolation from family and friends? There is none. Frankly, it is unethical for any organization to force the members to choose between death or serious illness and penalty.

Second, if the members of medical community feel such a rule is unethical, is there any recourse for them to rectify this unethical practice? Yes, absolutely. Many public procedures are available for the doctors to change such rules on their own initiative. Is there any similar recourse available for Jehovah's Witnesses to rectify this unethical practice? Absolutely not. Rank and file Jehovah's Witnesses have no voice to change the rules.

Third, doctors are not indoctrinated from childhood to accept one view over others. They have freedom to choose, reject or change the group, and such independent review is in fact encouraged. There is no such liberty among Jehovah's Witnesses, particularly those who were raised as a member from childhood.

McShea may still argue that there are such groups to enforce compliance. Yes, there are groups on earth which force members to choose between death and penalty. Examples are military, particularly of totalitarian regime, and certain religious sects of known unethical practices. Is McShea implying that the Watchtower religion should be counted as one of those? This question is crucially important for those who are interested in the issue of human rights and religious freedom. I appreciate his further clarification.

Untitled

4 March 2001



Thomas Daniels

Send response to journal:  
[Re: this article](#)

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What follows is not in any way intended to be suggestive of disrespect for Mr. Rolf Furuli's beliefs or person. I have listened to him on B-Greek for a couple of years and find him to be both an intelligent and agreeable person.

However I must take exception to a number of the things he has stated. Although he has attempted to explain why Jehovah's Witnesses "abstain from blood," I feel that he has succeeded only in explaining why he himself may choose to abstain from blood. In my opinion, his argument is marred not only by the presentation of an illusory picture of harmony between current and past JW beliefs but by internal inconsistencies that no thinking Jehovah's Witness could be expected to accept.

For example like many JW's I feel that it is the \*misuse\* of blood that God has forbidden. Furuli has taken a different approach in his sweeping condemnation of not the misuse, but the \*use\* of blood. For example, he states:

"After having studied this subject for years, we have reached the following conclusion which we regard as consistent. What is expressly forbidden in the Bible is using blood as a nutrient..... All other uses of blood (haima), even if not being mentioned in the Bible individually, are forbidden."

Of course, all creatures of flesh and blood from a few weeks after conception clear to the end of their life "use" blood. Furuli is no exception. When his blood and its respective components are used to transport water and soluble nutrients, to ferry oxygen to and carbon dioxide from the tissues, to immunize and fight infection, to bind toxins and to transport wastes, to regulate osmotic pressure

and to achieve and maintain hemostasis in the event of injury, these are nothing if not "uses" of blood.

Any JW (who as conservative Christians believe that Man is the result of a special creation) with even a rudimentary understanding of human physiology would have to concede that the above described uses of blood have been conceived designed and created by God himself and therefore it cannot reasonably be argued that "All other uses of blood.....are forbidden." Further, I find his assertion that "While fire and incense can be used for several purposes but not as means for sacrificing to a foreign god, there are no normal purposes for which blood can be used" to be problematic. There most certainly are normal purposes for which blood can be used, and it is pointless for a creature of flesh and blood to argue otherwise.

Given the fact that the purpose of a transfusion is not to nourish or feed the body as Furuli appears to mistakenly believe, but to augment one or more of these normal blood functions a qualification of some sort would seem to be in order. The idea that God has forbidden the performance of the functions for which blood was designed in the first place is absolutely ludicrous. If he wants to argue that it is the use rather than the misuse of blood that is forbidden, then to be consistent he must find some way to exempt from the prohibition those uses of blood that are necessary for the continuance of life. But after having argued at length that the "prohibition against blood" is "unqualified," "absolute" and "without exception" it doesn't seem that qualifying the phrase to read "abstain from [the] blood [of others]" or "abstain from blood [after it has been removed from the body]" would be very consistent on his part either.

However I believe the problems with consistency go much further than this. Under the heading "ACTION VERSUS MATTER" Furuli points out that while burning incense in recognition of the deity of a Roman emperor would have been objectionable to the early Christians, there would have been nothing wrong with burning incense for some other purpose. The question was not about incense as a substance, the question was about what the early Christians considered to be idolatry. In this he recognizes a basic principle used in the resolution of questions of ethics and morals, that similarity does not necessarily constitute equality. Burning incense in some other context would be morally distinguishable from burning it in what would arguably be an idolatrous act.

In harmony with this, he states:

"As a parallel, it is not the matter (fluid) blood that is important, but what the use of it represents."

Therefore the question of whether the consumption of blood and the transfusion of blood are morally distinguishable acts would certainly be a legitimate one. Is "taking in" the blood of another via transfusion morally equivalent to "taking in" the blood of another by consuming it? Or is the fact that both acts can be described in general terms as "taking in blood" no more significant than the fact that drinking a glass of water and drowning in a river can both be described as "taking in water?" Is the fact that the transfusion of blood bears a superficial similarity to the eating of blood morally significant, or is it as irrelevant as the fact that marital sex and adultery are similar acts?

Unfortunately Furuli does not seem to feel the need for a real resolution to these and similar moral questions as evidenced by the fact that the "action" is important and the "matter" unimportant only when it comes to harmonizing the doctrine on blood with the inconvenient fact that in actual practice, we consume blood everyday. (e.g. somatic cells in milk, residual blood in meat etc.) Once that hurdle is crossed the entire paradigm is turned wrong side out and the emphasis juxtaposed, for just a few paragraphs later, under the subheading "IS THE PROHIBITION AGAINST BLOOD QUALIFIED?" he states:

"The focus, therefore, should not be on the purpose of using blood, but rather on the question: «What is included in 'blood' (Greek: haima)?». Everything which is 'blood' is forbidden."

Suddenly it is the matter, blood itself that is important, and not the action, its associative context or purpose. On the surface at least, this seems to be terribly inconsistent and even self-serving, as it effectively sidesteps any obligation to provide a demonstration of moral equivalency in concrete terms and falls far short of describing why any thinking Witness would refuse transfusion. Specifically, how and why does donating platelets to save the life of a dying child profane or desecrate the symbolism involved with blood? In what way would this show disrespect for life and the Giver of life? JW's have both the need and the right to a simple and direct answer to such questions.

Another area where I feel something needs to be said concerns JW history itself. Furuli has asserted that "the modern history of JW shows that the fundamental view of blood has been the same for more than one hundred years." In support of this he has quoted a 1930's era issue of The Golden Age which condemned vaccination on the basis that it violated the Noachian covenant of Genesis 9. What he has not stated are the significant differences of interpretation that were attached to this passage at the time. The exact same issue from which he has quoted also states that "All reasonable minds must conclude that it was not the eating of the blood that God objected to, but it was the bringing the blood of the beast in contact with the blood of man." (1) At the time, Genesis 9:4 was seen not primarily as a prohibition against eating blood, but as a prohibition relating to bestiality that was reiterated at Leviticus 18:23- 24. This was a radically different viewpoint than what is taught today and JW teachings on blood have undergone considerable evolution since then.

Finally, and most important, despite his admonishment to others is his closing comments, I think

Furuli in his response is rather wide of the point himself. The point is that all JW's do not think alike and physicians treating JW patients need to be aware of this.

Furuli has asserted that "...transfusion is tantamount to eating blood..." This is his own subjective opinion. He is welcome to his opinion and though I disagree with it, I respect his right to hold it. In my own opinion there would be a huge difference between accepting a human kidney via transplant versus eating a human kidney. I believe that the transplant of human organs and human tissue, including blood is ethically, morally and spiritually distinguishable from cannibalism.

Furuli has chosen to adopt blood-banking terminology as his yardstick in making the determination of what is "blood." He apparently believes that centrifuging out the cellular components of blood, labeling each respectively as a primary component and then labeling everything left over as a primary component also is more than simply a system of categorization reflective of the way blood is packaged and sold to hospitals and pharmaceutical companies, but holds some spiritual significance as well. Using this yardstick, a JW patient voluntarily connected by IV to an inverted 500ml unit of plasma has definitely broken God's law and is subject to judicial inquiry while a JW patient voluntarily connected by IV to an inverted 500ml unit of 5% or 25% albumin solution has simply exercised his or her own conscience in determining what is and what is not "blood." Again, this is Furuli's own subjective opinion and he is welcome to it, but for me this viewpoint is horribly inconsistent. I see no reason to believe that while one procedure is a blood transfusion, the other is not and neither do I see anything resembling a rational basis for the idea that the "law of the centrifuge" hold any special significance with God.

Furuli seems to believe that the phrase "keep abstaining.....from blood" should be understood to mean "abstain from [the use] of blood." As with the previous examples, if this is his considered opinion, he is welcome to it. Personally, I don't believe that this is a textual interpolation that can legitimately be made during translation and know of no reputable translation that offers this rendering. While I would agree with Furuli in the assertion that the Bible forbids the eating of blood, I believe the idea that the Bible forbids the use of blood in the performance of the functions for which it was specifically designed is an untenable stretch.

I could continue but I think these examples are sufficient to illustrate the point. All JW's do not think alike and all JW's certainly do not think as Mr. Rolf Furuli. Even JW's who have reached the same general conclusions as Furuli regarding what preparations and procedures a Christian can accept in good conscience have not necessarily done so for the reasons that Furuli has offered. I do not believe that he is qualified to speak on behalf of JW's half a world away unless specifically invited to do so.

References:

(1) The Golden Age, People's Pulpit Association 1931, February 4:294

## Is the individual conscience truly the basis of blood refusal? Questions unanswered by Furuli.

4 March  
2001



**Osamu Muramoto,**  
Regional Ethics Council  
Kaiser Permanente,  
Interstate Medical Office  
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USA

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Is the individual  
conscience truly the basis of  
blood refusal? Questions  
unanswered by Furuli.](#)

Email Osamu Muramoto:  
[muramoto@aracnet.com](mailto:muramoto@aracnet.com)

I read with great enthusiasm and expectation Mr. Rolf Furuli's most recent letter ([Why do Jehovah's Witnesses abstain from blood?](#)). To my dismay, he has not addressed any of my five questions ([Reply and questions to Rolf Furuli Re: The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness](#)) which I addressed to him in response to his original letter ([The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness as a basis for refusing blood](#)). I have made it absolutely clear that I (and hopefully most physicians as well) will fully respect his well-thought-out reasoning to refuse "major" blood components, and to accept "minor" components. There is no need for him to expand his reasons any further to convince doctors. After all, most doctors cannot comprehend his Biblical exegesis, and they are not interested in such argument.

While we physicians will fully respect Furuli as one patient no matter how inconsistent his views and opinions might appear, we are still left in the dark how the dissenting Jehovah's Witnesses are treated ethically and respectfully. Although Furuli suggests doctors not to "listen to a third party", we doctors are faced with Jehovah's Witnesses themselves, not "a third party", who have dissenting views. Is Furuli suggesting to ignore, or worse suppress those fellow Witnesses as if they were "a third party"? Furuli, intentionally or unintentionally, avoided to address those crucially important questions. At this time, I will summarize my five questions into the following three items.

1. Does Furuli, as a member of the Hospital Liaison Committee, fully respect views and opinions of fellow Witnesses who disagree with him as to which blood fractions are acceptable?
2. How can Furuli explain his statement "the conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness is a basis for refusing blood" (Furuli's own words), when disfellowshipping/disassociation is justified for those who followed their Bible-based individual conscience (provided their exegesis on blood is different from Furuli's) and decided to accept blood fractions which are different from Furuli's selection?
3. If Furuli genuinely believes that "the conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness" should be respected and "the third party" should not harm the physician-patient relationship, is Furuli willing to write a letter to the Watchtower Society - a major third party - to suggest a reversal of the current recommendation that Jehovah's Witness health care workers breach medical confidentiality of fellow Jehovah's Witnesses and to refrain from intruding on the physician-patient relationship?

It is crucially important that Furuli answer these three questions unambiguously item by item. Otherwise we are forced to conclude that his assertion, ["the conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness as a basis for refusing blood"](#) is a mere political ploy of the Watchtower Society to camouflage its violation of the basic human rights of dissident Jehovah's Witnesses.

## Re: Furuli's reply to Muramoto

5 March 2001



**Thomas Daniels**

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Furuli's reply to Muramoto](#)

Email Thomas Daniels:  
[ocotillo50@hotmail.com](mailto:ocotillo50@hotmail.com)

After reading Rolf Furuli's latest response, I find that I must again take exception to one of his statements. Mr. Furuli refers to an article appearing in the February 1993 issue of The American Journal of Medicine.

He states:

"In an editorial, C.D. Kitchens refers to 16 studies with 1404 Witness patients, and reports that the authors "... implicated a lack of blood as the primary cause of death in 8 patients (0.6%) and contributing to death in another 12 patients, yielding a total of 20 deaths (1.4%)." The author continues, "Other complications were not increased in Jehovah's Witness patients". Then he draws the interesting conclusion: "Less clear is how much morbidity and mortality are avoided by this practice [refusal of blood], but they probably exceed the risk of being transfused."(6) Because it can be more dangerous to accept a transfusion than to refuse one, a person who refuses one and dies for this reason or another, cannot rightly be accused for suicide, and it is even more illogical to accuse his or her fellow believers for killing the person." (1)

Briefly for those who have not read the article, Dr. Craig S. Kitchens, a VA physician in Gainesville Florida searched MEDLINE and compiled 1404 surgical cases involving Jehovah's Witnesses which were collated into 16 surgical categories. The statistical results of Kitchen's exercise are as quoted above. While Dr. Kitchen's study was in many ways welcome news to Jehovah's Witnesses, there are a number of important details that must be kept in mind about it. In his unqualified denial that cause vs. effect relationships for mortality associated with refusing blood can be established, Furuli either voluntarily chooses not to state these details or perhaps simply doesn't understand them.

Kitchen's study was both specific and nonspecific. It was nonspecific in that it dealt with group statistics using aggregate figures. While this is informative in a presentation to the medical community on the subject of transfusion medicine as a general practice, neither the 0.6% nor the 1.4% figures necessarily hold any particular significance to the individual. As any physician following this discussion is well aware, intended benefits vs. potential risks of any medical procedure are not usually evaluated on the basis of group statistics, but on what is indicated by the symptoms and unique conditions of each case. The risks of refusing blood can be negligible or they can be severe. Although I feel that the numbers that Kitchen's worked with were rather small for definite conclusions, he own figures showed increased mortality associated with refusing blood ranging from amounts too small to measure on most of the categories to 2.77% and 8.33% in cardiovascular surgery.

The study was specific in that it dealt only with the administration of PRC's in scheduled surgery. Kitchen's did not question the propriety of administering plasma for factor V or non-specific bleeding disorders, the propriety of administering platelets for chemo induced thrombocytopenia, or any of a number of other medical uses of blood. Kitchen's did not question the validity of administering PRC's in emergency conditions where significant blood-loss can occur prior to surgery. Even strictly within the scope of his discussion, Kitchens did not conclude that blood should not be used at all in surgery but that, "Rather than reflexively administering blood, physicians must consider the risk-benefit ratio as they would for any other drug or procedure." (2)

In view of the foregoing, it should be apparent why Furuli's comment does not follow from the source material. Statements about transfusion medicine in its entirety are not supported by studies dealing with one aspect of it. Group statistics have little to do with the ultimate causes or mortality associated with individual cases and patients.

I know of a case of an unusual reaction to an anti-seizure medication in a child. The medication in question effectively wiped out the child's platelets at such an alarming rate that the pediatric hematologist initially suspected ITP. Keep in mind that as a Hospital Liaison Committee member, Furuli assists fellow Jehovah's Witnesses faced with crises involving blood. I wonder if he truly comprehends either what it means for an otherwise healthy child to have a platelet count of <1 and falling or why Kitchen's study would be unapplicable in such a case?

(1) <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37> March 4, 2001

(2) Kitchens, Craig S., Are Transfusions Overrated? Surgical Outcome of Jehovah's Witnesses, The American Journal of Medicine:119

## Re: Re: Muramoto's reply R. Furuli, The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness

5 March 2001



**Marvin Shilmer,**  
 Elder  
*Jehovah's Witness*

Dear Brother Furuli,

I cannot help but be taken aback by the following comment made by you. You said,

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Re: Muramoto's reply R. Furuli, The conscience of](#)

"[The] assertions that "In biblical times 'blood' only meant whole blood, not any blood fractions or components, major or minor. In biblical times 'abstain from blood' meant from eating blood, not from

[the individual Jehovah's Witness](#)

Email Marvin Shilmer:  
[mshilmer@hotmail.com](mailto:mshilmer@hotmail.com)

using it to treat medical conditions" are not true. The medical condition which caused the death of Jesus Christ, could have been that his heart burst. This can explain the words of John 18:34 that "blood (haima) and water came out" when the soldiers jabbed his side with a spear. If a volume of blood is allowed to stand undisturbed for a time, the red cells sink to the bottom. Evidently the red cells are called 'blood' in the quote, and the plasma, perhaps mixed with lymph is called 'water'. (9) A Biblical law can cover practices which are new and did not occur in the past; the law against 'porneia' can, for instance, be applied to a situation where a woman artificially is fertilized by semen from a man with whom she is not married."

As Jehovah's Witnesses, the Watchtower Society teaches us that plasma falls within the concept of blood (Greek: haima) that should be abstained from. If your comments above are accepted as a refutation of the idea that only whole blood fits the Biblical concept of haima then your comments above thoroughly refute the Watchtower Society's teaching that plasma is blood that should be abstained from! If on the other hand we accept your footnote [1] then your comments do not serve as the intended refutation. As an expert in Semitic language and an appointed member of a Hospital Liaison Committee who intends to provide help and comfort to our fellows, do you explain the potential distinction you make between red cells (blood) and plasma (water) to Jehovah's Witness patients when they ask your input about what is and is not or may not be blood (haima) according to the Bible?

Also, since we openly and publicly teach people about our beliefs on this subject, should we not also openly and publicly address in detail the merits of those beliefs in the face of counter reasoning? When a point of reason is the issue, why does it matter who sets it forth? Why are you apparently unwilling to hold an open discussion with me, a fellow Witness and elder, on this subject? Is it solely because I have offered what you consider to be countering objections or views? If that is your basis for refusing the discussion between us then your reason is no more than, "I will not openly discuss this issue with a Jehovah's Witness unless the person agrees with me," which means I could not be your brother in faith and have the discussion at the same time. If my disagreeing with you makes me an opposer then your manifest refusal in essence means, "Any Jehovah's Witness who does not agree with the Watchtower Society on this point is an opposer." Then it becomes impossible to hold a discussion of differing views posited in your initial reply, that is one between an experienced Jehovah's Witness with an inside view of the subject. If it is okay for two experienced Jehovah's Witnesses with differing views to discuss this subject then why must it take place in private when we teach the subject publicly? Should not all persons have the benefit of the insight and experience offered in such a discussion of a potentially life and death issue? Though individuals are oftentimes maligned by their fellows for publicly disagreeing with them, it is nevertheless my experience that truth and sound reasoning can easily withstand public scrutiny.

Marvin Shilmer

Endnotes:

[1] (9) The Hebrew word mayim and the Greek word hydor are generic terms which can refer to liquids such as juice and urin. That the red cells were specified as 'blood' in this verse, would not necessarily, according to Semitic thought, rule out that the hydor (water) or a part of it could be called 'blood' in other contexts. Regarding the Hebrew word nephesh ("soul", "life") Leviticus 17:11 says that the soul is 'in' the blood while verse 14 says that the blood 'is' the soul. This does not mean that the rest of the creature is not 'soul', because verse 15 shows that men 'are' souls, and 19:28 speaks of a 'deceased soul', a creature which had been a soul. So in John 18:34 the red cells are specified as 'blood', without excluding that other parts could be specified as 'blood' in other contexts.

## Re:Muramoto: Questions unanswered by Furuli

5 March 2001



**Rolf J. Furuli,**  
Research fellow in  
Semitic languages  
*University of Oslo*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re:Muramoto: Questions unanswered by Furuli](#)

Email Rolf J. Furuli:  
[furuli@online.no](mailto:furuli@online.no)

Dear Dr Muramoto,

You pose some questions and say «It is crucially important that Furuli answer these three questions unambiguously item by item.» I am very much opposed to laying a smokescreen in order to avoid making clearcut answers, but as a professional you know that some questions cannot be answered at all due to different reasons, and others cannot be answered just by 'yes' or 'no'. Your questions are:

- 1.Does Furuli, as a member of the Hospital Liaison Committee, fully respect views and opinions of fellow Witnesses who disagree with him as to which blood fractions are acceptable?
- 2.How can Furuli explain his statement "the conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness is a basis for refusing blood" (Furuli's own words), when disfellowshipping/disassociation is justified for those who followed their Bible-based individual conscience (provided their exegesis on blood is different from Furuli's) and decided to accept blood fractions which are different from Furuli's selection?
- 3.If Furuli genuinely believes that "the conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness" should be respected and "the third party" should not harm the physician-patient relationship, is Furuli willing to write a letter to the Watchtower Society - a major third party - to suggest a reversal of the current recommendation that Jehovah's Witness health care workers breach medical confidentiality of fellow Jehovah's Witnesses and to refrain from intruding on the physician-patient relationship?



1. The answer is 'yes', but I will add that while I respect everyone's right to follow his or her conscience, nobody can refer to this to prove that I condone their choices.

3. The answer is 'no' because the premises of the question are wrong: a) I do not view The Watchtower Society as a 'third party' but I view it the same way that my students view me, as a teacher, and b) I have already shown in the letter to which you refer that Jehovah's Witness health care workers do not breach medical confidentiality of fellow Jehovah's Witnesses, and do not intrude on the physician-patient relationship.

2. This question needs some comments because it is too complicated to be answered by a simple 'yes' or 'no'.

To illuminate the problem I will use two illustrations: The first setting is a married couple who are Witnesses. Suppose the husband starts to have sexual relations with another woman. What does this action indicate? That he has broken up the marriage, and we can say that he is on the way of dissassociating himself from his wife. The wife can now demand that the marriage be dissolved in a legal way. Suppose now that the man insists that the marriage shall not be dissolved; he wants to live with his wife and at the same time continue to have sexual relations with others. Nobody can accuse the wife of any wrong doing if she refuses to continue living with him. Her husband has by his actions shown that he has disassociated himself from his wife, so he can no longer claim his right to live with her. I respect that this man has the right to do the mentioned things, but I heartily disagree with him and will point out that he breaks the law of God.

The other setting is a group of doctors. Suppose some doctors created anonymous web pages where they attacked their colleagues. They accused the leaders of the medical organization where they were members as being dictatorial and not taking care of the interests of the members. They disagreed with their colleagues about the best treatment in particular situations, and they claimed that those who did not agree with them were responsible for killing hundreds, perhaps thousands of children.<sup>(1)</sup> To substantiate their claims they quoted medical articles, but sometimes out of context. At the same time they insisted that they were good colleagues. I suppose that the readers of BMJ will not accept the mentioned doctors as good colleagues. They simply have disassociated themselves from the good company of their fellow doctors, and then they must accept the consequences.

Some readers of the letters in the Muramoto 'chain' may be confused when they read different letters where persons calling themselves 'Jehovah's Witnesses' disagree. The case, however, is that some 'Witnesses' have behaved exactly as the opposing doctors mentioned above, and they have attacked those taking the lead among Jehovah's Witnesses and on the organization. They have even created an organization for the reform of Jehovah's Witness view of the blood issue. These persons have by their actions disassociated themselves from Jehovah's Witnesses, not primarily because of a different view of blood but because of a different view of the very basis for the Christian congregation.

The example above is a clearcut case of someone disassociating themselves. What about less clearcut examples? As I have stated several times, it is an extremely rare for a Witness to accept blood, but of course it can occur. How will I view a situation where this happens? I respect everyone's right to follow his or her conscience, as in the case of the one breaking up the marriage and in the case when someone accepts blood. But what about the relations between a person who accepts blood and the congregation? We should remember that the act of taking blood is not something which in itself severs the relations between a Witness and the congregation. What counts is the sum of his or her acts and the attitude of the heart, i.e. does the actions of the person show that he or she has dissassociated himself or herself from the congregation? Every case is different, and therefore we cannot lay down definite rules which must always be followed. As a conclusion I will say that the official position of Jehovah's Witnesses is that we do not accept an infusion of whole blood or its major components. This is the view of all the Witnesses that I know. If anyone does not accept this and other beliefs, that is his or her privilege, and if someone want to go further and disassociate themselves, that is also their right. But all persons must accept the consequences of their acts.

(1) The word 'children' was carefully chosen, because it would appeal to the emotions of the readers. themselves, that is also their right.

## Re: Re: Muramoto: Questions Unanswered by Furuli

7 March 2001



**Mrs Anne Sanderson,**  
Medical Secretary  
*Falkirk Infirmary FK1 5QE*

Re: Re: Muramoto: Questions Unanswered by Furuli

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Re: Muramoto: Questions Unanswered by Furuli](#)

I was impressed with Furuli's ingenious illustrations which he used to answer outstanding questions put to him by Muramoto. The JW way of thinking has been beautifully expressed and, looking at the issues purely from a JW point of view (which I am able to do), I want to congratulate Furuli at the outset for putting the JW case so well. In fact, I'd like to propose three cheers for Furuli; he's a brick and the WTS ought to be proud of him.

Email Mrs Anne Sanderson:  
[annesan@lineone.net](mailto:annesan@lineone.net)

As it is, the WTS has been making bullets for others to fire whilst they hide silently behind brave individuals like Furuli, who's standing virtually alone in the front line, taking all the flak. So could I suggest we bear in mind the fact that Furuli is doing something that needs to be encouraged - he's using his brains to engage in a public debate for a cause he feels passionately about. Let's do all we can to encourage other JW's to do likewise. Dialogue is everything.

Now, those answers and their wonderful illustrations... I simply want to comment on a few points, not all, as Muramoto's response will be the important one.

Answer No. 3 (a): "I do not view The Watchtower Society as a 'third party' but I view it the same way that my students view me, as a teacher."

The WTS originated the idea that their members ought to refuse blood treatments, even to the point of death. From 1961, when acting out of harmony with this policy resulted in being disfellowshipped, there was almost total uptake of the policy, world-wide, very quickly. Prior to 1961, how many individual JW's even thought about refusing blood transfusions? Would any of them ever have come - independently - to the conclusions stated in the 15 January 1961 'Watchtower' magazine about blood? No. The only reason millions of JW's suddenly began to refuse blood is because of what a dozen or so men in New York said in that magazine. The fact that the WTS said in 1945 that taking blood was "pagan and God-dishonoring" [1] yet no discernible avoidance of blood by JW's happened till 1961 proves the case. The WTS threat of being disfellowshipped effected the change.

At that point, the WTS became an uninvited third party in the JW-physician relationship. They created this triangle and continue to play their crucial role in influencing JW's decisions for it is clear in this debate that the WTS saying JW's have the right to act according to their individual consciences is hollow. Until they step back, taking with them their veiled threats of not surviving Armageddon, and being shunned, no freedom of conscience exists at all. The fact that a few JW's insist it does only shows how unaware they are of what constitutes true freedom. People who ask questions of JW's to ascertain whether they really know what the blood refusal policy entails can never be accused of being an unhelpful third party. Even if they ask with a view to changing JW's minds, so what? JW's spend all their spare time trying to question others with a view to changing their minds (religiously) and insist that's their God-given right. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

The next point, that the WTS is merely 'a teacher' in the same way that Furuli views himself, is sad. I have a copy of the 'Watchtower' magazine which has the pre-1975 article, "They Shall Know That A Prophet Was Among Them" wherein the WTS claimed to be Jehovah's modern-day 'prophet'[2] - quickly denied after 1975 [3]. But let's be glad for a degree of modesty, even if over-due. Let's assume the WTS is merely 'a teacher'. Yes, the Governing Body in New York teaches all JW's. But what kind of teaching do elders do? They merely parrot what the WTS tells them to say in talks, at meetings and assemblies, or when counselling JW's. No elder dares say anything that has not been printed by the WTS. A few have the imagination to rephrase WTS ideas in their own words, but any 'teacher' at congregation level who is discovered teaching anything other than what the revered Governing Body has already said will be silenced and/or put out. All the teaching is contained in WTS literature. If there were no elders, the teaching in the literature would carry on intact and be just as effective, the questions at the bottom of study articles/books doing the real teaching. JW's who conduct studies are simply the doll that the ventroloquist uses.

Answer 2, illustration No. 1: The adulterous JW husband and his faithful JW wife.

Paralleling dissident JW's with the husband to show they must be 'put out' for they are the ones who have dissolved the relationship is entirely reasonable, at a surface level. But the relationship in question is not that of member JW's with the WTS; it is supposed to be that of all JW's (leaders as well as rank and file members) with Jehovah God! There's something Freudian about equating an attack on "those taking the lead among Jehovah's Witnesses and on the organization" with an attack on God. It speaks volumes. The WTS view [on blood] is "the very basis for the Christian congregation", is it? Let's put this illustration another way.

What if the husband is accused by his wife of adultery but he has not committed adultery at all? His wife refuses to speak to him from the moment she suspects him of this crime so he cannot tell her how misconstrued her ideas are. She won't even go to a mediator with him so that both sides can be put calmly. You see, her idea of adultery is his buying books explaining how men are from Mars and women are from Venus. She thinks those books are pornographic (without even having looked at them) and that he must be having an affair with some other woman.

JW's who disagree with WTS teaching on the blood policy have not committed spiritual adultery against God. They are striving to be faithful to God's rightful demand that life be treated as sacred because it is from him, and all who are responsible for taking human life will answer to God. Such JW's are worried that the WTS will be found blood-guilty before God. They are alarmed that a tiny core of JW's (the Governing Body) are demanding obedience that equates with the kind of loyalty only God is entitled to. (Or, if they are not, they ought to be.) The WTS has adulterated its relationship with God by insisting salvation is dependent on obeying its core policies. Anyone who adds a requirement for salvation to the finished work of Christ has adulterated the gospel. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that failing to "abstain from blood" will prohibit salvation.

Answer 2, illustration No. 2: Dissident doctors working via an anonymous web-page to attack their colleagues.

If the medical profession had a practice that grossly violated patients' basic human rights and the only way to effect change was to work secretly, from within, then yes, that would be the right thing to do. And good luck to them. They would need it if management acted like God to that extent. Now, let's hear it from Muramoto...

[1] "Watchtower" 1 July 1945 pp 198-201 [2] "Watchtower" 1 April 1972 pp 197-200: "He [God] had a 'prophet' to warn them. This 'prophet' was not one man, but was a body of men and women. It was the small group of footstep followers of Jesus Christ, known at that time as International Bible Students. Today they are known as Jehovah's Witnesses." [3] "Watchtower" 15 May

## Scope of "abstain", fragmentation issues, policing vs reason, moral obligations within JW community.

7 March  
2001



**Mike Parsons,**  
Jehovah's Witness  
*Supporter of AJWRB*

Send response to journal:

[Re: Scope of "abstain",  
fragmentation issues, policing  
vs reason, moral obligations  
within JW community.](#)

Email Mike Parsons:  
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Rolf J. Furuli has confirmed that the view of JWs in relation to the "apostolic decree" is indeed interpreted as blanket cover. In his opinion: "The words of Acts 15:29 is said to come from God, and neither the words nor the context contain any qualification! The result of an analysis of the passage based on a normal use of lexicon, grammar, and syntax, is that the prohibition against blood is absolute and without exceptions." [3]

I understand that medical staff generally do not wish to be drawn into biblical issues, but I will do so on behalf of those who are JWs themselves, and employed in the medical profession, for Furuli's words, as an expert in biblical languages will carry much weight in their eyes.

Regarding the specific passage, I acknowledge that there is no qualification in the expression "to abstain from ... blood". I am not an expert in these languages, and I have no wish to dispute this passage in isolation. I do not however think that the whole story is being told.

What the reader is unlikely to know is that the word to "abstain" used here is actually used elsewhere in the bible, in which it is not meant in a all-inclusive sense. For instance, 1Timothy 4:3 refers "...commanding to abstain from foods...". This obviously cannot mean to abstain in an all-inclusive sense, as to do so would lead to starvation.

Examining the 2 texts in The Amplified Bible (a Greek/English version), which uses brackets "[]" for words NOT included in the original Greek demonstrates this:

Acts 15:20 "But we should send word to them in writing to abstain from and avoid anything that has been polluted by being offered to idols, and all sexual impurity, and [meat of animals] that have been strangled, and [tasting] of blood."

1 Timothy 4:3 "Who forbid people to marry and [teach them] to abstain from [certain kinds of] foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and have (an increasingly clear) knowledge of the truth."

It is quite possible that, as Furuli comments, "...those attending the meeting of elders where the Christian prohibition against blood was written down (See Acts 15), would think of eating and drinking blood as well." [3]. If that were so, then their thoughts on this matter would indeed be the entire scope of the abstention, although not explicitly expressed.

An interesting insight into this matter can also be obtained from the context, and intent of this statement.

The statement was issued as a "ruling" on the matter of Gentiles who were converted to Christianity. Some of the Jews considered that the converted Gentiles should be made to follow the Mosaic Law. [Acts 15:5] Others made the argument that some Gentiles had already accepted the gospel [Acts 15:7], and that God had already demonstrated approval of these ones by giving them the Holy Spirit. The apostle James then said: "It is my judgement, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God..." [Acts 15:19]

I am most curious as to how expanding the Mosaic Law could possibly be reconciled with this intent. It is evident that the apostles were intending to limit, rather than expand upon an existing requirement. At worse, they were intending to transfer certain laws from the Mosaic Law into the Gentile Christian community. Those laws were those that were already existing for "alien residents" (gentiles) existing amongst the Israelite nation.

That the Holy Spirit (and not God as Furuli states) saw no need to burden the Gentiles with an expanded requirement is evident from the fact that it (the Holy Spirit) was already amongst them and in their success prior to this decree.

There is therefore no real need to treat the text as a blanket statement, as Furuli suggests, although it may seem to read that way. The whole picture does not warrant that opinion.

I would also like to consider some of the peculiarities of the blood fraction vs sub-fraction issue. Both Patrick McShea [2] and also Furuli [1,3] have commented on this issue.

McShea has clarified his position regarding how he can hold good conscience and accept certain blood fragments, whilst not being able to accept others, or indeed any of the WTS prohibited fractions. He has also discussed his views on the considered necessity to "police" the congregation in order to keep it clean of people who "show no respect for blood".

The fragmentation issue, and the questions it raises are interesting in their own right.

McShea's particular position, if I understood it correctly, is in agreement with the WTS position on platelets, white blood cells and red blood cells (but plasma was not discussed).

Essentially, we can model this concept by imagining we had a machine in which we could place blood, put it on a "high" setting, and it would fragment it below it's cellular level of structure, isolate and purify each fragment entity, and pour it into separate jars. People could then select which jars of product they would permit and those that they would likewise reject.

McShea's particular position, on sub-fractions was a sub-set of what the WTS permits without making issue, theirs being an all-inclusive set, but his limited to "ones that do not naturally occur". McShea may therefore not select glucose or water, but the WTS would permit these fragments. As McShea has clearly defined his model, rejection of relative weight of the product as being relevant within that model is acknowledged, and I consider it fitting to do so within such a model. McShea would suffer no particular hardship relative to the WTS position, for by the very criteria of his elimination rule, the rejected substances must exist in other sources that could be drawn upon. This is of course McShea's personal choice (it has no stated scriptural foundation).

McShea would then be left with the unique items, that did not exist outside of blood, but that had been produced by in some way damaging blood from it's natural state.

McShea's reasons were not expressed, so I can only surmise that it may be based upon some kind of necessity for a "damaging" process that somehow equates to the Mosaic law (that is not binding on Christians) requirement to pour out blood of an animal killed for food onto the ground and cover it with dust (not a requirement of God's law to Noah).

Some could have objections to the validity of this position, since covering it with dust was intended to render it useless.

Others would indeed follow on with questions as to why, if these items are unique to blood, are other unique items (structures) not also permitted in the scope of people's conscience. In effect, if we had put the machine on a "low" setting, and fragmented it into the fractions in use today, what is the distinction here? Both item sets are unique to blood.

I am greatly curious as to the principles that allow McShea (and more importantly the WTS, as controlling agent of the JW community) to do this, as opposed to render the blood useless (as required in the Mosaic law). It is not that I would wish to put doubt in anyone's mind as to the use of these products, for I would wholeheartedly agree that there is no biblical moral ground to deny their use in my mind. I would state though that my basis for their use is different from his.

For it could indeed be argued that the issue of ownership comes into the debate if we accept the WTS position on this. McShea acknowledges that he would possibly be a beneficiary of a "crime" in his own eyes if he were to accept such treatment. The dissenters however do not believe that donated human blood is within the scope of God's law to Noah, so there is no ownership issue to be resolved for them. The ownership issue most certainly does exist in the case with the WTS view, as they consider ANY blood source to belong to God. Could it not be said that someone who held the opinion that an item (all blood) belonged to God is in fact handling "stolen goods" in their own eyes if they accept any blood component, whether whole, or in part, or in damaged form even? In the case of possibly unbled meat, ignorance can be claimed. This is not the case with any blood fragment. Would God consider such a person's conscience clean if he took what he considered to belong to God, but someone else had "stolen" and damaged in some manner?

Although focus has been on medical treatment, the very concept that "its not blood any more" would imply that eating such items would also be without judgement from the WTS.

Thus on the issue of having a "gross disrespect for blood", the tables could indeed be turned around if we were to accept the WTS position.

I find it most peculiar that people adopting this view are tolerated in the JW community, whilst yet others are expelled. Curiously, those who are expelled are of the opinion that they would NOT be stealing from God, for it is only a certain blood (the blood of an animal killed for food) that is mentioned in the account of God's law to Noah (and henceforth to mankind). It is not even the act (eating) that is important, but the very thought of holding another view, and expressing it. In one instance, the individual is answerable only to God ; in another, the individual is answerable first and foremost to the WTS (and then a further judgement by God later on).

This situation must indeed give rise to concerns over the WTS moral integrity, and the reader will likely marvel at this.

I would ask McShea, or any others, if they would indeed give hearing to those who expressed such genuine concerns over the blood issue, and still find them showing a "gross disrespect for blood". For these concerns are not out of a matter of convenience or a mere whim, let alone outright rebellion against the Bible, but express genuine concern and attention to the issue.

I would further ask as to why, given the nature of the issue, and the severity of consequence involved in "getting it wrong" (both to individuals, family members, mankind and to God), there is so much suppression. Just raising the issue, and even demonstrating a hint of alternate views inevitably

leads to confrontation by the church elders and subsequent expulsion for continuing to have concerns or doubts (let alone thought out views). There is no real discussion. It is a case of "recant your views or else face the consequences". The answer of course is that the elders in the congregation choose to uphold the position of the WTS. Any other view simply cannot be entertained, no matter how frail the WTS position is. It is the WTS who chooses (and teaches) to identify those who do not agree with their position as "opposers", for it automatically has judged their intent, and seeks to isolate them with a "them and us" attitude, even before they come to the foreground.

Surely the WTS has a moral obligation on its part to accept constructive criticism. To not accept correction from this source is to deny that there is any moral obligation for community members and those in a leadership position to each other.

The WTS has assumed the role of teacher in scriptural matters. That position places much responsibility upon them. Furuli has pointed out that:

"In connection with any subject which has to be learned, there is a need for teachers to guide us through the knowledge which is accumulated by others, and to point out important data for us. Similarly, there is a need for guidance when we are going to work out our ethical principles on the basis of our English translations of the Bible. And here is one area where Muramoto errs: the responsible persons among Jehovah's Witnesses who organise the world-wide community are portrayed as prophets who force their arbitrary decisions upon the individual Witness, while they are no more than teachers, whose teaching can be checked by the individual Witness. There can be two reasons why the individual Witness is very receptive to what is written in the literature from the Watchtower society and what is said in the congregation ..."

I have no issue with the principle of requiring teachers. However, the picture painted here by Furuli does not quite hold true to reality.

For instance, their role to "point out important data for us" is acknowledged as being a worthy one. How is this be reconciled though with the selectivity that is evident in the views that they present. Can it really be said that "due diligence" has been demonstrated by them in arriving at the conclusions of what they teach?

The "to guide us through the knowledge which is accumulated by others" phrase is a real mockery of those who are familiar with the issue at hand. How can the WTS or its "loyal ones" make such claims in view of its suppression of the opinions of some who hold alternative views. This is more accurately described as "to guide us AROUND (in an avoidance sense) the knowledge which is accumulated by others".

Regarding "the responsible persons among Jehovah's Witnesses who organize the world-wide community are portrayed as prophets who force their arbitrary decisions upon the individual Witness, while they are no more than teachers, whose teaching can be checked by the individual Witness." ... well, this really takes the biscuit! Some who "check out" the teaching have found alternative conclusions. Can it be said that they do not "force their arbitrary decisions upon the individual Witness" when they are expelled? Likewise, "what is said in the congregation" equates to teachings from the platform, or views in support of the WTS position, and do not include any other.

So the picture portrayed of the underlying framework is certainly not a balanced one. The thoughts that have been put into the minds of the JW community are only those from the WTS. I am not sure of how the role of prophet comes into it. No prophecy is involved with this issue. It's just a plain case of presenting selective views in support of a strange position, and suppressing everything to the contrary. You can call this teaching, if you wish. Others would not hold that view.

Everyone who is familiar with the story of "the emperor who had no clothes" will understand that it took just one child to point out the obvious, and everyone started murmuring. It took very little to change the established view of the community. The stark truth rapidly took hold.

It would, however, have been a very different ending if the small child, and anyone else who dared murmur, were expelled from the community, and into a faraway land.

This is how the existing "truth" (position) is maintained. The expulsion is a mental one. The label is "opposer".

For those who have accepted this position for many years, having been continuously fed a single sided argument, and much negative information about blood, the realisation of a balanced picture is not arrived at so easily. To state that people can possibly hold this opinion as a matter of conscience, as if it were arrived at by drawing their own conclusions, and that no other party has had anything other than an inconsequential or unintentional influence in this matter is absurd.

Dr Muramoto quite rightly identifies that this situation exists. If suppression of freedom of speech in this matter within the JW community is not interference, I don't know what is.

As I have earlier expressed, the existence of such defence mechanisms within the group can keep existing views trapped. The group as a whole cannot self-police. Whilst the blood-issue is possibly not the singularly held trapped view, it is indeed the most dangerous. Continuation of this view is indeed causing unnecessary deaths, not in a focal point area, but dispersed throughout the globe



and throughout time. Furuli may consider this just emotional play[4], but his role as a HLC member must surely expose him to the consequences of following the policy from time to time.

Furuli has also raised the issue of some "having a different view of the very basis for the Christian congregation." [4]

He asserts that "These persons have by their actions disassociated themselves from Jehovah's Witnesses, not primarily because of a different view of blood but because of a different view of the very basis for the Christian congregation." [4]

Furuli is probably aware of the current wording of the "baptism questions", which the individual witnesses answer "yes" to prior to their baptism (induction). These now mysteriously read as if they were in part a dedication to the "organisation". He sees it as some form of contract that a witness breaks if he is in disagreement with the WTS, and has thus in effect terminated their right to exist within that group.

Regardless of the exact wording, what most JW's undertake in their baptism (induction) is intended to be a dedication to God. The position of the WTS or "organisation" is supposed to be subservient to that. To expel (or define as self expelled) members who have genuine concerns, and express their views with other members of that group, and demonstrate that there is no biblical basis for the current policy is indeed raising bigger issues, as to whether it is God or the WTS that is the master. For the issue surrounding the blood policy are not within the domain of being a "black art", such that no-one can understand them without some special gift - they can be clearly demonstrated.

It must be remembered that part of the reason for becoming a member of the JW group was that it was believed that their teachings accurately represented those held in the bible. Whilst that was the case, people accepted that change may indeed come in future time. In that respect, the belief set cannot be held as if it were a fixed contract. It was also done on the basis that others within the group were acting on their behalf in refining bible knowledge. This was the basis for trust. The current situation with the blood policy's frail (actually non-existent) grounding, and the fact that it continues to be perpetuated with such methods surely must raise issues regarding whether the leaders are continuing to act in the best interests of the members of the JW community.

This being as it is, Dr Muromoto has raised an important issue regarding how medical staff treat JW patients.

#### References:

[1] The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness as a basis for refusing blood. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL52>.

[2] Why I accept minor blood fractions-Further clarification. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL60>.

[3] Why do Jehovah's Witnesses abstain from blood? <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL63>.

[4] Re:Muramoto: Questions unanswered by Furuli. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL74>.

## Re: Letters from Thomas Daniels

7 March 2001



**Rolf J. Furuli,**  
Research fellow in  
Semitic languages  
*University of Oslo*

Sir.

What is important for the readers of a medical journal is the ethical side of the treatment of Jehovah's Witnesses. This naturally includes a descriptive account of the beliefs of the Witnesses regarding blood, but hardly a normative discussion, i.e. an exchange of opinions whether that belief is correct or not. By having an idea of the reasons why the Witnesses refuse blood, an important premise for a balanced assessment of the ethical questions is established. It appears that I have not been able to communicate effectively the reasons why I and my fellow Witnesses refuse blood to the (pseudonym?) Thomas Daniels. While I hope this is my last letter in this chain of exchanges, I will try to correct this situation.

#### PRINCIPLES ARE ETERNAL - LAWS DO CHANGE

There are very few laws that govern the Christian way of life, but many principles. A principle is a 'fundamental truth', and fundamental truths in connection with God never change (Malachi 3:6). Laws are often an application of one or more principles in a restricted situation. This is the reason why three of the laws mentioned in Acts 15:28, 'to abstain from fornication, things strangled and blood' are based on the very same principle, namely, 'God is the source of life' (Psalm 36:10). For example, in order to give a child the best possible environment for growing up to become a balanced and happy human being, sex between persons is restricted to marriage. For instance, a couple living together without being married, may have a more stable relationship and show more love for one another than some married couples, but they are not willing to take the final step, a legal marriage where they are permanently bound to one another. Thus any children may not have the best possible environment, and the Witnesses therefore view sexual relations inside such a union as fornication.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Letters from Thomas Daniels](mailto:Re: Re: Letters from Thomas Daniels)

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The different situations of ancient Israel and the Christian congregation may also help us realise the difference between laws and principles. It is obvious that principles will be applied differently (materializing in particular laws) in a society which is restricted to a particular area (Palestine), where the literal temple of God stands, and where the laws of God regulate both the secular and religious life, than among the Christians who are spread around the world, who have no literal temple, and who are bound by the secular laws in their country. However - and this is very important - principles whose application are not affected by the differences between Israel and the Christian society will materialize in exactly the same laws in both societies. For instance, the principle that only the Creator deserves worship is not affected whether the people of God is a nation with literal borders and a temple, or whether they are spread around the globe and worship without the help of anything visible. Some of the laws of Moses, therefore, are binding for Christians, not because they are a part of the Mosaic law, which is abolished, but because they build on principles which are not affected by the situation in which the people of God is.

#### THE PRINCIPLES ON WHICH THE PROHIBITION AGAINST BLOOD ARE BASED

Connected with the principle 'God is the source of life' is another principle, namely, 'the life of all creatures belongs to God' (Ezekiel 18:4). Based on these two principles the 'use' of life has been and is greatly restricted: 1) life should only be given to others inside marriage, 2) the life of human beings should not be taken (except when it is directly commanded by God), (Genesis 9:6), 3) when animals were slaughtered for food, their life, represented by their blood, should be treated in a way showing that the life is given back to God (Leviticus 17:10-12)(1). Thus in ancient Israel the blood of humans should not be spilled except when God commanded it, and the spilled blood of humans should not be used for anything at all. Animals could be slaughtered for food, but their blood should not be used. There was, however, one exception: blood was used on the altar because "it is the blood that makes atonement" (Leviticus 17:11). In Israel animals were sacrificed for the sins of the people; in the Christian arrangement Jesus was offered once and for all (Hebrews 10:10).

Blood has represented life in the days of Noah, under the Mosaic law, and in the Christian order. This means that the regulations of the use of blood (based on the mentioned principles) are not affected by the situation of the people of God. This is shown throughout the Bible where the only legitimate use of blood (2) is on the altar (animal sacrifices in Israel and the sacrifice of Jesus in the Christian order). All other uses are prohibited, not by a long list of prohibitions, but simply by the fact that blood belongs to God and that he has stated that it should be poured out on the ground.(3) So, because God is the source of life and life belongs to God, we are not allowed to give life to others through procreation except inside marriage, we are not allowed to use blood in any way to sustain our life by eating it, and we are not allowed to use blood for any purpose.(4)

#### THE CHRISTIAN LAW AGAINST BLOOD

In Acts 15:28-29 we find some of the laws given to Christians "to keep abstaining from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication". There are no qualifications found in the context, so if the text is taken at face value, every prohibition is absolute and without exceptions. Some have argued that the commandments were just given for a short period, others say the word "blood" means only blood from animals, or only blood which is offered on the altar, and others say that the law only relates to taking blood through the mouth, and still others say that the laws should not be kept if life is at stake. I respect other peoples' right to make their own interpretations and follow their own conscience, but I would just like to point out that all these interpretations restrict the law, and there is nothing in the words themselves or in the context which justifies that. Thus something is taken away from the word of God. As for me, and I think for my fellow Witnesses (though I am not a spokesman for others), I dare not make any exceptions because such are not stated.

Let me elucidate this standpoint. The view that the laws in Acts 15:29 only includes actions which were known in the first century, has no founding. For instance, it is evident that sophisticated ways of committing fornication or sacrificing to idols invented in the 20th century is included. This can be ascertained if we realise that the laws are built on principles which are eternal. But let me be more specific. To participate in a sacrificial meal in connection with the worship of an idol is obviously included in the command to abstain from 'things sacrificed to idols', but what if we do not eat the meat but are present at the meal and participate in all the other things? Or, do we break the commandment if we function as a waiter and serve the sacrificial meal but we don't eat ourselves? Or, what if we let the worshipers rent our house and we arrange for the meal but do not participate ourselves? Obviously it is not only the act of eating that would violate the command, so it is not the matter, 'meat' that it important, even though it is the medium by which the wrong acts are done.

We may also use 'things strangled' and 'fornication' as examples. If I were completely isolated and the only possible food was a strangled animal, could I eat it without breaking God's law? Or what about fornication? Is it prohibited in certain situations, but not other situations, if for instance the man and the woman are in love? Or what about artificial insemination with semen from a man with whom the woman is not married? The text in Acts 15 is without exceptions, so the laws must be applied without any exceptions.

The examples above, particularly the one discussing 'sacrifice to idols' can illuminate Daniels' problem. After quoting my words, "The focus, therefore, should not be on the purpose of using blood, but rather on the question 'What is included in 'blood' (haima)?' Everything which is 'blood' is forbidden.", he writes: "Suddenly it is the matter, blood itself that is important, and not the action, its

associative context or purpose. On the surface, at least, this seems to be terribly inconsistent and even self-serving.. " (5) The solution is very simple. To take blood or blood components into the body do not physically pollute the body, except in the cases where disease is transmitted, but the act of disobedience in connection with the sanctity of life is connected with the fluid 'blood'. Therefore it is important to ascertain whether a particular component 'is' haima in the Biblical sense of the word, because only by using what really is 'blood' is God's law violated. While the matter, blood, is unimportant in itself, breaking the law 'to abstain from blood' cannot be done if the matter, blood, is not present.

#### STATISTICS AND THE INDIVIDUAL PATIENT

In a letter Daniels criticises my application of the words of Dr. Kitchen (6). His analysis of Kitchen's article is sound, but he seems to have missed my primary point. The quote was used as one piece of evidence to show the falsity of the claim that 'abstaining of blood' on the part of the Witnesses has resulted in the sacrifice (killing) of hundreds, perhaps thousands of children. Two of the premises behind this claim are that blood transfusions do not kill anyone and that refusing them kills great numbers of people. Both premises are wrong, and the mentioned article shows that. I need not quote more articles to substantiate this, because it is commonly known that transfusions of blood often transmit disease (i.e. there are between 1000 and 10-million potential carriers of Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease in the UK(7)), and may even in a short time cause the death of those being transfused.

It is true that for a person with an extremely low hemoglobin level, there is little comfort in statistics showing that blood transfusions may kill; what is important for that patient is her situation. However, the Witnesses have been pioneers in the treatment of such situations. Here in Norway we have been publicly commended for this work. The HLC has over and over again stressed the following point for doctors: «If you have blood at your disposal you will think and behave differently from what you would if blood was ruled out. So why don't you acquire the knowledge of bloodless surgery before a crisis occurs and do some planning in case of a crisis?» An effective bloodless treatment of patients with extremely low hemoglobin or platelet levels must be based upon knowledge and planning. One 'bloodless team' at a hospital in Oslo has for years ordained injections of EPO and intravenous iron in the patient during a period of 30 days before the operation. Thus the hemoglobin level becomes artificially high and is increasing. The blood loss is evaluated continually, and if it drops to a certain level, the operation is halted, the patient is given some days to recover, and the operation is completed later.

When statistics are applied to the Witnesses in order to compare death rates and survival rates, the fact should be remembered that, due to the standpoint and active work of the Witnesses, doctors have learned a lot and have invented many new methods in the treatment of patients with low blood levels. This has greatly increased the prospects for such patients. So, while it is correct that "Group statistics have little to do with the ultimate causes or mortality associated with individual cases and patients." (8), it is also true that 'traditional group views of the mortality of patients with extremely low hemoglobin levels have little to do with the survival rate of Witness patients in this situation who are treated with the latest methods which have been developed'.

(1) Note that in the days of the tabernacle it was not enough to pour the blood out on the ground, but it should be poured out at the entrance of the tabernacle (Leviticus 17:3-9). This shows that the pouring out of the blood was a religious act; it indicated that the life was given back to God.

(2) By the words «use of blood» I mean of course the use of the blood of other creatures and not my own. The arguments of Daniels that I use my own blood and therefore am inconsistent when I say that blood cannot be used, are strange indeed.

(3) Those who opt for the use of blood, claiming it has a biblical backing, should be able to point to places in the Bible showing that the use of blood is allowed.

(4) While I in principle see no difference between eating and a blood transfusion, my custom is not to use this in conversations regarding blood, because it does not cover all situations. For me, the absolute prohibition of any use of blood is the ultimate reason for refusing to take haima into my body, and this I convey to others.

(5) Daniels, T. (a) <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37>, 5 February 2001.

(6) Daniels, T. (b) <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37>, 5 February 2001.

(7) The Medical Post, November 24, 1998, p. 5.

(8) Daniels, T. (b) <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37>, 5 February 2001

#### Is the WTS a major third-party?

8 March 2001



**Michael Ramfield,**  
Jehovah's Witness

I am a Jehovah's Witness who disagrees with the Watchtowers policy concerning blood transfusions. I would like to comment on Mr. Furuli's response to question 3 posed from Dr. Muramoto [1].

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Is the WTS a major third-party?](#)

Mr. Furuli maintains his position that he does not view the Watchtower Society as a third party who

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harms the physician-patient relationship. He makes the comment that Jehovah's Witness health care workers do not breach medical confidentiality of fellow Jehovah's Witnesses. He says this is so because such situations are extremely rare - as he puts, it, "I am quite sure that among medical personnel who belong to the 15,000 Witnesses of Norway there is not a single example of this situation [Witnesses who breach medical confidentiality] within the last ten years."

However, whether or not the situations are rare, the fact remains Jehovah's Witnesses are instructed to breach medical confidentiality if it concerns the spiritual wellness of a congregation member. Dr. Muramoto referred to a 1987 Watchtower article that encourages Witnesses who have access to confidential medical information to breach confidentiality and report such cases to the congregation. I can assure you this is a practiced teaching. I've experienced it personally. Three years ago, in my congregation, a brother was disfellowshipped after a woman in the congregation, who worked in the hospital where the brother was being treated, reported to the elders that this brother had received a blood transfusion. She had no personal connection with this brother other than their association within the Organization. They didn't even belong to the same congregation. So how did she find out this brother had received a transfusion? It later became known in the congregation that she had done some investigating while she was working after she became suspicious. How did other congregation members respond to her "finding out" this brother? To put it bluntly, she was praised by other congregation members for her superlative investigating work, that rooted out this weed of a brother.

So is the Watchtower Society a third party who harms the physician-patient relationship? As Mr. Furuli notes, the Watchtower Society is our teacher. And they teach us to break medical confidentiality. So from this teaching, I believe it's obvious the Watchtower Society is a major third party. There is also another reason the Watchtower Society is a major third party. It punishes members who disagree with their policy on blood by disfellowshipping them. Whether or not the blood policy is correct, and whether or not enforced shunning is correct, the fact remains that members of the congregation who receive transfusions will be subject to shunning from friends and family members, if their transfusion is found out. This is a tremendous scare tactic. It scares me.

I recently had minor surgery. The doctor informed me that the probability of me needing a transfusion was very small, but he would like to play it safe by having me donate some of my own blood prior to the surgery. This practice is also prohibited according to the Watchtower Society. At the time, I was in the presence of my wife. So my choices were to tell him, "o.k., let's do it", or to inform him of my position of abstaining from blood transfusions, even if it's my own blood, because of my convictions as a Jehovah's Witness. Since I disagree with the scriptural foundation of our blood policy, I wanted to say "o.k., let's do it." However, because I was in the presence of my wife, I knew that if I said it, my wife, in addition to being awe-struck, would feel the pressure to report me to the elders. So, since the risk was minor, I took my chances and informed my doctor of my position to reject any blood transfusion. The risk was minor, but the fact is I put my life on the line because of the reality of the consequences of even suggesting I would receive a transfusion of my own blood if I needed it.

These situations are real. The teaching that we should breach medical confidentiality if necessary, is real. If I, who am a very competent person and who has studied the scriptures rigorously and has come up with the conclusion that blood transfusions do not violate Jehovah's law, can be "scared" into refusing a transfusion, I wonder how many other Witnesses are out there who, if given a chance, would reconsider any declarations made concerning their stand on blood transfusions.

Is the Watchtower Society a "major" third-party in the physician-patient relationship. I think the answer is obvious.

Michael

[1] Muramoto's question: If Furuli genuinely believes that "the conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness" should be respected and "the third party" should not harm the physician-patient relationship, is Furuli willing to write a letter to the Watchtower Society - a major third party - to suggest a reversal of the current recommendation that Jehovah's Witness health care workers breach medical confidentiality of fellow Jehovah's Witnesses and to refrain from intruding on the physician-patient relationship?

Furuli's response: The answer is 'no' because the premises of the question are wrong: a) I do not view The Watchtower Society as a 'third party' but I view it the same way that my students view me, as a teacher, and b) I have already shown in the letter to which you refer that Jehovah's Witness health care workers do not breach medical confidentiality of fellow Jehovah's Witnesses, and do not intrude on the physician-patient relationship.

## For The Physicians

8 March 2001

**Marvin Shilmer,**  
 Elder  
*Jehovah's Witness*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: For The Physicians](#)

Email Marvin Shilmer:  
[mshilmer@hotmail.com](mailto:mshilmer@hotmail.com)

TO THE PHYSICIAN:

Frustration does not begin to describe the emotion that so many Witnesses feel who realize the serious faults in Furuli's reasoning in the face of sound objections. Compounding that frustration is a sense of sincere disappointment that naturally ensues from watching those we love avoid difficult though necessary details and aspects of issues. This is compounded yet again when the very center of our earthly brotherhood, the Watchtower Society, avoids the same issues time and again. In the end all this takes a heavy toll on the trust that should exist within that association of brothers, my association of brothers. It also takes a heavy toll on the physical, emotional and spiritual health of the

fine people in my faith that realize what the Watchtower Society, and now Furuli and others, have failed to account for in terms of sound reasoning.

#### THE FAILING:

##### Foundation Principle:

Once again Furuli contends that a foundation principle for our teaching on blood transfusion rests on the biblical teachings that 'God is the source of life,' that 'the life of all creatures belongs to God' and that 'Blood represents life.' (Psalm 36:10; Ezekiel 18:4; Genesis 9) This is the same foundation that the Watchtower Society refers to as a "fundamental ethical norm."<sup>[1]</sup> What he fails to argue true is that our specific application of this "fundamental ethical norm" is correct. Just restating a fundamental idea does not make a specific application of that idea correct, and our stance as Jehovah's Witnesses on transfusion is a specific application.

##### Unfounded Assertion:

As outlined above<sup>[2]</sup>, Furuli's arguments depend upon specific premises that are either unsound or false. Even his latest argument contains a huge and wholly unfounded premise that "throughout the Bible... all other uses"<sup>[3]</sup> of blood are prohibited, with the sole exception being sacrificial use of blood. Please, brother Furuli, show just where Noah was prohibited from using blood aside from eating blood of slaughtered animals!

##### Qualification?:

In his discussion of the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15 Furuli asserts that "there are no qualifications found in the context." For that reason Furuli contends that "every prohibition [therein] is absolute and without exceptions."<sup>[3]</sup> Assuming that is true, then without exception should Christians abide by that unqualified prohibition from blood as righteous Noah was required or as Jews were required? Certainly the Mosaic Law required Jews to abstain from blood more so than the text of Genesis 9 required of Noah. I would agree with Furuli that qualifying an otherwise unqualified biblical tenet is unsound, but is that the case here? Does Furuli argue that the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15 stands on its own merit without being qualified by other Bible texts? Certainly he does no such thing! In fact he does just the opposite by constantly relying on tenets of the Mosaic Law as qualifiers. Why then does he insist upon applying tenets of the Mosaic Law to the Apostolic Decree as a qualifier when it is self evident that righteous Noah was not held to those same qualifiers? (I.e., exactly what Biblical text required Noah to trash blood onto the ground, or, for instance, where exactly was Noah prohibited from using blood to paint pictures or dye his clothing?) If God's prohibition to Noah sufficiently covered God's fundamental concerns on blood then what changed since then? If we rule out the idea of change in a fundamental norm (which Furuli does) then why should we believe that Christian abstention from blood requires more than was required of righteous Noah? Again, a valid question is: Can we dogmatically conclude that Christians must abide by blood prohibitions as was required of Jews rather than what was required by righteous Noah? Furuli has yet to answer or even address this question, a question that qualifies the text of Acts 15:28,29, a question that gets to the very heart of Furuli's conclusions. Why?

##### Avoidance:

Remarkably, in Furuli's depiction of counter arguments he leaves out the one that most threatens his own, that the same principle he espouses equally supports the view that eating blood is prohibited for Christians only when that blood is obtained by killing. That is exactly the extent of application of Furuli's favored principle that Genesis 9 applies to Noah. Rather than 'taking away from the word of God' as Furuli would assert<sup>[3]</sup>, that conclusion depends precisely upon God's word without adding to or taking away from it. Beyond equally supporting Furuli's favored principle, the only way the Biblical text of Deuteronomy 14:21 can harmonize with that principle is if it applies solely to blood of slaughtered animals<sup>[4]</sup>. Is Furuli willing to argue that God would voluntarily and unilaterally provide unslaughtered and unbled animal carcasses to persons expressly for consumption in spite of the fact that eating such unbled flesh is a thing abhorrent to Him?

##### PHYSICIANS:

I believe Furuli knows that the Watchtower Society receives requests from active Jehovah's Witnesses for answers (not just replies) to the same questions and counter arguments that I have presented here. Just like the Watchtower Society, so far Furuli has refused to deal with those questions and counter arguments head on. Should this be of concern to physicians? As posited in my initial response<sup>[5]</sup> to Dr. Muramoto's article, as a matter of ethics I believe the process of justification requires that those able to help do so, and physicians are uniquely able to help in this circumstance as the second party in sound healthcare decisions. Certainly an individual's conscience should be respected, but certainly an individual's conscience should not be harmed by good information and reasoning regardless of the source. The very idea that a physician is so concerned for their patient should instill confidence and trust in that relationship.

Marvin Shilmer

##### Endnotes:



[1] See Watchtower brochure How Can Blood Save Your Life, 1990, page 5.

[2] Shilmer, <http://bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL64>.

[3] Furuli, <http://bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL75>.

[4] On the point of Deuteronomy 14:21 the Watchtower Society published comments in a Question from Readers article in The Watchtower magazine issue of April 15, 1983. Though the article went on to conclude that our stance of refusing blood transfusion is correct it did so without addressing the unilateral nature of Deuteronomy 14:21, that is that the text has God voluntarily providing unbled animal carcasses for the purpose of eating to the very people the Noachian Law applied to, namely Noah's progeny. Since that article failed to consider and explain Deuteronomy 14:21 as it would then apply to our stance, the article then does not represent a counter argument to what I have presented here.

[5] Shilmer, <http://bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL12>.

## On Consistency

8 March 2001



### Thomas Daniels

Send response to journal:

[Re: On Consistency](#)

Email Thomas Daniels:

[ocotillo50@hotmail.com](mailto:ocotillo50@hotmail.com)

I have objected to what seemed to me to be a sweeping unqualified condemnation of the "use" of blood and Furuli has graciously clarified. He states:

"By the words «use of blood» I mean of course the use of the blood of other creatures and not my own. The arguments of Daniels that I use my own blood and therefore am inconsistent when I say that blood cannot be used, are strange indeed." (1)

I beg to differ. My comments are not strange given the fact that at no place in the Bible is a distinction drawn or qualification given as to whose blood must not be eaten. Witness literature in fact frequently argues that even though not specifically stated, the Biblical prohibitions against blood would apply to human blood as well as animal because the term "blood" should be understood as inclusive of all blood. In harmony with this and as Furuli is well aware, the Witnesses feel that deliberately eating your own blood would be just as much a violation of the Divine law as eating the blood of another creature.

My intention in pointing out that all creatures "use" blood was not simply to point out the basic fallacy in Furuli's assertion that ".....there are no normal purposes for which blood can be used" (2) or to correct his misconceptions concerning the design of transfusion. In so doing, I wished also to focus his attention on the inherent inconsistencies involved with enlarging a prohibition inclusive of all blood from the specific to the general.

To be perfectly blunt, either the prohibited action is specific and the object of that action nonexclusive or the prohibited action is nonspecific and the object of that action exclusive. However no creature of flesh and blood can argue that the prohibited action is inclusive of all "uses" while simultaneously arguing that the object of the prohibition is inclusive of all "blood" as well. Before the extreme implications of such an argument are dismissed as "strange indeed," I would suggest a simple exercise with Venn diagrams.

Far more troubling to me than simple issues of consistency however are the moral implications of the particular interpretation of the Divine law in question.

For example, Furuli states:

"So, because God is the source of life and life belongs to God.....we are not allowed to use blood in any way to sustain our life by eating it, and we are not allowed to use blood for any purpose." (3)

By attempting to make an issue out of "sustaining life" he has linked the consumption of blood with the transfusion of blood not on the basis of a shared moral negative but on the basis of a shared moral positive. What's wrong with this picture? To use a classic moral dilemma as an example, if stealing a loaf of bread to save the life of a starving child is wrong, why is it wrong? Is it wrong because it is stealing or is it wrong because it sustains life? It's hard to imagine anyone seriously considering the latter possibility, as saving life in and of itself is not morally objectionable. Yet this seems to be the essence of Furuli's argument.

I find such an argument ethically deficient. Transfusion may be a morally objectionable \*means\* of sustaining life even as eating blood would be a morally objectionable \*means\* of sustaining life, but neither can possibly be wrong \*because\* they sustain life as this in and of itself is not morally objectionable. Sustaining the life of someone who is sick or injured is certainly a goal that is both ethically and morally defensible.

I realize Furuli is a busy man and quite likely did not come here to debate his personal beliefs. However no matter how much he might desire things to be different, he cannot evade the responsibility of the one arguing for an exclusionary position towards a life saving medical procedure. If he wants to show that transfusion is forbidden by God his position is therefore reasonable, he can do one of two things. He can either produce a specific Biblical condemnation of this procedure or he can provide a substantive demonstration that this procedure is either physically or morally equivalent to something that is explicitly condemned in the Bible. So far he has done

neither.

(1) Furuli, R. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37> 7 March 2001;Footnote 2

(2) Furuli, R. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/32> 2 March 2001

(3) Furuli, R. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37> 7 March 2001

## Summary and correction of Q&A between Rolf Furuli and the author

8 March 2001



**Osamu Muramoto,**  
Regional Ethics Council  
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*USA*

I appreciate Mr. Furuli's two letters [1][2] which attempted to address all of my questions raised in my two previous letters.[3][4] I fully realize that some of the questions are difficult for him to answer. I appreciate Furuli's earnest effort in his reply, and I accept these letters as his genuine and final answers. In this letter, instead of pursuing further clarification from him, I would like to summarize several important points that have become clear so far in our dialogue, so that the readers can understand where our differences are. I will also correct some of his most erroneous statements.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Summary and correction of Q&A between Rolf Furuli and the author](#)

Email Osamu Muramoto:  
[muramoto@aracnet.com](mailto:muramoto@aracnet.com)

### RELIGIOUS BIAS AGAINST THE AUTHOR

Although I appreciate Furuli's reply, an unfortunate development of his discussion is that he now portrays this author as an "opposer" of Jehovah's Witnesses. He characterizes my letters as "an attempt to change the faith of the addressee and all other Jehovah's Witnesses".[1] Why does he resort to such a distortion of the whole issue? He now introduces a religious bias in this debate by speculating my religious motive. It is probably the easiest way for Furuli to discredit my argument and trash my article by painting a religious color on me.

I have tried to avoid religious argument and to focus on bioethical aspects of the issue. During the course of my discussion, it is inevitable to be critical to certain aspects of Jehovah's Witnesses, but that is an inherent part of discussion such as this. Furuli's exaggeration that this is my attempt to "change the faith of all other Jehovah's Witnesses" is beyond comprehension. I have patients, friends and relatives who are Witnesses, and we are in good relationship without interfering with other's religious matters. It is unfortunate that a person such as Furuli who is familiar with academic debate has to resort to such ad hominem attacks to distract the readers from the substance of our discussion. I hope Furuli considers our discussion based on the merit of the substance, and I urge him to refrain from attacking the character of the messenger using religious bias in order to silence the message he dislikes.

### WHO IS THE THIRD PARTY IN DOCTOR-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP?

I wonder if Furuli's definition of the term "third party" is different from mine. When we say "third party" in doctor-patient relationship, everybody else other than the doctor and the patient is considered the third party. Furuli repeatedly claims I am "a third party" and urges the readers not to listen to me because I am not a Witness.[1] I am a physician facing with Witness patients. I am in the direct doctor-patient relationship, along with most other medical professionals. We are all "the second party." It appears that this is Furuli's another attempt to discredit the author and distract the audience by putting a false label of "a third party" on me.

Another peculiar usage of "third party" by Furuli is seen in his response to my question regarding the third party intrusion in doctor-patient relationship. Furuli states: "I do not view The Watchtower Society as a 'third party' but I view it the same way that my students view me, as a teacher".[2] Although I can understand a teacher is the second party vis-à-vis students, and a religious leader is the second party vis-à-vis the followers, there is no place for The Watchtower Society coming into the doctor-patient relationship as the second party. Even a teacher may not enter the doctor-patient relationship of his students. With further thought, however, I found that his response raises an interesting point which is in fact quite relevant to my article. Perhaps, when he wrote that The Watchtower Society is not a third party, it was not his misunderstanding but his genuine feeling.

If Furuli cannot think of The Watchtower Society as a third party when he sits with a doctor, The Watchtower Society is the active party in his medical decision-making. It is no longer the matter between Furuli and the doctor. It is the matter between Furuli conjoined with The Watchtower Society and the doctor. That would explain very well many unanswerable questions we are discussing here. Or perhaps another explanation is that The Watchtower Society plays the role of his parent, and Furuli plays the role of an infant patient. If The Watchtower Society is Furuli's mother or his guardian, for example, Furuli is absolutely correct that The Watchtower Society is not a third party in his relationship with his doctor. In either case, that explains very well why Furuli, as an infant patient, thinks he is selecting various blood products based on his own conscience, but in fact his "mother" selects everything for him. That can explain why his own conscientious selection of blood products is always 100% identical with what his "mother" or The Watchtower Society has selected.

I wonder Furuli's relationship with The Watchtower Society is the same as a baby's relationship with his mother, instead of student-teacher relationship. At any rate, I find this framework of the doctor-patient relationship and the role of the third party quite interesting from the viewpoint of medical ethics. This would be a good topic to discuss among the readers in the medical ethics community.

### ILLEGAL BREACH OF CONFIDENTIALITY OF INCIDENTAL MEDICAL INFORMATION

Regarding medical confidentiality, Furuli introduces an example of a case of HIV-positive patient who might cause danger to a third party and general public, in order to show the occasional needs to breach medical confidentiality in certain situations.[1] It is true that this is a common ethical dilemma we face in daily medical practice. Another typical case is a psychiatrist who sees in his patient a sign of impending impulse to commit murder. Should medical confidentiality be breached for the good of public safety? It is indeed a difficult ethical dilemma we face on daily basis.

However, these situations are totally different from the case of "Mary" who violated the law to breach medical confidentiality.[5] Under no circumstances, even in the situation Furuli mentioned, is it legal or ethical for a medical worker, such as "Mary", who incidentally obtained medical information of another patient while processing medical records as a medical assistance, to breach confidentiality. The ethical dilemma of the HIV-positive patient Furuli mentioned, and the psychiatrist treating a potential murderer, all involve direct doctor-patient relationship. Doctors obtained critical information during the course of their professional relationship. "Mary" has no fiduciary relationship with the patient. She is not legally authorized to obtain any medical information whatsoever. Her action is outright illegal and unethical.

We physicians never recommend to violate the law even in the cases mentioned above. First thing we recommend is to bring up the case to an ethics committee or any equivalent of professional review board to find out the most ethical way to handle the situation. If there is a real emergency, there are many appropriate legal resources. There is no parallel between "Mary" and the situation Furuli mentioned. "Mary" committed an outright illegal act even without any emergency, and was praised by The Watchtower Society for her action. We physicians handle such "dangers" in medical ethics committees and legal procedures without resorting to illegal action.

One thing that concerns me in Furuli's comment is that he dismisses this illegal practice because "such a situation occurs so rarely".[1] I am certain that illegal actions happen rarely in Jehovah's Witnesses. I am fully aware that Witnesses are generally law-abiding people. The question is how they behave in rare situation of distress. I am totally perplexed by the fact that Furuli as a Jehovah's Witness condones and dismisses such an illegal action just because it is "rare". I am sure murder is "rare" and stealing is "rare" among Jehovah's Witnesses. Rare occurrence has nothing to do with moral value of the action. And even if it is rare, as long as this recommendation to breach confidentiality is not formally rescinded, psychological pressure to Witness patients never goes away. Unfortunately, we have not heard any assurance from Furuli that the Watchtower Society will stop this illegal practice of violating medical confidentiality any time soon.

#### **"THE BIBLE ALONE" DOES NOT DETERMINE WHICH BLOOD FRACTION TO REFUSE**

Obviously I am not in the position to debate Biblical exegesis with Furuli, but even without much knowledge of the Bible, I see an obvious discrepancy in his statement. He asserts "it is a bold and utterly false claim to say that the Watchtower Society is the authority for Jehovah's Witnesses and not the Bible".[1] He goes on saying "my basis for being a Witness I find in the Bible and in the Bible alone". Yet he fails to explain how "the Bible alone" tells someone to die by refusing "major" components, but to live by accepting "minor" components, when he keeps citing The Encyclopedia Britannica, discussing mother's milk and placenta, "what clearly [he feels] is blood (haima)" etc, yet never cites any scriptural passage to determine this critical difference between the "major" and "minor" components. Nor did he explain how "the Bible alone" can change the position on hemoglobin from 1998 to 2000. Please keep in mind that these are not just a minor doctrinal adjustment. These changes determine the life and death decisions of millions of people worldwide.

#### **"USING BLOOD AS A NUTRIENT IS FORBIDDEN IN THE BIBLE"**

Another obvious difficulty comes from Furuli's assertion in his earlier letter[6] that "[...] we have reached the following conclusion which we regard as consistent. What is expressly forbidden in the Bible is using blood as a nutrient." Who are "we"? Isn't this conclusion his own? He then jumps to his assertion without any evidence that "99 % of my fellow believers [...] reject oral and parenteral feeding (transfusion) by blood (haima)". Of course, there may be other Witnesses who may have reached the same conclusion by studying the Bible as much as Furuli does, but how come 99% of six million followers reach the same conclusion at the same time for something the Bible never mention (transfusion), unless it was orchestrated by a strong controlling power, or it was Furuli's presumptuous proposition which ignores individuality of millions of people?

Furuli either does not know the purpose of blood component therapy, or intentionally ignores it. Here, I will summarize the purpose of each component therapy.

- Red blood cells = to restore oxygen delivery to the peripheral tissue
- White blood cells = to treat infection by restoring deficient white cells
- Platelets = to restore platelet function for uncontrollable hemorrhage
- Plasma = to restore the blood coagulability by adding coagulating factors

Of course there are many other purposes for component therapy, but those are the main purposes in current practice, which anybody can read in elementary medical textbooks. There is no role of "nourishing" or "feeding" in those "major" components. Ironically, there is one blood component which is occasionally used to correct malnutrition. That is albumin which is permitted to use according to the Watchtower Society. Hypoalbuminemia occurs in people with poor nutrition. Administering albumin is one of the quickest ways to correct this problem. It quickly increases serum

albumin level, which is one of the indicators of malnutrition, and alleviate the symptoms of malnutrition. If Furuli and the Watchtower Society truly believes "nourishing" with blood products is prohibited by the Bible, albumin should be refused, not red cells or platelets.

### BIBLE-BASED INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE OF 99% OF WITNESSES IS THE SAME AS FURULI'S

Despite these basic facts of the current transfusion practice, Furuli asserts "99%" of the Witnesses reject blood products based on the same reason of "feeding by blood" as Furuli concluded.[1] Once again, I repeat, I fully respect Furuli's personal conclusions from his Biblical exegesis even if I feel they are totally inconsistent. The issue is not whether Furuli's conviction is consistent with the Bible. (I am sure this is the issue for dissident Witnesses - that is a different issue.) Nor is it my desire to change the (apparently illogical) belief. The issue I am pursuing here is, regardless of "what clearly [Furuli feels] is blood (haima)", more than six million people including unknown number of dissident Witnesses have no freedom to select which blood product to accept without using Furuli's criteria.

Suppose Furuli is correct that 99% of six million of Witnesses believe and behave almost identically as Furuli does in every detail of blood products. Still 1% or 6,000 of Witnesses and unknown number of their children are deprived of freedom to choose their medical treatment, and freedom to live according to their own Bible-based conscience on blood products, which happen to be different from Furuli's. Assuming everything Furuli stated is correct, there is still a serious problem of medical ethics and the basic human rights of 6,000 people!

### CAN BIBLE-BASED INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE OF EACH WITNESS DETERMINE WHICH BLOOD PRODUCT TO ACCEPT?

It is quite noteworthy to the readers that this question, which is the most essential part of my article and this discussion, is still not answered in unequivocal term. Furuli wrote in his first reply,[1] "I would respect a position based on the sincere conscience of another Witness, whether or not it is different from mine." Yet he made an exception of "stealing", implying accepting blood may be a similar exception. In his second reply,[2] he wrote, "the answer is 'yes', but I will add that while I respect everyone's right to follow his or her conscience, nobody can refer to this to prove that I condone their choices." In essence, he would "respect" other's conscientious choices of blood products, but he may not "condone" their choices.

To all fairness to Furuli, I see he is genuinely struggling with a very difficult and delicate balance between being a conscientious individual Jehovah's Witness and being an organizational man to be loyal to every word of The Watchtower Society. By reading through his series of letters, the readers can easily see his "crisis of conscience": he first started with a bold statement **"the conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness"** as a basis for refusing blood,[7] then enforced his position by declaring that the basis of his position is **"in the Bible alone"**, [1] but at the end, he concluded his last letter, "As a conclusion I will say that **the official position** of Jehovah's Witnesses is that we do not accept an infusion of whole blood or its major components. This is the view of **all the Witnesses** that I know." [2]

By following his thought process of starting with "the individual conscience" and "the Bible alone" and ending up with "the official position" of "all the Witnesses", the readers can clearly see a typical mind-set of a loyal Witness, who genuinely believes he is acting on "the individual conscience" based on "the Bible alone", is in fact conforming to "the official position" of The Watchtower Society which universally binds "all the Witnesses".

Another conspicuous pattern in Furuli's writing is that he consistently avoided to discuss individual blood products, and to try to discuss only generic concept of "blood" and the murky distinction between the "major" and "minor" components. In clinical setting, what matters is which product the patient receives, not any abstract concept of "blood", "major" or "minor". "Abstaining from (conceptual) blood" must be translated into a selection of a specific blood product, but this discussion is conspicuously absent in Furuli's writing. In order to illustrate his problem, I will hereby take "a platelet product" as an example of a specific blood product which belongs to the "major". It can be any blood product, but discussing one representative product will make our discussion much closer to our clinical setting.

### IS DISSOCIATION/DISFELLOWSHIPING JUSTIFIED?

The next question is what Furuli would actually do with those who disagree with him in selection of blood products. He then discusses how disfellowshipping or disassociation of those who conscientiously accepted "a platelet product" (an example of major component) are justified. He introduces two examples, an unfaithful husband who Furuli considers disassociated from his wife, and a doctor who attacked colleagues and who Furuli also considers disassociated from the colleagues.[2] Where is the similarity between a Witness who accepted a platelet product to treat his uncontrollable hemorrhage and a husband who is unfaithful to his wife?

I suppose Furuli wants to say that in both cases, the other party generates such a strong emotional repugnance against the "sinner" that he or she does not want to have such a person in his or her company. In short, Furuli would still "respect" a Witness who accepted a platelet product, but he would not greet with that person or eat with him from the same table, and certainly not worship in the same congregation, even if that person is his close friend or family member.

## DISASSOCIATION - A PUNISHMENT WITHOUT A FAIR PROCEDURE

While I agree with Furuli that the way he would treat those dissident Witnesses reflects the reality of the current practice of Jehovah's Witnesses, namely ostracism and shunning, whether such a practice is acceptable in our society in general, and particularly in the medical community, is a different matter. There are several problems which raise serious concern among doctors and ethicists about this practice. Since most doctors and ethicists are unfamiliar with this practice, I will expand this discussion here.

The first problem is that, even though Furuli claims that the disassociation was initiated by the action of the "sinner", it is perceived as a punishment from the viewpoint of the "sinner". Furuli's expression "all persons must accept the consequences of their acts"[2] implies that "disassociation" is the consequence of the sinner's act. This sounds a matter of fact, but it is only a political euphemism to evade the responsibility of delivering the punishment. Does it make any sense to Furuli if he heard the Chinese government saying "the arrest and imprisonment of Jehovah's Witnesses in China is the consequences of their acts"? There is always an authoritative power behind the execution of any punishment. No matter how paraphrase the expression to avoid social responsibility, "disassociation", or ostracism and shunning, is a punishment established and executed by the authority of a Jehovah's Witness congregation.

The next problem is that a punishment cannot be applied in an arbitrary process in our civilized society. This is also true even with the examples Furuli cited, namely unfaithful husband and a doctor attacking colleagues. In an ideal situation, a fair trial or judicial process takes place before a punishment is delivered. If, for example, that doctor were to be ostracized by the colleagues without a fair procedure, he can sue the group for undue discrimination. One of the most serious problems of "disassociation" of Jehovah's Witnesses is the fact that the punishment is applied to any "sinner" without a fair trial or judicial procedure.

Furuli stated, "what counts is the sum of his or her acts and the attitude of the heart, i.e. does the actions of the person show that he or she has dissassociated himself or herself from the congregation." A logical question that follows this Furuli's statement is "who judges the 'the attitude of the heart' of a Witness who accepted a platelet product?" Furuli, or congregation elders, or God? It is totally unclear who makes the final judgment, particularly when there is no formal judicial process for a "sinner" who accepted a platelet product. The only explanation I can think of from the Furuli's account is that "the attitude of the heart" on which the punishment of ostracism and shunning is based is "the attitude of the heart" toward the leaders of the congregation and The Watchtower Society, not "the attitude of the heart" toward God. That is the only explanation I can think of, unless Furuli or someone in the leadership plays "God."

To conclude this discussion on punishment of accepting a "major" blood component, I have to emphasize to the readers that a Jehovah's Witness who conscientiously accepted a "major" blood product can be punished without a fair trial, and only with arbitrary and subjective judgment of "the attitude of the heart" which is judged by the leaders such as Mr. Furuli. It is reminiscent of a group lynching of a mob without fair hearing. We physicians need to remind ourselves that we have a fiduciary relationship with our Witness patient. We carry our moral obligation to protect our patient even if he or she is considered a "sinner". The above discussion by Furuli only enforces my proposal to protect Witness patients who might have different views on blood products from the controlling power of the Watchtower Society.

## FALSE STATEMENTS REQUIRE FORMAL CORRECTION/APOLOGY

Furuli's letters also contain many errors and misinformation, particularly numerical and quantitative aspects of blood transfusion risks. I may address those in my later letters if I have a chance. I will finish this letter by correcting Furuli's gross false statements which I sincerely hope is not his intended malicious attack.

Furuli states "[...] you ask for an acceptance of the correctness of your viewpoints, and that we cannot do." [1] Where did I ask for an acceptance of the correctness of my viewpoints? I am asking only to consider another viewpoint. Whether it is accepted as correct or not is up to individual Witnesses. Furuli also states "... you suggest that doctors should try to persuade sick Witnesses to change their minds." [1] Again, his assertion is totally false. As anyone can read in my article above, I suggested doctors to present the patient a chance to reconsider their previous position. This attitude is totally different from to "persuade to change their minds". I sincerely hope this is not Furuli's malicious attack on me, but if he is indeed a civilized and responsible Witness, a formal apology is in order.

He then continues: "If you respect our consciences, why don't you not follow your own decision but leave us alone?" [1] I repeatedly wrote that I respect Furuli's conscience. [3][4] Yes, I will leave Furuli alone as a patient in this matter. However, I will **not** leave the next Witness patient alone, because it is my professional responsibility to give the best care that this next Witness patient deserves. His or her "individual conscience" can be different from Furuli's. As a physician, I have an obligation to find out how he or she personally feels about the major and minor components, and which blood product they want to accept, without any misinformation or pressure. I will respect their final decisions, but I will **never** leave them alone, as Furuli urges. I have no obligation to follow the universal "official position" of The Watchtower Society by leaving the Witness patient alone. To do so is totally irresponsible, and I urge my fellow physicians not to "leave alone" Witness patients. After all, who are you, Mr. Furuli, who determines the life and death decision of six million people by saying "leave **us**



alone" instead of saying "leave **me** alone"? You have no right to say anything about their conscience for six million of other people by using the pronoun "us", let alone 1% (according to your own estimate) or 6,000 of Witnesses who might disagree with you!

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## Jehovah's Witnesses Disunited on Blood?

9 March 2001



**William Edmonds,**  
Elder  
*Jehovah's Witnesses*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Jehovah's Witnesses Disunited on Blood?](#)

Email William Edmonds:  
[wedmonds45@hotmail.com](mailto:wedmonds45@hotmail.com)

Please allow me to add the perspective of one more active Elder among the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses on the subject at hand.

At a fundamental level, it brings me pain to see several of my brothers debating each other on spiritual matters in a public forum such as this. Jehovah's Witnesses pride themselves on the brotherhood that exists among them. As just one example, in countries torn by racial strife, Jehovah's Witnesses have established a truly impressive track record of teaching individuals of different ethnic backgrounds to love and respect one another as brothers for whom, we teach, Christ died. Such individuals have, in a very real way, done what the Biblical text espoused by the United Nations advocates, namely to "beat their swords into plowshares." (Isaiah 2:4 – Modern King James Version)

One of the factors contributing to this unity, Jehovah's Witnesses teach, is our common acceptance of certain scriptural teachings and standards. For instance, Jehovah's Witnesses in all parts of the earth believe that fornication is morally wrong. And yes, it is true, Jehovah's Witness elders will, at some point, make the decision to disfellowship, or expel from the congregation, an individual who refuses to accept this scripturally-defined moral standard, and persists in practicing such.

Jehovah's Witnesses' position on this has been explained this way in their official magazine, The Watchtower:

But if decisions as to conduct are a personal matter, why are some of Jehovah's Witnesses disfellowshipped? Nobody arbitrarily determines that the practice of a particular sin requires disfellowshipping. Rather, this action is Scripturally required only when a member of the congregation unrepentantly engages in gross sins, such as those enumerated in the 5th chapter of First Corinthians. Thus, while a Christian may be disfellowshipped for practicing fornication, this occurs only if the individual refuses to accept the spiritual assistance of loving shepherds. Jehovah's Witnesses are not alone in following this Christian practice. The Encyclopedia of Religion notes: "Any community claims the right to protect itself against nonconforming members who may threaten the common welfare. In a religious setting this right has often been reinforced by the belief that the sanction [of excommunication] affects one's standing before God."(1)

Given the track record of unity among Jehovah's Witnesses, what accounts for a certain amount of seeming disunity—and yes, frustration—around this issue?

After considering carefully the wording in the above-quoted reference, it is good to remember that the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society (hereinafter WTS), in the January 15, 1961 issue of its official magazine, The Watchtower, stated its position that the acceptance of a blood transfusion was of sufficient moral gravity to warrant disfellowshipping.(2) It is worth noting that, as with fornication, it is not the mere committing of the act that warrants disfellowshipping, but the attitude of the "sinner." Notwithstanding that, it is equally worth noting that the act is considered serious enough that it is considered a "gross sin."

As a side note, reference has already been made in this discussion to a slight technical change on this issue in the last year, namely that now a person who goes against our thinking in this area disassociates themselves, as opposed to being disfellowshipped. In practical terms, though, the end result to the individual is the same.

Men who serve as elders in each local congregation are charged with overseeing this process. Some of these, upon their own scriptural review, have found they have questions regarding our categorization of acceptance of blood, or the components of blood, as a "gross sin," one of sufficient gravity to subject an individual to potentially being cut off from the congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. Some have taken the additional step of addressing their questions in this area to the WTS, either verbally, or through written correspondence. Among the questions they have asked are:

1. We teach that our position on blood is based on the Bible record concerning events that predate the Mosaic Law (Account of Noah - Genesis 9:3,4) without imposing on Christians a responsibility to conform to portions of the Mosaic Law. Can our position truly be defended solely based upon God's commands to Noah, which are taught to be binding upon all mankind, or do we need to rely on further commands given later under the Mosaic Law, which we teach no longer applies to Christians, to establish our "law"? (If it is argued that we are taking our position based on **\*\*principles\*\*** found in the Mosaic Law, then are we not elevating such principles into a hard and fast law, via our disfellowshipping/disassociation stand?)

2. Are we on solid ground when we argue that Biblical commands regarding proper and improper use of the blood of a creature one **\*\*killed\*\*** apply to the donated blood of another human, who has not given their life?

3. To go a step further, are we on solid ground when we argue that Biblical commands regarding proper use of the blood of a creature one killed apply to medical usage of one's own (autologous) blood?

4. What **\*\*Scriptural\*\*** explanation can be given for our current categorization of "components" vs. "fractions." (Keeping in mind that Jehovah's Witnesses look to the WTS as spiritual counselors, not medical advisors)

It seems to me that the fact we are having this internal debate is evidence that, at least for some, the answers provided have not been satisfactory, and that their questions regarding what appear to be contradictions in our official policy have not been directly responded to, but rather sidestepped.

I think the fundamental question that has given rise to a high level of frustration on the part of certain Witnesses, particularly elders, who have analyzed this subject at some length, is this:

How can we ask that an individual—one of our brothers—literally be willing to risk their life for a belief or face judicial review, and yet not be willing to address head-on, and in a forthright manner, any and all questions that arise as whether we can honestly say with 100% certainty that this is truly what God expects?

I would just like to offer a couple more comments in conclusion.

Firstly, I have great respect and admiration for all my fellow Jehovah's Witnesses who have contributed to this discussion, regardless of the arguments they have presented. It is the issue that must be focused upon, not the personalities of those arguing the points.

Secondly, it is my belief that the level of knowledge and understanding manifested in this debate is far beyond that of the average Jehovah's Witness. For example, my brother Furuli's defense of our position is, as has been noted, about as good a defense as could be made. However, as my brother Shilmer has highlighted above, it could be argued that this defense is ultimately more of a defense of our **\*\*right\*\*** to our belief than the actual **\*\*belief\*\*** itself. In contrast, the vast majority of Jehovah's Witnesses, in my experience, have **\*\*not\*\*** thought through this issue fully, but rather simply accept the view presented by the WTS, whatever that view may be. I find it somewhat frightening that some of my brothers have been so conditioned to simply accept what they are taught that they have essentially transferred their capacity for critical thought --on what could literally be a life-or-death issue--to another.

The WTS, in its publications, often warns of the dangers of skeptical thought. To a point, I agree with their view. It is my observation that those who view everything in life through the glasses of skepticism, accepting and trusting nothing, are at risk of leading purposeless lives, with no solid foundation on which to base moral choices. In the eyes of the skeptic, the very faith inherent in Christianity is viewed as fallacious, even juvenile.

However, I believe it equally tragic to jettison what seem to be the natural self-protective skeptical mechanisms we all have. Ironically, Jehovah's Witnesses are firm believers in creation, as opposed to the notion that we are here simply by chance. If one, then, believes in God as Creator of all, it would seem to follow that it is not without reason that this God, this master designer, gave each of us our brain, with its marvelous capacities for logic and reason. Would not it be an insult to that very Creator if one were to subjugate those capacities, or to simply abdicate them to another? In fact, the Bible--the very book we claim this Creator had written for us--tells us to "keep testing whether you are in the faith," and not to simply "believe every inspired expression." (2 Corinthians 13:5 and 1 John 4:1 – New World Translation). In this, I do not believe the Bible is advocating distrust or suspicion of religious teachers, but rather simply reminding each individual to use their own God-given mental faculties when examining teachings and beliefs.

Finally, with respect to the issue I raised at the outset--that of unity-- I believe it needs to be recognized that it is actually quite a testimony to the loyalty and desire for unity of those in responsible positions who have questions with the WTS' view of blood that they have **\*\*not\*\*** gone around their respective congregations, or other areas within their sphere of influence, and promoted opposing views. What a dilemma it must be for them when they hear fellow brothers or sisters express themselves in ways that reveal that they have not thought through this most serious issue independently and clearly, and then struggle with what they should say in response! I would further submit that, in actuality, great respect for the WTS is manifest by their continuing to serve despite their

personal misgivings on this subject! To my way of thinking, men and women such as this actually demonstrate greater loyalty than one who simply either doesn't see, or chooses to ignore, the issue.

#### References:

1. Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. Living Up to Christian Dedication in Freedom. The Watchtower 1998;Mar 15:22
2. Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. Questions From Readers. The Watchtower 1961;Jan 15:63-64

## Furuli's deadly shell game – where's the blood? Part 1

9 March 2001

**Lee Elder,**  
Founder  
AJWRB - Ass. JWs for  
Reform on Blood

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Furuli's deadly shell game  
– where's the blood? Part 1](#)

Email Lee Elder:  
[leeelder@ajwrp.org](mailto:leeelder@ajwrp.org)

### Furuli's deadly shell game – where's the blood?

**Part One - The full text with graphics and charts can be viewed at:** <http://ajwrp.org/furuli.html>

As founder of the Associated Jehovah's Witnesses for Reform on Blood (AJWRB) I have had many opportunities to debate ultra conservative Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) regarding the Watchtower's blood policy over the years.[1]

Like Furuli they have very little substance to their arguments but lots of obfuscation, ad hominem attacks, straw man arguments, false analogies and diversions. Well over a week ago I posed a number of questions to Furuli (see <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL75>) to which he never responded. Additionally, I emailed him twice hoping that he would discuss these matters privately but he has never responded.

I was going to repeat those questions here but the bottom line is that Furuli cannot answer the questions anymore than the Watchtower Society (WTS) or any other Jehovah's Witness. Those that try often end up becoming members of AJWRB. Some of these exact questions have been posed to the WTS over the years by numerous JWs and the WTS inability to answer directly led to the formation of AJWRB since the conscience of JWs like myself required that we do something to try and inform other JWs and the medical community regarding the many inconsistencies and contradictions. My interactions with other JWs on this issue over the last five years has led me to conclude that the overwhelming majority of JWs who investigate this matter and consider a critical review of the policy, such as provided by AJWRB, do not want neither themselves nor their loved ones to die in support of the policy.

This marks the fourth time I have asked Furuli to answer these very serious questions. If he cannot answer them one must wonder how he can support a policy that requires Jehovah's Witnesses to lay down their lives rather than accept one of the forbidden components on the WTS' most recent *special list*. One can only wonder what kind of ethics permit him to take such a position. I've buried a member of my family prematurely as a result of this policy. I hope that Furuli does not have to experience that before he honestly addresses these important questions and deals with the core issues raised by Jehovah's Witness dissidents.

I believe that it is fairly accurate to state that Furuli objects to "blood transfusions" because in his view they constitute the eating, consumption or misuse of blood. Essentially, he accepts the view that blood is whatever the WTS happens to declare it to be at any given moment.

Part of the problem lies in the fact that the Watchtower can't ever seem to make up its mind exactly what blood is. I will present the two extremes based on published statements by the WTS. Here is the first:

["Whether whole or fractional, one's own or someone else's, transfused or injected, it is wrong." - The Watchtower 09/15/1961 p. 559](#)

At that point in the evolution of Watchtower policy, blood was wrong – period. No clarifications were necessary. The old advance directive, "blood card", published by the WTS and signed and carried by Jehovah's Witnesses was very clear. No blood in any way, shape or form, was permitted.

**NO BLOOD TRANSFUSION !**

As a God-fearing Christian and a believer of Jehovah's word, the Bible, I hereby demand that blood, in any way, shape or form, is **NOT** to be fed into my body; however, blood substitutes may be used in case of extreme loss of blood.

'YOU MUST NOT EAT THE BLOOD OF ANY SORT OF FLESH'  
LEVITICUS 17:14 NW

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Witness \_\_\_\_\_ (Over)

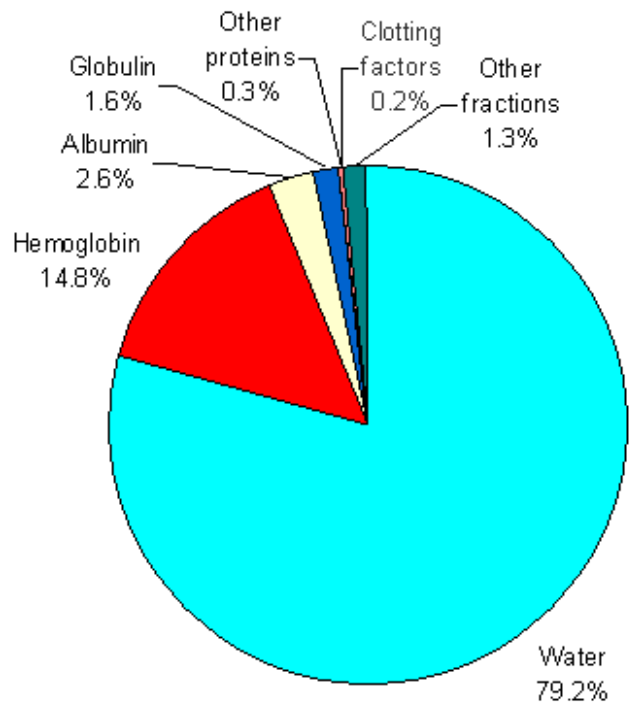
The other extreme is where we find ourselves today now that the once clear and strong stand of Jehovah's Witnesses has been diluted to this:

"...when it comes to fractions of **any** of the primary components, each Christian, after careful and prayerful meditation, must conscientiously decide for himself...Should Christians accept these fractions in medical treatment? We cannot say. The Bible does not give details, so a Christian must make his own conscientious decision before God." – The Watchtower 06/15/2000 p. 29-31

The intervening 39 years (1961-2000) show a continual reevaluation of the policy permitting first blood serums, hemophiliac treatments, albumin, all plasma fractions and finally all blood products fractionated from red cells, white cells, platelets and plasma. As the chart illustrates, today Jehovah's Witnesses may accept basically 100% of the blood as long as they take it in fractionated form.

If we were debating these issues just one year ago, Furuli would be asserting that hemoglobin is (haima) and that anyone who disagreed with him opposed God, today the WTS position has changed and he would argue just the opposite. This is not really a matter of conscience for the average JW. Like Furuli they must accept that blood is whatever the WTS currently says it is. If they don't, or even if they ask too many questions of fellow believers, they will find themselves in front of a judicial committee on charges of apostasy. There they will have the opportunity to hear Furuli's same arguments presented by JW elders with even less grasp of the subject than Furuli and they can choose to agree or they will be disfellowshipped and shunned by their JW family members and friends.

This is the kind of respect for the conscience of the individual that Furuli and other ultra conservative JW elders demonstrate..



Furuli stated that "Animals could be slaughtered for food, but their blood should not be used." Most Jehovah's Witnesses would agree since the Bible teaches that the blood of a slaughtered animal should be poured out upon the ground. So perhaps Furuli can tell us why the WTS has given a green light to the use of HemoPure – highly purified cow blood? Why in the world would Jehovah's Witnesses reject human blood and then turn around and use something like cow blood that the Bible clearly does have something to say about?

Those wishing to learn more about this development can read the article: ["Watchtower Approves HemoPure for Jehovah's Witnesses."](#)



I will respond to some of Furuli's recent arguments:

"The modern history of JW shows that the fundamental view of blood has been the same

for more than one hundred years.”

This is a misrepresentation of the WTS' published statements. Here is a database of WTS comments on blood: <http://ajwrb.org/watchtower/quotes.shtml>  
Anyone who is interested can verify this for themselves.

Furuli stated:

“The Encyclopedia Britannica shows that our view of red and white cells, platelets and plasma as the ‘major blood components’ hardly is idiosyncratic - this is a normal medical viewpoint.”

The Encyclopedia Britannica is not an authority on blood transfusions. There are, however, plenty of experts available to comment on what constitutes a "major" blood component. For instance, in the book "Modern Blood Banking and Transfusion Practices - Fourth Edition", by Denise M. Harmening, PhD, Chair and Professor, Dept. of Medical Research at the University of Maryland, we find extensive and authoritative information on this subject. On page 237, we find the following comment:

"The following section reviews each of the major components in terms of their preparation and general use." [2]

Then we find extensive discussion of red cells, white cells, platelets and plasma which as we know are forbidden by the WTS.

Interestingly, however, we also find that Cryoprecipitated Antihemophilic Factor, Factor VIII Concentrate, Factor IX concentrate, Antithrombin III, Albumin, Plasma Protein Fraction and Immune Globulin are also listed and discussed as **major** blood components.

Clearly the WTS conveniently manipulates the definition of blood (haima) and its major components however it happens to see fit at the moment and many JW's, like Furuli, immediately jump to attention and proclaim that the latest special WTS list is the real definition of blood (haima). The WTS does this so often they have even coined the expression "new light" to refer to the practice.

Furuli discusses the "function of the placental barrier" and basically asserts that only WTS approved blood components normally pass through it. This argument has been used by the WTS for over a decade as a basis for permitting plasma proteins. The argument is fanciful since erythroblasts, trophoblasts, granulocytes and lymphocytes all pass the placental barrier. For a complete evaluation of this WTS argument, read the following article and references:

<http://ajwrb.org/basics/crumbles.shtml>

Furuli stated:

“The words ‘blood fraction’ and ‘vaccine’ had one meaning or reference in 1931, another in 1961 and still another in 2001.”

This is immaterial since the WTS specifically mentioned the actual names of forbidden blood components like *albumin* and *hemoglobin* from the 1950's right up through 1998.

End of part one.

## Furuli's deadly shell game – where's the blood? Part 2

9 March 2001



Lee Elder,  
Founder  
AJWRB - Ass. JW's for  
Reform on Blood

### Furuli's deadly shell game – where's the blood?

Part two - The full text with graphics and charts can be viewed at: <http://ajwrb.org/furuli.html>

Furuli stated:

“I do not consider it appropriate to discuss internal questions with an outsider who is very critical of our brotherhood of believers.”

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Furuli's deadly shell game  
– where's the blood? Part 2](#)

Email Lee Elder:  
[leeelder@ajwrb.org](mailto:leeelder@ajwrb.org)

Furuli has ignored Marvin Shilmer a current JW elder who disagrees with him as well as myself. He is simply dodging issues that he cannot address.

Furuli states:

“I am doubtful regarding the information you have gotten from opposers. I do not think that the statistics of persons who pretend to be something they are not, namely, loyal and cooperative brothers in the congregation, should be trusted, particularly not when their words are so dramatically different from what I know about Jehovah's Witnes

Furuli is welcome to think of me as he pleases. Nonetheless, the comments were made by a handful of anesthesiologists at the 2000 ASA conference and we [published them in our report](#) on the conference. Though anecdotal reports from a handful of doctors may not be statistically significant they do serve to illustrate that our basic contention is true, namely that if doctors have a private conference with the JW patients and ask them a few simple questions, *some* will definitely reconsider their position.



Furuli states:

“...those persons whom you represent and who have written letters in connection with your article actively oppose Jehovah's Witnesses and express false accusations.”

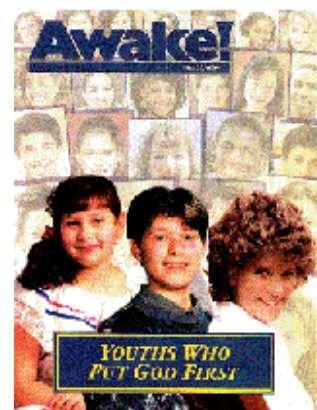
I'm pretty sure that Furuli is talking about me here so I'll use this opportunity to specifically ask him where I have made some false accusation. He quotes me where I state: "My question to you, sir, is this: is the sacrifice of hundreds, perhaps thousands of JW children a justifiable price for 'greater peace, inner contentment, and life meaning.'"

Then Furuli goes on to state:

"This is a serious accusation, but where is the proof behind it? Hundreds, perhaps thousands of children killed by Jehovah's Witnesses? The article in Awake! May 22, 1994, to which the writer refers, does not speak about children in general, but about youngsters with leukemia and similar deadly diseases. The lack of blood did not kill the youngsters mentioned in the article; their disease killed them. If a young person who already knows that he or she is going to die, does not want to try to prolong life for a short time with the use of blood but seeks alternative treatment, how can it be said that Jehovah's Witnesses sacrificed ("killed") this person?"

I agree with Furuli, I have made a serious accusation but not a false one. Consider the following:

The WTS has at times portrayed children who have died as a result of following its policies as martyrs. The cover of the May 22, 1994 Awake! magazine (official church magazine) shows the photos of 26 children, with the caption: "Youths Who Put God First." The inside cover of the magazine states, "In former times *thousands* of youths *died* for putting God first. They are *still doing it*, only today the drama is played out in hospitals and courtrooms, with blood transfusions the issue." (italics added for emphasis)



There are approximately 3100 new cases of leukemia and lymphoma diagnosed in children age 15 and under in the U.S. each year. With the U.S. population at 274,000,000, the approximately 1,000,000 JWs in the U.S. constitute about 0.364% of that population. This suggests there are approximately eleven new cases of leukemia and lymphoma among JW children in the U.S. each year (or more if we include sixteen and seventeen-year-olds).

Worldwide there are nearly six million active JWs and another nearly nine million who associate with them and have varying degrees of commitment to the WTS blood policy. If we conservatively estimate the size of the JW community at ten million and base our projection on U.S. statistics, we would expect to see approximately 110 new cases among JW children each year.

In the 1940's, when the WTS blood policy began to take shape, the mortality rate for children with a diagnosis of leukemia was nearly 100%. Today that rate is less than 20%. Since transfusion of red cells and platelets generally remains essential to successful treatment of these cases, it is reasonable to conclude that the mortality rate among JW children may still be close to 100%. Thus, the impact of the WTS policy is significant: each year probably 80 or more JW children are at high risk of dying when their parents insist on "bloodless" treatment.

This figure could be adjusted downward somewhat for cases involving very young JW children where courts have taken custody away from the parents temporarily to provide needed care. Nonetheless, the WTS' own comments seem to acknowledge a very high incidence of death among JW children.

Even reducing the estimate to a very conservative 50 JW children per year, it is apparent that physicians could have saved hundreds--if not thousands--of additional lives in recent decades had they been allowed to transfuse red cells and platelets, thus enabling a rigorous use of chemotherapy. So the inference made by Awake magazine that "thousands" of children have died as a result of compliance with WTS policy may be quite correct.

Furuli states:

"Because it can be more dangerous to accept a transfusion than to refuse one, a person who refuses one and dies for this reason or another, cannot rightly be accused for suicide, and it is even more illogical to accuse his or her fellow believers for killing the person."

First of all there is no sound evidence to demonstrate that accepting a transfusion is more dangerous than accepting one. In fact, physicians know the evidence is quite to the contrary and we have

[carefully documented that](#) at the ajwrb.org website.[3] Secondly, Furuli resorts to “straw man” tactics since neither nor myself accuse JW's of committing suicide or of killing fellow believers. Such comments by Furuli are incredible.

Furuli states:

“It is a bold and utterly false claim to say that the Watchtower Society is the authority for Jehovah's Witnesses and not the Bible.”

Here is one of many relevant published statement by the WTS:

“That they [Jehovah's Witness] must adhere absolutely to the decisions and scriptural understandings of the Society because God has given it this authority over his people.”  
Watchtower, May 1, 1972, p. 272

I could take up many pages refuting Furuli's biblical arguments which dissident JW's, reputable scholars and even orthodox Jews reject as untenable. Physicians aren't generally interested in that kind of thing anyway and its totally unnecessary. In reality the biblical arguments are very simple.

If one takes the time to carefully study all of the biblical accounts regarding blood, it becomes quite clear that whenever the wrongful use of blood is mentioned, it is always in the context of **eating** blood, as the Watchtower itself has acknowledged at various times.

“Each time the prohibition of blood is mentioned in the Scriptures it is in connection with **taking it as food**, and so it is as a **nutrient** that we are concerned with in its being forbidden.” - Watchtower 9/15/58, p. 575 (italics added)

Is a blood transfusion a feeding on blood? Simply stated, to receive a nutritional benefit from blood, you would have to eat and digest it so that it could be broken down and used as food. No significant nutritional benefit accrues from a blood transfusion.[4]

Since it cannot be established that a blood transfusion is a feeding on blood or the equivalent of eating blood, then the *critical link* necessary to biblically support the Watchtower blood policy does not exist.

If physicians can remember and use this simple line of reasoning, they will find that many of their JW patients will re-evaluate their position, especially in light of the WTS now permitting 100% of blood in fractionated form.

For those who would like to see Furuli's biblical arguments refuted point by point, you can read the biblical discussions at the AJWRB website. <http://ajwrb.org/bible/index.shtml>

The Watchtower Society's blood policy has swiftly mutated into a deadly shell game. The policy aims to permit artificial blood (hemoglobin solutions like HemoPure and PolyHeme). While the leadership waits for the new blood products to hit the market, members continue to reject medically necessary transfusions of red cells and discontinue their chemotherapy treatments when platelet transfusions are needed even though platelets comprise less than 1/5 of 1% of blood volume. The average Jehovah's Witness has little or no realization of what is taking place. Most of those that do are frightened by the implications and effectively silenced by fear of Watchtower sanctions that would require their JW family members and friends to shun them.

In conclusion, Furuli provides has provided an excellent demonstration of how a rational individual comes to yield to the authority of a high-control religious group. As mind control specialist, Steven Hassan, writes, “The essence of mind control is that it encourages dependence and conformity, and discourages autonomy and individuality . . . There is no room in a mind control environment for regarding the group's beliefs as mere theory . . . the doctrine is reality.”[5]

## References/Notes

[1] Elder L. Why Some JW's accept blood and conscientiously reject official Watchtower Society Policy. *Journal of Medical Ethics*; 2000;26:375-380

[2] Kennedy D. Modern Blood Banking and Transfusion Practices, F.A. Davis; 1999: 237-248, 343,344. Library of Congress, ISBN: 0-8036-0419-X

[3] Elder L. Just What are the Risks? AJWRB - <http://ajwrb.org/science/risks1.shtml>

[4] I use the expression "significant" nutritional benefit since albumin has been used in the past to treat malnourished patients and is in fact still used quite extensively for that purpose in countries like Japan due to economic reasons. However, the WTS has no problem with albumin (or the other plasma proteins) and has permitted JW's to use these for over two decades. See our database on [Albumin](#). Ironically, the more the WTS and Furuli argue that blood transfusions are "eating" blood, the more they condemn their own long standing policy on albumin.

[5] Hassan S. Combating Cult Mind Control, Inner Traditions Intl Ltd; 1990: 55, 80

**"Eternal Principle" - an alternate evaluation.**

9 March 2001



**Mike Parsons,**  
Jehovah's Witness  
Supporter of AJWRB

=errata=

In a previous letter [1], the Amplified Bible was described as "(a Greek/English version)", when it is not.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: "Eternal Principle" - an alternate evaluation.](#)

My apologies to the audience for this error.

=end of errata=

Email Mike Parsons:  
[m\\_parsons8@hotmail.com](mailto:m_parsons8@hotmail.com)

Furuli has stated that he considers that "biblical principles" are eternal.

I would ask that Furuli (and others) consider what he has described as "eternal principles" relating to the blood topic in a slightly different approach.

I know that technology isn't quite there yet, but just suppose...

As you sit in your office one day there is a strange noise behind you, and as you turn around, a time-machine appears. Within this time-machine there is a cardboard box. As soon as you remove the box, the time-machine vanishes.

You open the box, and inside is a strange-looking machine and instruction manual. The manual says that you put vegetables in the "input side", and from the "output tap" pours human blood 1 minute later. The machine is a "human blood synthesiser unit". It synthesises human blood in exactly the same form as if it were within humans today. It is identical to human blood, and may even be a disease-free source. The machine does not give technical details of how it works, but for the sake of discussion, we will say it is purely electro-mechanical, powered by solar panels, and has no "lifeform" parts inside other than the vegetation put into the "input side".

I am curious as to how Furuli would view the output product.

I merely wish to demonstrate a point here, namely that generally, the bible connects the symbolism of blood to indicate LOSS OF life, and that it is that that is the quintessential issue, rather than the material itself.

If I were to accept Furuli's view, that blood was a banned substance from the apostolic decree forwards, then I would not be able to use the machine-fabricated source too, for he considers it to be an "all-inclusive" ban.

However, since the machine would be life-less (in the concept that we accept ... created carbon-based lifeforms), then the link of blood to life is not present. The rules (as Furuli sees them) surrounding its use would no longer have any real meaning. The material is one and the same, but since no life was taken, the rules relating to blood, and its significance as a token for loss of a life no longer exist.

Bringing this line of thought back to the existing situation (without this machine), again the principle of blood equating to loss of a life comes into play. If blood is freely donated, in the same way as perhaps other organs may be, is there a lost life? If not, do we have to hand back anything to God, by divine command?

I acknowledge that all sorts of unpleasant issues could be raised here, which are not directly covered other than perhaps by biblical principle (eg can animals likewise "donate" blood or other organs?). However, I ask that these be brushed aside, and just focus on the single principle:

Blood (to be given back to God) = (loss of) life (which does not belong to us, but our Creator alone).

This is what some people within the JW group have come to understand, and so take their conscientious decision on permitting the use of donated blood.

I acknowledge that there are pros and cons to bloodless surgery vs use of blood. But to assess the risk of these things are outside of the scope of the scriptures, and there should therefore be no prohibition of blood based merely on risk alone. For risk varies with time, technology, the skill of the medical staff, and the immediate circumstances of the patient. It is not that risk should be irrelevant to the equation however, but assessment of risk is outside the scope of a religious group, and is between the doctor and patient.

That the essential element, respect for life (as opposed to the material "blood") has further biblical precedents can be shown.

For instance, at Act 20: 26,27 Paul says: "Hence I call YOU to witness this very day that I am clean from the blood of all men, for I have not held back from telling YOU all the counsel of God." Here, literal blood was not involved. It was responsibility for (future) loss of life.

Also, in ancient Israel, whilst David was in battle with another army, he told others of his longing for a drink from a particular well. The account at 1 Chronicles 11:18-19 then says: "At that the three forced their way into the camp of the Philistines and drew water from the cistern of Beth'le-hem, which is at

the gate, and came carrying and bringing it to David. And David did not consent to drink it, but poured it out to Jehovah. And he went on to say: "It is unthinkable on my part, as regards my God, to do this! Is it the blood of these men that I should drink at the risk of their souls? For it was at the risk of their souls that they brought it." And he did not consent to drink it."

Here, David felt some measure of responsibility not for the death of anyone, but risk of death. He regarded the water as if it held the "added value" of possible loss of their lives, and so he could not bring himself to drink it. Here, the literal fabric "blood" was not involved, but the very essence of the issue, loss of life was well known to him.

It is arguable that the WTS is focusing on "loopholes" within the letter of the (mis-understood scope of the) "law", rather than understanding (dare I say ignoring?) the underlying value that it is trying to protect.

References:

[1] Scope of "abstain", fragmentation issues, policing vs reason, moral obligations within JW community. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL76>.

## Muramoto's new interpretation of the meaning of the concept "informed consent"

13 March 2001



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### MURAMOTO'S NEW INTERPRETATIONS OF THE MEANING OF THE CONCEPT "INFORMED CONSENT"

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Muramoto's new interpretation of the meaning of the concept "informed consent"](#)

Email Rolf J. Furuli:  
[furuli@online.no](mailto:furuli@online.no)

It is rather sensational for a physician to urge his fellow physicians to be less supportive than previously towards a particular patient group in need of surgery. Yet this is what Dr. Muramoto has done. It is no less sensational that the reason for this is that he finds "ethical flaws in the blood doctrine" and that it is "inconsistent", "illogical", and "irrational"; thus there is a value judgement of the beliefs of the Witnesses that justifies this suggestion.(1) Medical science is descriptive, religion is normative, thus Dr Muramoto's approach in this case is religious rather than medical. This new interpretation of "informed consent", where physicians are supposed to evaluate the nature of the patient's decision, is called "rational non-interventional paternalism"(2)

Concerning my words "you ask for an acceptance of the correctness of your viewpoints" and "you suggest that doctors should try to persuade sick Witnesses to change their minds.", Dr Muramoto writes at the end of his letter, "I sincerely hope this is not Furuli's malicious attack on me, but if he is indeed a civilized and responsible Witness, a formal apology is in order." (3) I am not a native speaker of English and I may choose words which have connotations leading to someone being offended. If that is the case, I regret it; I am just as opposed to ad hominem attacks as Dr Muramoto is. However, I cannot apologize for my words quoted above because they are true, as I will show.

### THE MAJORITY VIEW OF THE MEANING OF "INFORMED CONSENT"

The understanding of the concept "informed consent" in the medical community in Norway (and probably in other countries as well) is as follows: The physician and the patient discuss the situation. The physician outlines possible ways to treat the illness, discusses the pros and cons, including the risks of operating without recourse to blood, but the patient makes the final decision. Apart from the physician and the patient, other persons should not play any role in the decision, if the patient has not specifically asked for it. The physician has no right to question the quality or the correctness of the patient's decision, but he or she has the right to refuse to treat the patient on his or her conditions.

Showing respect for the autonomy of the patient and the physician, as outlined above, does not exclude the influence from other parties in connection with the decisions both of the patient and the physician. The physician may feel the influence or pressure from colleagues and the hospital administration, from ethical committees or governmental agencies, and from the courts. However, neither of these are "third parties" who influences the physician in an unjust way, because it is the physician who, based on his or her free will, makes the decision. The patient may feel the influence from family and friends and from the members of the congregation, but I consciously leave out the word 'pressure' because, after 40 years as a Witness, I experience that to abstain from blood is one of the beliefs that is deepest rooted in the conscience of each Witness, because it is clearly stated in the Bible. It is the patient who, on the basis of his or her free will, makes the decision to abstain from blood.

While physicians of Norway generally respect the autonomy of each Witness, they also feel the responsibility to make sure that the decision not to accept blood is the patient's own decision and that it is final. Therefore they usually explain the situation for the patient, and ask the patient if he or she will refuse blood even if death should be the outcome. Some doctors also ask why the patient refuses blood, and how long the patient has had this conviction. When they find that the decision is final, they usually decide to treat the patient on his or her conditions. This is really an ideal situation of what is called "informed consent" - full respect for both the autonomy of the physician and the patient without any intrusion into the personal sphere of any of them. I see no ethical problems with this fine physician-patient relationship.

### MURAMOTO'S VIEW OF THE MEANING OF "INFORMED CONSENT"

In the article in BMJ Dr Muramoto writes "An in-depth discussion of the entire blood policy with

individual patients may become necessary to ensure truly autonomous decisions on blood based treatment. Their advance directives and so called "blood cards" should be re-evaluated with the patients in light of the new policy."<sup>(4)</sup> These words seem harmless enough, but underlying them we find suggestions of a new way of treating Witness patients which is a threat to the principle of "informed consent" as it is understood by the majority. This is seen in the article which he refers to in his note (2) and to the later follow-up article. A reference to both articles are found in my notes (1) and (2).

Dr Muramoto follows the suggestion of Savulescu and Momeyer<sup>(5)</sup> who suggests that physicians should act as "critical educators" who should reason with those patients whose decision they deem as irrational. Writes Dr Muramoto: "In this paper I will expand on this argument and propose that medical professionals familiarize themselves with the inherent flaws of the blood doctrine, and provide JW patients with new perspectives and rational reasoning by proposing a few simple questions which can be presented in "non-interventional" fashion and without outside pressure. These questions may enable patients to view their doctrine from new perspectives and give them a chance to make a more informed, autonomous and rational decision."<sup>(6)</sup>

This suggestion reminds me of the anecdote of the physician who said to the patient: "Your depression is caused by unfavorable experiences in your childhood. " The patient answered: "But I had a very happy childhood with no unfavorable experiences." The physician concluded: "You certainly had such bad experiences, but you do not remember them because you have suppressed them in your mind." Regardless of what the patient says, she is at the mercy of the physician. If the situation was not so serious for the Witness patient, the approach of Dr Muramoto could be quite amusing: The physician decides that the decision of the patient is irrational, and then, without intruding the autonomy of the patient or influencing her, the physician helps the patient to make a rational decision!

But this is not all; not only is the view of the physician placed above the view of the patient, in effect overruling it, but the view of a third party is even used as a criterion by which to judge the Witness patient. Writes Dr Muramoto: "Jehovah's Witness patients who refuse life- saving blood transfusions may not only be irrational, as Savulescu and Momeyer argue, but may also be misinformed, misguided and, to some degree, coerced according to the information, based on direct knowledge and experience provided by dissidents and reformers."<sup>(7)</sup> This puts the situation completely upside down and jeopardizes the autonomy of the patient. The basic authority is a small group of anonymous dissidents who are called 'reformers'. Their claims that the Witnesses are misinformed and coerced are uncritically accepted. The Witnesses are judged as 'irrational', and on this basis it is fair that the physician acts as a 'critical educator' who will 'help' the Witness to reach a rational decision.

#### A LOOK INTO THE " CRITICAL EDUCATING" OF THE WITNESSES

As a member of the HLC for many years I have worked carefully and responsibly with the blood issue both practically and theoretically, and I find no inconsistency and no irrational side of the position held by the Witnesses. I have had in-depth discussions with many surgeons and anaesthetists who have asked critical questions about the basis for our standpoint. While not agreeing with our conviction, they have found the standpoint logical and rational, given that the words of the Bible are authoritative. So many intelligent and balanced people do not share the accusations of the dissidents that our view is inconsistent and irrational. This handful of dissidents are partisans and they are not presenting their case in a fair way.

I refer to my five letters in this chain where I have tried to explain the view of the Witnesses in a logical way. In short the consistency can be thus outlined: We have found that the Bible prohibits \*any\* use whatsoever of the blood of other creatures. So we will abstain from everything which is included in the concept 'blood'. No other arguments are necessary to outline the basis for our faith regarding blood, and the allembicing scope makes it perfectly consistent. Actions described by Greek words such as 'porneia' (fornication), 'aselgeia' (loose conduct), 'farmakia' (druggery, spiritism), 'komos' (revelry) and others are so grave that "those who practice such things will not inherit God's kingdom."<sup>(8)</sup> Yet after all philological tools have been utilized to find the semantic range of their meaning and references, still there are some judgments that must be made, and similarly with the word 'haima' (blood). Any 'judgement' can be criticized by those who view the case differently, but a different interpretation does not make a standpoint irrational.

Sixty years ago 'blood' was 'whole blood'. In the course of time, more and more products have been produced on the basis of blood, and as responsible people we have needed time to consider each product in relation to the concept 'blood'.<sup>(9)</sup> The view of fractions have not moved back and forth, but only in one direction, i.e. after having studied a fraction and found that we cannot definitely say that 'this is included in the concept 'blood' or 'this is not included in the concept 'blood'', the conscience of each person must decide whether to use it or not<sup>(10)</sup>(for instance, I still remember how we struggled with cryoprecipitate around 1965). We are not able to see that plasma, red cells, white cells and platelets can be excluded from the Biblical concept 'blood', but the use of any other fraction is a matter of conscience.

I find the suggestion that a physician should have the right to make a quality evaluation of the patient's decision, and when finding it 'irrational' should have the right to 'educate' the patient as an intrusion into the rights of the patient. But worse still, some of Dr Muramoto's suggestions of \*how\* to 'educate' the patient can best be described as manipulation. Just look at his first example of how a



physician is recommended to speak:

"I am concerned by my knowledge that there have been a number of significant changes in related understandings by the WTS. Probably you know that vaccination and organ transplants were for some time ruled unacceptable and morally wrong. These are now considered acceptable. But I think you would agree that the previous rulings may have had some quite serious effects - illness, disability, even death - while they were in force. It would seem that a person would want to consider what the future might yet bring in further changes of viewpoint. If holding to some present policy were to result in disability or even death in your own case, and that policy were reversed next year or some years from now, would you feel that such loss would have been worthwhile and justified.."(11)

I am not afraid that many Witnesses will change their mind because of this 'education',<sup>(12)</sup> but in my view this kind of reasoning is unethical because it manipulates the patient by posing hypothetical scenarios and by hiding (probably unconsciously) important information. Let us use vaccination as an example. The physician leads the patient to believe that the negative view of vaccination among the Witnesses before 1949 was bad, because it led to illness, disability, and death for some Witnesses. What is not told, is that vaccines before this year contained much blood, were impure, and caused a number of deaths. So, also from a medical point of view it was not given that to accept vaccines was the best choice. To hide the fact that vaccines could be dangerous at this time and cause death, and instead saying that \*not\* to take them could be fatal, is a blatant example of what Dr Muramoto and the dissidents accuse the Watchtower Society of doing, namely, to hide information.

I do not doubt the sincerity of Dr Muramoto. I view him in a positive way as a fellow human being, and I think that his standpoint regarding blood also has a professional basis. However, his suggestions that the physician should have the right to make a quality evaluation of the patient's decision (read: religious faith), and if found irrational, the doctor should 'educate' the patient (try to change the faith from being irrational to being rational), introduces a strong religious element through the backdoor. This is truly a religious approach, because science is descriptive while religion is normative. I therefore find that my words about his intent to change<sup>(13)</sup> the faith of the Witnesses regarding blood, has being justified; and I will not apologize for them.

## CONCLUSION

The hospital liaison committees of Jehovah's Witnesses have for more than ten years worked hard to help physicians give effective treatment to Witnesses refusing blood. We have urged them to learn new techniques for saving blood, and we have supplied them with the latest medical information regarding the treatment of different kinds of surgery or chemotherapy without using blood. For instance, we distribute free of charge a CD with several thousand abstracts and references to medical articles discussing bloodless treatment; and it is updated regularly. Our work, together with the growing understanding that blood is potentially dangerous, has paved the way for a situation where even the most complicated cases can be treated without blood.

This fine support from the medical community has been greatly appreciated, and it has, without excluding the possibility that the treatment of any disease may be fatal, given the Witnesses a feeling of security. Now they need not both fight with their medical problems and at the same time fight with the physicians in order to get a bloodless treatment. And suddenly a physician stands up and urges his fellow physicians to be less supportive! The reason for the suggestion is that he believes in the unverified claims of a small group of dissenters (who will not even disclose their identity), claims which for the most part are rejected as exaggerated or false by experienced witnesses as myself. So, because Dr Muramoto and this group think that the standpoint of the Witnesses regarding blood is irrational, they want the doctors to 'critically educate' the Witnesses in order to 'change their stance'. I am very much concerned that the good relationship between the medical community and the Witnesses may be harmed by the work of this group. They take care of their own interests and not those of the community of Witnesses. A handful of dissenters should not be allowed to influence the treatment of thousands of Witnesses who are determined to abstain from blood and cooperate with the physicians. I hope that physicians realise the improbability of the claim of this group that the standpoint the Witnesses express in a signed statement and further express in words when they come to a hospital, is not necessarily what they mean; so an evaluation of the quality of their decision is needed.

## APPENDIX: BREACH OF CONFIDENTIALITY.

Dr Muramoto writes: "I am totally perplexed by the fact that Furuli as a Jehovah's Witness condones and dismisses such an illegal action [a breach of confidentiality of a medical worker] because it is "rare".<sup>(14)</sup> This is a wrong interpretation of my words, and Dr Muramoto's accusation is false. I do not condone an illegal action even if it just occurs once. What I was discussing was that Dr Muramoto presented cases which are extremely rare, if they ever occur (such as vigils to avoid blood transfusion) as typically for the Witnesses, and in this connection I wrote that difficult cases where a Witness had a dilemma regarding confidentiality were extremely rare.

Dr Muramoto accepts that there are situations where a medical worker face an ethical dilemma; he even adds an example of "a psychiatrist who sees in his patient a sign of impending impulse to commit murder". He states: "We physicians never recommend to violate the law even in the cases mentioned above (15)." I accept this, but I suppose that different 'cases' are discussed in the ethical sessions where medical students are educated. I further think that if teachers discuss child molesters, while they do not recommend a breach of confidentiality even in cases where an adult

may harm more children, they will understand a health worker who notifies the police in such cases.

I want to make a statement: We Jehovah's Witnesses never recommend to violate the law in the cases mentioned above, or in other cases involving Jehovah's Witnesses, and we never recommend an intrusion of the physician- patient relationship! It is therefore a false statement when Dr Muramoto asks me to write a letter to stop the "recommendation that Jehovah's Witness health care workers breach medical confidentiality of fellow Jehovah's Witnesses and to refrain from intruding on the physician-patient relationship". The article (The Watchtower 1 September 1987:12-15) to which Dr Muramoto refers does not contain such a recommendation. A hypothetical case is discussed where a Witness who is a medical worker comes upon information that a fellow Christian has committed fornication and then killed the baby by taking an abortion. Two important Biblical laws are broken, and after deciding the matter for some time "Mary" approaches the fellow Witness and speaks with her about the matter. The article says:

"Circumstances can vary greatly. Hence, it would be impossible to set forth a standard procedure to be followed in every case, as if everyone should handle matters as Mary did. Indeed, each Christian, if ever faced with a situation of this nature, must be prepared to weight all the factors involved and reach a decision that takes into consideration Bible principles as well as any legal implications and that will leave him or her with a clear conscience before Jehovah."

I suppose that if we remove the words referring to God and the Bible in the quote above, few, if any would object to the quote being used in a session about medical ethics, where a case had been discussed in which a doctor had informed the police about a person who had molested children. Still it could rightly be said that "We physicians never recommend to violate the law even in cases of child molesting."

(1) Muramoto, O. "Bioethics of the refusal of blood by Jehovah's Witnesses: Part 1. Should bioethical deliberation consider dissidents' views? " Journal of Medical Ethics - August 1998, pp. 223-230.

(2) Muramoto, O. "Bioethics of the refusal of blood by Jehovah's Witnesses: Part 2. Anovel approach based on rational non-interventional paternalism. Journal of Medical Ethics - October 1998.

(3) Muramoto, O. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37>, 9 March 2001.

(4) Muramoto, O. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37>, 6 January 2001.

(5) Savulescu, J., Momeyer, R. W., "Should informed consent be based on rational beliefs? " J Med Ethics 1997:203-208.

(6) Muramoto, O. "Bioethics of the refusal of blood by Jehovah's Witnesses: Part 2. A novel approach based on rational non-interventional paternalism." Journal of Medical Ethics - October 1998 Osamu Muramoto, pp 295,296.

(7) op. cit. p 296.

(8) The New Testament, Galatians 5:21.

(9) When Dr Muramoto claims that the leadership has all power and with reference to this says: "This is why hemoglobin was prohibited by God in 1998 but now permitted by God in 2000, as I discussed in my article", he utters tendentious words, indicating that he does not understand lexical semantics and its use in Bible understanding, and neither the thinking of Jehovah's Witnesses.

(10) Please remember that we have never 'authorized' the use of a fraction made from blood. To say that each one's conscience must decide is not the same as an authorization.

(11) Muramoto, O. "Bioethics of the refusal of blood by Jehovah's Witnesses: Part 2. Anovel approach based on rational non-interventional paternalism." Journal of Medical Ethics - October 1998 Osamu Muramoto, p 298.

(12) Dr Muramoto agrees: "In reality, I do not expect any significant number of JW's will easily change their stance after one or two private meetings with a physician." "Bioethics of the refusal of blood by Jehovah's Witnesses: Part 2. Anovel approach based on rational non-interventional paternalism." Journal of Medical Ethics - October 1998 Osamu Muramoto, p. 300.

(13) Look at the quote in note 13 where Dr Muramoto himself uses the expression «change their stance».

(14) Muramoto, O. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37>, 9 March 2001.

(15) The other case was a physician who knew that the man whom his daughter was about to marry was HIV-positive, but the daughter did not know. Should the father inform his daughter about the man's condition?

**Re: The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness as a basis for refusing blood** 13 March 2001

**A. Servant,**

I am a committed Christian, not a Jehovah's Witness, and I do not have any family or personal friends



Christian Voluntary  
Worker  
*U.K. Church*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: The conscience of the individual Jehovah's Witness as a basis for refusing blood](#)

Email A. Servant:  
[JustHisServant@aol.com](mailto:JustHisServant@aol.com)

who are members of the society. My interest in this matter began as a result of postings to the Christianity Message Board on AOL and I have researched the subject and prayed about the issues involved for a few months. My desire is to see an end to what appear to me to be incoherent and illogical reasonings and teachings for a 'partial' prohibition on blood which I do not feel are scripturally sound and which are responsible for the deaths of faithful members of the society on a daily basis who are often ignorant of the current teaching/thinking of the society.

I do have a personal interest in the outcome inasmuch as I do not think it my Christian duty to stand back from something which I see as so illogical and which can result in the death of fellow human beings. I cannot imagine the grief of a Doctor within whose ability it is to possibly save someone's life, being unable to do so, because a particular blood part was not on the list of those items which can be accepted 'in good conscience', or indeed as is sometimes the case, despite the fact that the treatment they offered was something which was allowed by the Society but of which the patient was unaware.

Mr. Furuli may well be fully aware of current Society teaching and may attempt to defend his views and those of the Society, and consequently would be treated as a patient in accordance with his wishes. But those members with whom I have corresponded seem to have – dare I say it? – a woefully inadequate knowledge of the current stance of the Watchtower and an imperfect understanding of the contextual analysis of the scriptures. When I have asked questions, answers have generally followed the same line of argument to the point where I know exactly what is going to be stated next. Mr. Furuli's argument followed the same general lines, but was more highly polished than other versions which I have read.

Here is an example of a response I received recently (quoted word for word and without correction): 'should not take blood transfusion because that obviously violates Gods law but if they accidentally take small bits of blood through things like vaccinations and other treatments that we might not be aware of having blood in it then we shouldn't worry too much, but we should keep quiet so as not to stumble anyone else. I know I am simplifying this rather. But I just don't have the brain to do it any other way. This seems to be what they are saying about blood factions - that it is OK to have them because it would not stumble other christians but taking pints of blood would clearly be wrong and would be against god's law. In any case JW's are not disfellowshipped for taking blood transfusions now anyway'. This lady is currently studying with Jehovah's Witness - she has family who are members. The next quotation is from someone who has been a Witness for many years: 'If the Society are wrong Jehovah God will rectify this in his own good time... and I for one will wait patiently on him to do so.' And another from the wife of an elder who is a grandmother and has been a Witness for about 40 years: 'I find the thought of using something from cow's blood (when hemopure was mentioned) thoroughly disgusting' and 'Which part of ABSTAIN FROM BLOOD do you not understand?' My answer is the part which God allows if He truly and unequivocally says 'abstain from blood'.

The society cannot have it both ways: either abstain from blood in its entirety according to Acts 15 v 29, or lift the prohibition on the basis that there is no logic in 'slightly' abstaining from blood.

To be a Doctor faced with patients who re-iterate 'No blood' - who are unaware of the Society's current thinking, thus refusing something which could be used in 'good conscience', would – in my humble opinion - be like watching helplessly as someone voluntarily ended their own life. In the case of minors the emotive images and language of the May 1994 Awake! magazine haunts me – 'In former times thousands of youths died for putting God first. They are still doing it, only today the drama is played out in hospitals and courtrooms, with blood transfusions the issue'.

May I ask Mr. Furuli to clarify the sources for the initial claim 'In former times thousands of youths died for putting God first'? To what is the Awake! Magazine referring, bearing in mind that in this context these are minors (under the age of 18)? What period of history is being considered? Are these Jehovah's Witness youths?

The second sentence implies that 'thousands' are still doing so. The 'drama' analogy I find quite disturbing as it underestimates what is happening. It may be a 'drama' in the sense that it can also be a life or death situation, but 'drama' also conjures up the image of various 'actors' playing out their respective parts in a scene in a hospital or courtroom – when the situation should be confined to 2 people only – the physician and the patient. To continue the 'drama' analogy, there is no room in the physician/patient relationship for supporting 'actors' (unless we are speaking of a minor) nor an 'audience' to watch the way in which the plot unfolds, nor 'critics' who would then report on it to 'interested' parties!

Mr. Furuli maintains that the majority of these children were those suffering from fatal illnesses like leukaemia. If Mr Furuli is privy to information about the medical conditions of this group of youngsters, could he please enlighten us? How many of these youngsters were dying of fatal illnesses? How many might have had their lives prolonged by the use of blood products until such time as medical advances might have provided them with a more favourable prognosis? Of all these children, how many died from refusing a component which may now be taken in 'good conscience'? Emotive questions, I know, but pertinent ones I feel.

I have read Mr. Furuli's first posting and would like to offer the following comments on the three items which seem to me to relate solely to dietary laws concerning animals:

· 1 I do not understand the reasoning behind and the first example used regarding 'things offered/sacrificed to idols'. Does the NWT translate 'eidolothuton' (Strong's No. 1494) and interpret this word in a different way from other translations? Certainly the word is translated differently by the NWT here and the society implies that this section applies to idolatrous practices. If we examine the Lexicon for Strong's number 1494 it gives us the following meanings:

1) sacrificed to idols, the flesh left over from the heathen sacrifices 1a) it was either eaten at the feasts or sold (by the poor and miserly) in the market.

Mr. Furuli proceeds to expound a case scenario based on 'idolatry' rather than 'things offered/sacrificed to idols'. His example of a family asked to offer fire and incense to the genius of the emperor is, therefore, not a valid one because that example surmounts to 'abstention from idolatry' rather than from 'abstention from things offered/sacrificed to idols' in accordance with Strong's definition. The example portrays a family refusing to take part in an idolatrous act, not abstaining from 'eidolothuton'. Examination of the other 9 instances of the use of the word 'eidolothuton' in Acts, 1 Corinthians and Revelation bears out the Strong's definition, but I do not have a copy of the wording of the NWT in these instances.

The father's refusal to compromise his faith and commit an idolatrous act is not the same as abstaining from things offered to idols. This is totally different and Christians would not compromise their faith by committing an idolatrous act and consequently lost their lives. It cannot, therefore, imho, be linked to the refusal of Jehovah's Witnesses to take certain elements of blood – a stand which may cost them their life – for they are not the first two elements of the 'apostolic decree' and therefore the argument is flawed.

When read contextually, we have a statement which seeks to limit rather than expand any requirements for Gentile converts. The Pharisaic converts at verse 5 stated 'It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.' Peter's response is that 'in cleansing their hearts by faith He (God) has made no distinction between them and us. Now therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus, just as they will.'

To which James replies that 'I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain.....' And the end of the letter states 'and if you keep yourselves from these things, you will do well.'

· 2 Let us now consider 'things strangled', the third element of the decree – leaving the blood issue for the conclusion. This is fairly straightforward at first glance – abstain from meat where the animal has been strangled – i.e. unbled meat. I prayed about this passage into the early hours of the morning and felt compelled to re-read the passage. The Bible by my bed is an RSV. I read the passage and my eye fell to a footnote at the bottom of the page – 'some early manuscripts omit 'things strangled'. Why would they omit that element of the 'apostolic decree'? The omission occurs at verse 20 and verse 29. This event occurred after a member of the organisation had said to me that God would not have repeated Himself if 'abstain from blood and unbled meat meant the same thing'. It would appear from some early manuscripts, that the two were felt to be a repetition and that blood by its contextual position in the sentence leads us to believe that the decree is speaking of animal blood (which was my contention).

· 3 If we look at the Greek, 'haima', is sandwiched between 'things offered/sacrificed to idols' and 'things strangled'. I would maintain that from a contextual reading, 'haima' would refer to the blood of animals because it is sandwiched between the first and second nominal phrases which both refer to animals according to Strong's definitions.

Contextually, the passage is the deliberation of the apostles and elders about whether Gentiles should be required to be circumcised or to keep the Mosaic law. The argument needs to be re-read and my reading would accord with that of Russell's as quoted in the Watchtower of 15th May 1897 - i.e.

'The answer ignored every feature of that law, except four points; and the first three of these were mentioned no doubt as a basis of common fellowship between those who had been Jews and those who had been Gentiles, namely, (1) abstaining from meats that had been offered in sacrifice to idols; (2) abstaining from animal food that had not been killed after the manner of the Jews; (3) abstaining from the eating of blood. It would be almost impossible for those who had been reared as Jews to ignore these three points, and if the converts from the Gentiles did not observe them it would be a constant barrier to their social intercourse." The Watchtower 05/15/1897, p. 153 (Reprints p. 2158)

'....The things here recommended were necessary to a preservation of the fellowship of the "body" composed of Jews and Gentiles of their different education and sentiments....A similar thought attaches to the prohibition of the use of blood. To the Jew it was forbidden, and under his covenant it was made a symbol of life - to partake it would imply responsibility for the life taken....These prohibitions had never come to the Gentiles, because they had never been under the Law Covenant; but so deeply rooted were the Jewish ideas on this subject that it was necessary to the peace of the church that the Gentiles should observe this matter also.' - The Watchtower 04/15/1909, p. 117 (Reprints p. 4374)

It is fairly easy to see if this view of the passage, namely, that it is cultural, is correct and that is to see whether Orthodox Jews, Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics permit blood transfusion. In all 3 traditions, 'Tradition' is very important in reading and understanding texts. We know that the Christian version of Leviticus and the Jewish equivalent are identical. If 'Tradition' permits blood transfusions, it can only be because Leviticus for both Christians and Jews, and Acts for Christians, is not relevant in the case of blood transfusions. All 3 traditions are a lot closer to the situation than we are now. If it is fine for them, I cannot see how Jehovah's Witnesses can say that it is against God's law.

So was Russell wrong? He believed that the recommendations were necessary for 'unity' – yet the Jehovah's Witnesses are 'set apart' from the fellowship of the 'body', in fact, they believe themselves to be the 'body'. They are 'united' as Mr Edmonds states – 'One of the factors contributing to this unity, Jehovah's Witnesses teach, is our common acceptance of certain scriptural teachings and standards'. The problem with the blood prohibition, however, is that there is a growing number of members who are not 'united' in their 'common acceptance of certain scriptural teachings' and when studying the scriptures for themselves in depth, find that the 'scriptural teaching' of the Watchtower on this matter does not, in fact, have a foundation in the scriptures themselves. There is no mention of a 'partial' blood prohibition.

I have studied the Watchtower's blood brochure 'How Blood can save your Life' and was surprised to find that much of the brochure related to quasi medical discussion without identifying those components of blood which can be taken 'in good conscience'! The Scriptural justifications were not as high in evidence as I had expected either but the brochure is mainly about the inherent dangers of blood and the insistence that there are alternatives to the use of blood, and tacitly implies that these are as effective as blood. The brochure does not begin with a scriptural defence of the blood policy as I assumed that it would, but:

'Each day people face ethical decisions about health: organ transplants, abortion, the "right to die." Hopefully, you will never face those problems.

Yet, there is one issue that demands your attention: How can blood be used to save life?

With good reason, many now ask, 'How safe are blood transfusions?' But this is more than a medical issue. It has made news involving Jehovah's Witnesses. Have you wondered why these ethical people, who believe in good medicine, refuse to accept blood?

As you will see, the medical and moral aspects of using blood bear directly on how you can save your most valued possession: LIFE.'

The brochure begins by posing a question in its 3rd sentence – 'How can blood be used to save life?'

The one issue that it maintains 'demands your attention' is left unanswered in the publication in relation to the use of blood. Instead, the brochure tackles everything else that 'might' save your physical life – except blood. The focus switches immediately in the 4th sentence to 'How safe are blood transfusions?' To a reader, this would appear to imply that the most important issue is the safety of blood – not the scriptural basis for the blood prohibition.

It then states that 'the medical and moral aspects' – not religious grounds, not scriptural basis - but 'medical and moral aspects of using blood bear directly on how you can save your most valued possession: LIFE'

The brochure is pretty short on statistics and showing supporting evidence – contrary evidence is never given - but sweeping statements are made in highly emotive language such as 'each year thousands die as a result of transfusions; multitudes more get very sick and face long-term consequences.' Having stated this, where is the supporting evidence? Nothing is quoted. And again, 'Have the dangers since been eliminated so that transfusions are now safe? Frankly, each year hundreds of thousands have adverse reactions to blood, and many die'. Not a statistic in sight.

I was advised to read the brochure by a Jehovah's Witness and having done so, I concluded that the most sensible pieces of advice contained therein were:

'Before submitting to any serious medical procedure, a thinking person will learn the possible benefits and the risks.' Agreed!

'In many places today, the patient has an inviolable right to decide what treatment he will accept. "The law of informed consent has been based on two premises: first, that a patient has the right to receive sufficient information to make an informed choice about the treatment recommended; and second, that the patient may choose to accept or to decline the physician's recommendation. . . . Unless patients are viewed as having the right to say no, as well as yes, and even yes with conditions, much of the rationale for informed consent evaporates."—Informed Consent—Legal Theory and Clinical Practice, 1987.' This would appear to be in agreement with Dr. Muramoto's original paper. The discussion is between the physician and the patient and the patient has 'the right to receive sufficient information to make an informed choice'.

'Many people agree that a court is no place for personal medical issues.' Yet the society used to bring those who accepted blood therapy before a 'judicial enquiry', and if unrepentant, disfellowship them. The society seems to agree with Dr. Muramoto that medical issues are personal. So why were



'Mary's' activities lauded?

'If a court forced an abhorrent treatment on you, how might this affect your conscience and the vital element of your will to live?' And if an organisation lead you to believe that 'to force blood on a Christian would be the equivalent of forcible sex—rape' (blood brochure) would that not have formed your judgement that the treatment was 'abhorrent'? And how does Hemopure stand in this whole argument? Bovine blood?

'You owe it to yourself to get the facts in order to make an informed choice about blood.' Hear, hear, I cry!

With such written support by the Watchtower for 'personal medical issues' which 'many people agree that a court is no place for' and the opening question 'Yet, there is one issue that demands your attention: How can blood be used to save life?', may I make the following suggestions?

- A copy of the AJWRB's brochure should be made available at the official Watchtower site on the internet.
- A copy of the AJWRB's brochure should be made available to all Jehovah's Witnesses – after all, it is they who are knocking on doors trying to recruit new members, and they who are 'teaching' the blood doctrine at grass roots level with what I have found to be a lack of knowledge.
- All Jehovah's Witnesses should be given written confirmation of the blood components and treatments which may be allowed 'in good conscience'.
- Open discussion of this matter should be allowed at congregation level with all relevant scriptural and medical information available and with medically qualified personnel available to explain medical issues.

And in light of the Society's statement that 'You owe it to yourself to get the facts in order to make an informed choice about blood.' which shifts the responsibility for action onto the individual rather than the society, that

- Disfellowshipping or disassociation for accepting blood when the personal conscience is not compromised by doing so, should be discontinued.
- Decisions relating to blood treatment should be left to the individual conscience without fear of censure or shunning.

Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross was to give us life. He gave His blood – not a pint, but all of it – voluntarily. I believe that the Jesus I know and love would applaud the willingness to save the life of a fellow by giving our blood for medical use, the work of the medical teams in using the blood to save life and the work of Dr Muramoto, the AJWRB and others in trying to highlight the inconsistency of application of the blood prohibition by the Watchtower. The failure of the Watchtower to adequately provide information – and indeed to suppress information by dint of 'apostasy' – is a serious matter in my humble opinion. The number of deaths, internationally, from this policy, could be as high as 3 per day, 19 a week, 83 a month, 1,000 a year if using medical data for extrapolation.

If the Watchtower maintained that all its followers totally abstained from blood that would be easier to understand for it would at least be a consistent application of its view. The current position with certain items allowed cannot be sustained from scriptural interpretation.

Do not wait for 'new light' – it has been here all the time!

God bless +

Mark 3 v 4 And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched [it] out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

## Response to Furuli

16 March 2001



**Marvin Shilmer,**  
Elder  
*Jehovah's Witnesses*

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[Re: Response to Furuli](#)

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What Does it Take?

In the face of counter reasoning Furuli has apparently convinced himself of his conclusions on the subject of blood and Jehovah's Witnesses. Just how he has retained his conclusions in the face of that counter reasoning is unknown because he refuses to openly defend them in the face of what is practically a line by line refutation of the very premises upon which his conclusions are based. To onlookers this gives an unmistakable image of wearing blinders. He appears to be ignoring those refutations in order to retain his conclusions. To date the closest thing explaining that action is his more recent statement that "This handful of dissidents are partisans and they are not presenting their case in a fair way." [1] Furuli makes it sound as though having a dissenting view makes that view unfair by default! Just \*what\* is unfair about anyone offering counter reasoning and refutation is not stated by him. More importantly, Furuli does not explain why he does not attempt to resolve those concerns! Exactly what does it take to get him and, more importantly, the Watchtower Society to

address these refutations, counter reasoning and overall concerns in a head-on and fair fashion? What does it take?

In his rejections addressed to Dr. Muramoto Furuli says, "I am just as opposed to ad hominem attacks as Dr Muramoto is." If this is so then why is his retort to the views of dissenting Witnesses that of an unexplained "they are not presenting their case in a fair way"? Without an accompanying explanation, what is that but a weak assault on their character? What is that if not a skillfully veiled ad hominem attack? Assuming the individual character of each dissenting Witness is deplorable, how exactly does that at all refute the concerns and reasoning they would offer? What does it take to get Furuli to address the actual and specific refutations, counter reasoning and concerns rather than excusing himself and his views by no more than an irrelevant and unexplained contempt of character? What does it take?

Furuli takes exception to Dr. Muramoto's suggestion that physicians should treat Witness patients independently of official Watchtower teachings rather than treating Witnesses collectively as though each of them feels the same way about those teachings. Exactly what is wrong with treating the person based upon their personal convictions rather than treating the person according to a collective belief is not clearly stated by Furuli. Just how is a physician to know the details of personal convictions and whether they are convictions as opposed to pressure to conform, that is unless they ask for and investigate the reasoning of the individual Witness patient? Furuli has already admitted that there is dissenting views on this issue and those dissenters have expressed experience of pressure to conform to Watchtower policy. That Furuli says he does not know of or has not experienced pressure to conform has no bearing on whether that does indeed happen. Indeed there is experience to the contrary and practically every physician knowledgeable about Witnesses knows it! In the face of that, exactly what is wrong with a physician taking initiative to encourage that patients fully express themselves in the face of honest questions? This is left unexplained by Furuli. Does Furuli hold his personal experience in higher esteem than the experience of other Jehovah's Witnesses? What does it take for Furuli to respect that a physician wants to treat the person including their personal convictions rather than treating a person as their religious association would prefer them treated? What does it take?

Furuli offered an anecdote of a treating physician who refuses the convictions of the individual by influencing them otherwise. For at least two reasons that anecdote is no more than a red herring. 1) Nowhere has Dr. Muramoto expressed that a patient's personal convictions should be dismissed by overturning them. Rather, Dr. Muramoto has recommended that those convictions be determined as personal ones by evaluating them with the patient to that end. 2) If a patient changes their minds in the face of good questions then who is Furuli to decide that that is anything short of an autonomous action on the part of the patient? Why is it fine for us as Witnesses to influence values related to medical treatment and it is not fine that physicians do the same? Assuming both actions result in an according conviction, why is one an action of autonomy and the other not? Furuli appears to think that everything boils down to Religion or Science when that is not the case. In this case we are talking about a religious teaching based at least in part on supposed scientific views. (E.g., since albumin would feed the body if taken through the digestive track, then, according to our teachings, why is it suddenly not food because it is administered intravenously? Why do we not apply the same "scientific" logic with each component of blood?) Regardless of who does it, why is it wrong that a view that purports to be partly based on science is questioned as to its scientific accuracy? What is bad about that? Does Furuli think that patients who happen to be Jehovah's Witnesses are not just as due that discussion as any other patient?

As for Furuli's contention that many intelligent and balanced people find Jehovah's Witnesses stand on blood as logical and rational, that contention is meaningless unless that finding stands up in the face of refutation and counter reasoning. To date Furuli has provided no answer to specific refutations and counter reasoning. If his sources are that intelligent then I suggest he invite them to the discussion. Maybe they will try answering what Furuli has ignored. Only then will we know if their findings are intelligent or balanced.

Finally Furuli makes a sweeping statement that "the Bible prohibits \*any\* use whatsoever of the blood of other creatures. So we will abstain from everything which is included in the concept 'blood'. No other arguments are necessary to outline the basis for our faith regarding blood, and the all-embracing scope makes it perfectly consistent." [1] That statement ignores that our teachings on this subject include more than "the blood of other creatures." Indeed our teaching includes a prohibition on using our \*own\* blood. Furthermore, Furuli's contention that "we will abstain from everything which is included in the concept 'blood'" is actually incorrect. What we teach to abstain from is only what the Watchtower Society says falls under the concept of blood. The problem with that position is that it has yet to explain scripturally why one part from blood is "blood" and another part from blood is maybe not "blood." Since, as Furuli contends, our teaching is based solidly upon the Bible then we must expect that those discriminations can be proven scripturally. This he has failed to do by resolving refutations offered him. [2]

Furuli's contention that "the Bible prohibits \*any\* use whatsoever of the blood of other creatures" is also conflicting with our teachings on blood by virtue of Witnesses buying products manufactured from blood. In essence Witnesses are paying others to \*use\* blood to make those products. Does Furuli think there is a moral distinction between performing a [supposed] immoral act versus paying someone to perform a [supposed] immoral act? If so I would like to see him reason that point because that is precisely what his conclusions assert.

Furuli's contention that the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15 is unqualified and absolute<sup>[3]</sup> is likewise problematic. Besides the fact that Furuli himself qualifies that Decree by means of the Mosaic Law, he also ignores that an \*absolute\* prohibition would require abstaining from using blood in anyway whatsoever including looking at it, smelling it, feeling it, buying it, selling it, etc. Does Furuli argue that those acts are also prohibited or does he \*qualify\* the passage otherwise? Again, since the passage in question does not specify the acts of eating or consuming then, by Furuli's applied reasoning, anyone who says the prohibition applies only to eating or consuming of blood is then diluting the verse. Surely Furuli must admit that the Apostolic Decree \*is\* contextually qualified by \*existing\* and \*applicable\* scriptural standards, otherwise what was that first century discussion about? The only remaining question then is what scriptural qualifiers to attach. Reasoning offered on this forum demonstrates that Furuli's act of qualifying by the more stringent prohibitions in the Mosaic Law is less than valid because he has failed to defend that view scripturally in the face of refutation and counter reasoning. On the other hand, regarding blood, reasoning such as provided at [jwbloodreview.org](http://jwbloodreview.org) soundly qualifies the Apostolic Decree by means of the Noachian Law, and that qualification does not prohibit using donated blood for transfusion. Furuli has knowingly failed to address any of this yet he claims to retain conclusions otherwise. Just what does it take to get a person representing themselves as logical to read and address counter reasoning? What does it take?

At some point it becomes a willing act of discouragement that the Watchtower Society, and now Furuli, does not publicly address valid and intelligent concerns, refutations and counter reasoning such as those offered here in response to Dr. Muramoto's article. Naturally we each have the option of whether to face and resolve hard questions. But in this case where other people's lives can be so effected, it is disturbing to say the least that these issues are left to teeter without sound resolution. It is only natural that a physician would want to make sure of a patient's convictions in such a setting! We are not addressing just another religious teaching. We are discussing a religious teaching that can immediately affect peoples' lives and health! Also, if we assume spiritual consequences, then if we choose wrongly then we are talking about affecting persons' long-term prosperity! What judgment awaits persons who incorrectly promote a teaching that causes death? (Jeremiah 7:31) Does that thought not behoove that we all examine each and every single aspect of this particular religious teaching? How can we say we have done that unless any and all reasoning has been thoroughly resolved on the subject?

What will it take to get the Watchtower Society, and not Furuli, to address these concerns just as publicly as it does its teaching on the subject so far? Is the Watchtower Society going to be a spiritual guide and provider or not? Why must we beg that it address these concerns like the poor must too often beg for meager crumbs? (Luke 16:21)

Marvin Shilmer

Endnotes:

[1] Furuli, <http://bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL87>

[2] Shilmer, <http://bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL64>; Shilmer, <http://bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL79>

[3] Furuli, <http://bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL75>

## Autonomy of individual Witnesses should not be sacrificed by "the majority" - Reply to Furuli

19 March  
2001



**Osamu Muramoto,**  
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I welcome the most recent letter from Furuli,<sup>[1]</sup> who stopped making ad hominem attacks on the author and started discussing the core issue of medical ethics. The questions raised by Furuli have been discussed occasionally in the medical ethics community, and I will be happy to discuss this controversy.

### THE NATURE OF BIOETHICAL DELIBERATION

Furuli stated that my approach is "religious" because he thinks "science is descriptive while religion is normative" and my approach is the latter. Bioethics is neither descriptive nor normative. If one adjective is needed to describe the nature of bioethics, it is deliberative. There are some norms in bioethics, and there are descriptive aspects in bioethics, but the most important aspect of bioethics is deliberation. It is an interdisciplinary field where different parties with different norms have deliberative interaction to handle moral issues in biomedical practice. Often the process of deliberation is more important than reaching a definitive answer or a norm. When Furuli reads literature in bioethics, he needs to understand this aspect. Many articles are written for the sake of deliberation, not to present a norm for patients and physicians. My papers should also be read in this context.

### THE MAJORITY VIEW OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Furuli is correct in pointing out that my approach to the blood refusal by Jehovah's Witnesses is not "the majority view." I have proposed to look at this old issue from a new perspective. If my view were the same as "the majority view" without any novelty, my papers would not have been published. Although the basic five elements of informed consent, i.e., competence, disclosure, understanding,

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[Re: Autonomy of individual Witnesses should not be sacrificed by "the majority" - Reply to Furuli](#)

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voluntariness and consent<sup>[2]</sup> are well accepted, there have been ongoing deliberation regarding how to evaluate and establish each element. The series of my papers Furuli cited deal with the element of "understanding" of the informed consent by Jehovah's Witnesses.

As Furuli described in his last letter, "the majority view" regarding informed consent of Jehovah's Witnesses is quite simple. Furuli stated: "The physician has no right to question the quality or the correctness of the patient's decision, but he or she has the right to refuse to treat the patient on his or her conditions." In other words, what Furuli is saying is tantamount to: "Doctor, don't ask why I refuse this. You take it or leave it." Furuli may be correct that this is the majority view, or at least the practice pattern of the majority of physicians. As Furuli mentioned, those doctors still ask customary questions such as how committed the patient is to the religion, and whether the patient fully understands the risk of refusing blood. However, they seldom ask why the patient refuses blood; they just accept the explanation the Watchtower Society or its representatives such as Furuli gives, assuming that is what the patient also believes.

The Watchtower Society and its officials, such as Furuli, have done a tremendous amount of work over the past two decades to permeate this practice and notion inside the medical community. Due to their systematic effort worldwide, the attitude of physicians and Witness patients has been molded according to the policy of the Watchtower Society. Once the stereotyped knee-jerk association between "Witness patients" and "no blood products" is built up in the medical community, there is no longer a need for bioethical deliberation. The process becomes almost a daily routine. This is exactly what Furuli described as "the good relationship between the medical community and the Witnesses".

### PROPOSED APPROACH TO BLOOD REFUSAL OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

Again, Furuli is correct that my proposal is different from this approach that the majority of doctors are following. I started challenging this "majority view" in 1998 in the series of papers I published in the Journal of Medical Ethics (JME).<sup>[3][4]</sup> The fundamental issue I have raised is the relationship between the conscience and autonomy of individual Witness patients vis-a-vis the policy of the organization of the Watchtower Society. The tenet of autonomy and informed consent should belong to an individual person, not an organization, religion, policy, doctrine or anything other than the patient himself. I argued that individual conscience should be treated and established independently from the organizational policy. In order to achieve this goal, I proposed to ask Witness patients questions which would enable each patient to personalize the decision-making process by deliberating their position in a rational fashion. Furuli interpreted this approach as asking for "an acceptance of the correctness of your viewpoints" and as "persuading sick Witnesses to change their minds." It is one thing to ask for rational explanation of their decision, it is quite another to ask to accept the correctness of different views or to change their minds. Furuli mislead readers by introducing something I have never promoted.

He also ignored another important point I proposed. That is the "non-interventional" aspect of this approach. Physicians are encouraged to ask various questions which rational and autonomous individuals are supposed to be able to answer, yet a lack of a rational answer does not result in persuasion or forced transfusion. This is what I wrote in my paper in the JME, which Furuli failed to quote:

**It is not the purpose of the meeting to win an argument with the patient using the physician's authority. A peaceful and rational discussion, avoiding argument, followed by suggestion that the patient think about the questions before giving a final decision should be most effective. Then the final decision made by the patient must be fully respected.**

Furuli's assertion that my proposed approach places "the view of the physician above the view of the patient, in effect overruling it" is entirely his fabrication. Contrary to Furuli's distorted representation, my proposed approach does not promote persuasion, and the patient's final decision is always respected.

### RATIONAL BELIEFS AND FALSE BELIEFS

Although my proposed approach seems new, Savulescu et al have been proposing this approach for some time. Savulescu argued that informed consent should be based on "rational beliefs".<sup>[5]</sup> In order to understand this argument, the concept of "false belief" (caution - this has nothing to do with religious belief system) in terminology of bioethics needs to be understood. There are many examples of "false beliefs" in daily medical practice. A heavy smoker refuses to quit smoking because he believes smoking reduces stress and gives him longevity. This is a false belief because his goal of "longevity" is in direct conflict with his behavior of refusing to quit smoking. His goal and behavior are incongruent. Refusal of life-saving treatment is often considered false belief. For example, a woman with gangrene of the foot refuses an amputation because she wants to continue to dance with her husband. Her belief is a false belief because she will never be able to dance whether she has an amputation or not. If she has an amputation, she will lose the foot. If she does not, she will lose life.

Regarding ethical approach to the false beliefs, the leading bioethicists and the authors of one of the most widely read reference books in bioethics wrote as follows:<sup>[2]</sup>

**When beliefs are demonstrably false, the question arises whether patients and subjects should be forced to abandon their false beliefs to enable them to reach an informed decision. Some have argued that if autonomous subjects decline further information, it should not be imposed. This proposal is attractive, but it also seems wrong to say that we should never pressure protesting patients or subjects to change their beliefs or to process information differently. If choice is limited by ignorance, as in the case of a demonstrably false belief, it may be permissible or possibly obligatory to promote autonomy by attempting to impose unwelcome information.**

Thus, the above mentioned heavy smoker with a false belief may arrive at a different viewpoint if vital information on the health hazards associated with smoking is provided. This approach is totally different from what Furuli purported as my proposal, which would force the patient to accept the information on tobacco hazards and to change their mind on smoking. It is bewildering that Furuli, as an intelligent scholar and a loyal Jehovah's Witness, is unable to see this obvious difference. However, I will no longer pursue his formal apology. I am beginning to think that Furuli genuinely cannot see certain things which are obvious to other people. His use of circular reasoning and failure to address core issues makes it appear that he is selectively blind when it comes to evaluating the Watchtower Society's blood policy. Even at this late stage he offers no biblical support for the list of acceptable and unacceptable blood products other than a quote from the Encyclopedia Britannica.

### **AUTONOMY AND INFORMED CONSENT BELONGS TO THE INDIVIDUAL PERSON**

In my last letter[6], I pondered upon Furuli's repeated remark that the Watchtower Society is not a third party in his relationship with his physician. Strange as it may sound, this seems his genuine feeling toward the Watchtower Society. The only explanation I could come up with for this curious remark is that Furuli and the Watchtower Society are in an inseparable, perhaps symbiotic relationship, such as a mother and a baby, so that his wish is always identical with the Society's wish, and vice versa. In this relationship, the doctor does not necessarily confirm the autonomy and consent of the baby; the mother (the Watchtower Society and its representative) can fulfill all the requirements of autonomy and informed consent. This relationship explains very well the current "good relationship between the medical community and the Witnesses", in which all the six million "babies" (Witness patients) are treated universally under one protocol given by the "mother" (the Watchtower Society) without any further questions asked. That explains why six million people all of a sudden in 2000 stopped viewing hemoglobin as "blood", and why all six million people (except for the minority of dissidents) select the same blood products as unacceptable.

This practice is acceptable only if all the Witnesses were really "babies." The reality, however, is that there are a substantial number of Witnesses who are mature enough to deliberate their own position on the blood issue independently from "the mother". This has raised serious ethical problems regarding the autonomy of those "mature" Witnesses. Just as the autonomy of a mature young adult is separate from the mother's, so is the autonomy of those mature Witnesses who view the selection of blood products differently from "the mother."

### **THE MINORITY'S AUTONOMY SHOULD NOT BE SACRIFICED BY THE MAJORITY**

Throughout his writing, Furuli has attempted to discredit the reformers and dissidents among the Jehovah's Witnesses, while ignoring the serious questions raised by dissidents such as Lee Elder and Marvin Shilmer. Furuli's attempt to discredit those fellow Witnesses is palpable throughout his writing. For example, he wrote, "[...] a small group of dissenters (who will not even disclose their identity) [...]". Furuli is dishonest because as a Witness, he is fully aware that any Witness who publicly disagrees with even one small point of the Watchtower doctrine and policy cannot maintain the membership. For example, can any Witness remain inside the organization after he publicly expressed his opinion that platelet products should be acceptable to Witnesses since it is not a major fraction as the Watchtower Society teaches? Furuli knows the answer; such a behavior is absolutely prohibited. Whether a platelet product is acceptable or not is probably a rather minor part of the entire doctrinal system and religious practice of the Watchtower religion. Yet, Witnesses are prohibited from publicly criticizing the organization even on relatively minor points. Witnesses are required to accept the doctrine and policy of the Watchtower Society in toto, or else they are ostracized and shunned. The unknown number of dissidents are all forced to remain anonymous on the internet because of this totalitarian policy.

Furuli should not criticize these dissidents for being anonymous. Their anonymity is the best evidence that there is no free speech and discussion among the Witnesses regarding critical ethical problems inside the organization. I have personally met at least eight of such dissident Witnesses. Some of them are active, and others are inactive, but they are all genuine Jehovah's Witnesses. Of course, my personal contact of Jehovah's Witnesses is extremely limited considering at least six million Witnesses scattered throughout the world. However, at least one thing is clear to me: the number of Witnesses who do not conform to the Watchtower policy is not negligible.

Furuli's recurrent argument is that these dissidents are a "small group" and "anonymous", and thus they should be ignored in bioethical deliberation. Very interestingly, that is the exact problem I have brought to the attention of the medical community. From the Watchtower perspective, Furuli is telling the audience, "don't listen to the minority, only listen to the majority of the Witnesses". Yet, the basic tenet of the respect for autonomy applies only to an individual person, whether he or she belongs to the majority or minority. In this regard, the following comment by Furuli exemplifies his gross disregard for the "handful" or "small group" of individuals. "A handful of dissenters should not be



allowed to influence the treatment of thousands of Witnesses who are determined to abstain from blood and cooperate with the physicians." Sorry, Furuli, even if thousands or even hundreds of thousands of Witnesses agree with Furuli, we physicians still face only one patient at a time. What is important to physicians is to look at this individual person, and obtain the truly autonomous and informed decision from this one person, regardless of how thousands of others believe. To borrow the above expression by Furuli, "the majority of Witnesses should not be allowed to influence the treatment of one Witness"!

## CONCLUSION

By failing to address the many questions raised in my letters and letters from his fellow Witnesses, Furuli has demonstrated a typical example of a Jehovah's Witness who refuses certain blood products without logical and rational explanation. However, the trail of his letters indicates that Furuli has made earnest attempts to rationalize his position. Such a dialogue with Jehovah's Witness patients is of utmost importance, and exactly what I have recommended in my previous papers. Whether Furuli stubbornly rationalizes the Watchtower policy and clings to it by ignoring the information and viewpoints provided here, or he starts looking at the whole issue from a different angle, is entirely his personal choice. As I repeatedly wrote, I fully respect Furuli's final and informed decision, and will never force him to accept anything he does not feel comfortable with.

However, I will make it absolutely clear again that all the argument Furuli developed here to defend his position, successfully or unsuccessfully, applies only to Furuli's personal decision as one patient. Furuli's autonomy and his informed decision are his, and only his. The next Witness patient the physician encounters should not be treated based on the Furuli's reasoning. It is wrong to treat mature adult Witness patients as if they were the babies of one mother. I would still ask the next Witness patient the same questions I asked Furuli all over again, and I urge fellow physicians to do the same.

Finally, I thank Mr. Furuli for his discussion in BMJ. His comments and responses are typical of loyal Jehovah's Witnesses, and as such, he demonstrated how they trivialize, ignore and worse suppress the dissenting minority. He inadvertently supported and enhanced the very point I have been making to the medical community for some time. That is, "Don't follow the crowd. Treat one individual at a time, and separately from the crowd!"

## REFERENCES

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**Thank you Rolf Furuli**

20 March 2001



**Lee Elder,**  
Founder  
AJWRB -Ass. JWs for  
Reform on Blood

I must tip my hat to Rolf Furuli for he has done a great service for all dissident Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) who conscientiously reject the Watchtower Society (WTS) blood policy.

By coming into a public forum and failing to address the core issues raised by dissident JWs, Furuli has demonstrated at least three things:

1. Neither Furuli nor the WTS can answer the simple questions we have raised.
2. It is fitting and proper for Jehovah's Witnesses to discuss this policy outside of the organization.
3. Physicians who ask JWs simple questions about the policy will find they are stumped and may reevaluate their position.

Furuli has helped create a historical record that will serve the Associated Jehovah's Witnesses for Reform on Blood (AJWRB) very well since the record clearly shows that even very experienced JW elders who are HLC (Hospital Liaison Committee) members (like Furuli) cannot answer simple questions about a policy they expect other JWs to die for if necessary.

What great irony is to be found when Furuli chides Muramoto by saying:

"...he (Muramoto) believes in the unverified claims of a small group of dissenters (who will not even disclose their identity), claims which for the most part are rejected as exaggerated or false by experienced witnesses as myself."

Yes, claims which Furuli refuses to address despite being asked to do so on at least four occasions. Where has Furuli shown that claims made by AJWRB are false? Where is the logical basis for calling our claims "exaggerated?" Once again we're treated to another round of Furuli's logical fallacies.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Thank you Rolf Furuli](mailto:leeelder@ajwr.org)

Email Lee Elder:  
[leeelder@ajwr.org](mailto:leeelder@ajwr.org)

I dare say that Furuli's lack of response to the issues will answer any remaining questions in the minds of physicians regarding the lack of autonomy of their JW patients. With Furuli and the WTS, it's their way or the highway.

Why should Furuli bother with something incidental like respect for the conscience of the individual or medical confidentiality? Pesky JWs who ask too many questions before they let their child bleed to death can just leave as far as Furuli is concerned. Actually, he would really prefer that they just identify themselves so that he can disfellowship them for not agreeing with him about what blood (haima) is this week. Lest we forget, he may once again change his mind next week and six million JWs will have to fall in line with the latest definition or face shunning and destruction by God.

Thank you Rolf Furuli - I nominate you for AJWRB "reformer of the year" for perfectly demonstrating how totally bizarre and undefensible the WTS blood policies have come to be.

## Risk of blood transfusion / Illegal breach of confidentiality: Addendum to reply to Furuli

21 March 2001



Osamu Muramoto,  
Regional Ethics Council  
Kaiser Permanente,  
Interstate Medical Office  
East, Portland, OR 97227,  
USA

In addition to my previous reply to Furuli,[1] I would like to add one correction to Furuli's error on the risks of blood transfusions, and a response on illegal breach of medical confidentiality.

### RISK OF ACCEPTING TRANSFUSION VERSUS REFUSING TRANSFUSION

In his attempt to minimize the death toll of the Watchtower blood policy, Furuli wrote[2]:

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Risk of blood transfusion /  
Illegal breach of  
confidentiality: Addendum to  
reply to Furuli](#)

Email Osamu Muramoto:  
[muramoto@aracnet.com](mailto:muramoto@aracnet.com)

In an editorial, C.D. Kitchens refers to 16 studies with 1404 Witness patients, and reports that the authors "... implicated a lack of blood as the primary cause of death in 8 patients (0.6%) and contributing to death in another 12 patients, yielding a total of 20 deaths (1.4%)." The author continues, "Other complications were not increased in Jehovah's Witnesses patients". Then he draws the interesting conclusion: "Less clear is how much morbidity and mortality are avoided by this practice [refusal of blood], but they probably exceed the risk of being transfused." (6) Because **it can be more dangerous to accept a transfusion than to refuse one**, a person who refuses one and dies for this reason or another, cannot rightly be accused for suicide, and it is even more illogical to accuse his or her fellow believers for killing the person. (emphasis added)

Thomas Daniels[3] already addressed this issue, and I will provide additional data to shed more light. Specifically, the focus of my discussion is Furuli's comment "it can be more dangerous to accept a transfusion than to refuse one." This notion is rampant among Jehovah's Witnesses; they are simply lead to believe that refusing blood transfusion is safer. I will show from available data that it is a typical "false belief" which is deeply embedded among Jehovah's Witnesses including Furuli. First, since Furuli misquoted Kitchens (he omitted "not" before "being transfused"), I will quote the pertinent sentences from the Kitchens' original article.[4]

The Jehovah's Witness patients' decision to forego transfusions for major surgical procedures appears to add 0.5% to 1.5% mortality to the overall operative risk. Less clear is how much morbidity and mortality are avoided by this practice, but they probably exceed the risk of not being transfused.

In this comment, Kitchens did not know the exact "risk of being transfused". Kitchens speculated that the risk of being transfused probably exceeds the risk of not being transfused. Obviously Kitchens did not fully research the available data on "the risk of being transfused", as his focus was on the risk of refusing transfusion. However the mortality of transfusion had already been known in 1993 when the Kitchens' paper was published. The study by Sazama in 1990[5] analyzed 355 blood transfusion-associated deaths reported to the United States Food and Drug Administration. The study was able to estimate the overall mortality associated with blood transfusion. The short-term mortality rate, which corresponds to Kitchens' estimate of short-term mortality rate from refusing blood, was 1 to 1.2 per 100,000 patients who received blood transfusions. In other words, receiving blood transfusion increased the mortality by 0.001 to 0.0012%, whereas refusing blood transfusion increased the mortality by 0.5% to 1.5%.

Furuli may argue that the data by Sazama is too old, since more transfusion-related complications have become known since this study. The risk of blood transfusion was again extensively reviewed in the "Medical Progress" review in the New England Journal of Medicine in 1999.[6][7] In this progress review, the overall number of deaths from blood transfusion is estimated between 23 and 44 deaths per million units of blood. These numbers include every complications from blood transfusion, not just short-term mortality as in Sazama's report. The short-term mortality which corresponds to Kitchens' estimate should be smaller than these numbers. Thus, a typical blood transfusion of two units carry the risk of 46 to 88 overall deaths per million patients, or 0.0046 to 0.0084%. If a larger amount of blood is transfused, this risk will increase further, to 0.01 to 0.03%.

The accurate number itself is not as important as the magnitude of the risk. Available data indicates that the mortality of refusing blood is close to one hundred times greater than the mortality of being transfused. In the United States alone, about 1.5% of population has conditions requiring blood transfusion each year according to the statistics of the American Association of Blood Banks. That means about 15,000 of Witnesses in the United States will face such conditions each year. Not all of them need transfusion for major surgeries, but suppose half of them had major surgeries, about

7,500 Witnesses have about 1% of additional mortality according to Kitchens. To put this in perspective, 75 Witnesses are dying each year in the United States alone due to refusal of blood transfusion, whereas only about 0.01% of mortality, or life of less than one Witness, is spared by refusing blood transfusion and avoiding transfusion-related death. We never know the exact number of life lost and life saved by refusing blood transfusion. However we can estimate the magnitude of mortality from this practice with reasonable certainty. If we accumulate the above number over the past thirty years and extend to other countries, "hundreds and thousands of deaths from the blood refusal policy" is not at all an exaggeration.

Finally, Furuli should carefully read the conclusion of this authoritative review article in the New England Journal of Medicine.[6]

The use of blood transfusion has declined, in large part because of concern about the safety of the blood supply. It is unlikely that any level of hemoglobin can be used as a universal threshold for transfusion. **The advent of a very safe blood supply suggests that outcomes should now be monitored to identify patients in whom transfusion may be underused in addition to identifying patients who receive unnecessary transfusions. Techniques or strategies to avoid blood transfusion will no longer be driven by the known risks of death from blood transfusion, since they are now so low that no alternative is currently as safe as a blood transfusion. Instead, blood conservation will be driven more by issues related to the costs and inventory of blood.** (emphasis added)

There are two pertinent points to our discussion in this conclusion.

1. The risks of death from blood transfusion are now so low that no alternative is currently as safe as a blood transfusion.
2. We should identify patients who may not receive necessary blood transfusion, in addition to identifying patients who receive unnecessary transfusions.

The following is the conclusion of the part two of this review article.[7]

Increased attention to the costs of health care delivery has caused the relative benefits and costs of blood conservation to be scrutinized. The prospective identification of surgical candidates who will need transfusion and therefore will truly benefit from blood conservation must be based on patient-specific factors, such as the baseline hematocrit and the anticipated blood loss during surgery. **The challenge for physicians will be to educate their patients that the decision to conserve blood should no longer be based on the safety of the blood supply,** but on evidence that blood conservation is safe and of value for individual patients. (emphasis added)

If we compare these conclusions in the authoritative review of blood transfusion medicine with the popular misconception among the Witnesses that "accepting blood transfusion is more dangerous than refusing blood transfusion", we can clearly see how "false beliefs" are effectively permeated throughout the Jehovah's Witness population through the "bloodless surgery" campaign driven by the Watchtower Society. See also the end note below about the "bloodless surgery".

## JUSTIFICATION OF ILLEGAL BREACH OF MEDICAL CONFIDENTIALITY

Regarding breaching medical confidentiality, Furuli has not been able to grasp the difference between legal and illegal breach of medical confidentiality. In his attempt to show another example of justifiable breach of confidentiality, Furuli even cited the confidentiality of child molesters.[8] It is not illegal in most states and countries for health care workers to breach confidentiality of child molesters. To the contrary, it is mandatory to report those cases in most jurisdictions. There is no parallel with reporting violators of the Watchtower rules, which is illegal. Ironically, it is some Jehovah's Witness elders who did not report child molestation that happened in their congregation.[9]

Regarding hypothetical case of "Mary" who worked as a medical assistant processing medical records and breached medical confidentiality of a fellow Witness patient who received abortion,[10] Furuli cited several cautionary comments in the same article. There is no question that those warnings were necessary because "Mary" after all committed an illegal act. The Watchtower Society could not explicitly promote an illegal act in its main magazine. However, we should not be distracted by the cautionary comments Furuli cited. Although Furuli stated "we Jehovah's Witnesses never recommend to violate the law in the cases mentioned above", he failed to mention the important exception to this rule. This exception is clearly stated in the article in which the "Mary" story was featured.

This command from the Highest Level of authority in the universe put the responsibility upon each Israelite to report to the judges any serious wrongdoing that he observed so that the matter might be handled. While Christians are not strictly under the Mosaic Law, its principles still apply in the Christian congregation. Hence, there may be times when a Christian is obligated to bring a matter to the attention of the elders. **True, it is illegal in many countries to disclose to unauthorized ones what is found in private records. But if a Christian feels, after prayerful consideration, that he is facing a situation where the law of God required him to report what he knew despite the demands of lesser**

**authorities, then that is a responsibility he accepts before Jehovah. There are times when a Christian "must obey God as ruler rather than men."-Acts 5:29. (p13)**

There may be occasions when a faithful servant of God is motivated by his personal convictions, based on his knowledge of God's Word, to **strain or even breach the requirements of confidentiality because of the superior demands of divine law.** Courage and discretion would be needed. (p15) (emphasis added)

According to this article, there is one exception to obeying the law of medical confidentiality. That is, when obeying "the law of God" or "the superior demands of divine law" conflicts with obeying "the demands of lesser authorities." Unfortunately, whether abortion or accepting blood transfusion, those actions are clearly violating "the law of God" according to the current Watchtower teaching. Despite Furuli's assertion, "we Jehovah's Witnesses never recommend to violate the law in the cases mentioned above", [8] the instruction from the Watchtower Society made a major exception to "Caesar's things to Caesar" or obeying the secular authority.

No matter how many excuses Furuli cites, the "Mary" story has the following three facts which cannot be disputed.

1. Mary committed an illegal act of breaching medical confidentiality of a fellow Witness patient who received a prohibited medical procedure.
2. The Watchtower Society in this article condoned Mary and did not censure her.
3. The Watchtower Society taught Witnesses that, where "the law of God" requires them to breach medical confidentiality, then doing so "despite the demands of lesser authorities" is their responsibility before Jehovah.

Of course, illegal breach of medical confidentiality is not an easy act, and has to be done cautiously because of the potentially serious consequences as the article warned. The article spent a great amount of space discussing risks and implications involved in this act, including an oath some employees took for confidentiality. Why the Watchtower Society needed to discuss all those implications in great length? Because the Watchtower Society did not simply say "don't do it." Instead of simply forbidding the Witnesses from committing this illegal act, it taught "do it, but be careful not to get in trouble." As the article stated, "courage and discretion would be needed." Still, if the circumstances allow, the Jehovah's Witness healthcare workers could act the same way as Mary did with "courage and discretion". This teaching remains a threat to our law-abiding society at large.

#### END NOTE ON BLOODLESS MEDICINE

The author believes **blood conservation** medicine is a safe, scientifically sound and cost-effective approach to reduce unnecessary blood transfusions, as extensively reviewed by the recent review article cited above.[7] However, "**bloodless**" medicine as promoted by the Watchtower Society, which means no blood under any circumstances at the cost of patient's harm and death, is an unsafe and costly religious practice under the name of "medicine".

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#### Answers to Dr. Muramoto's & others questions

26 March 2001

**Patrick J. McShea III,**  
Director of Systems &  
Software Development  
*National Alliance*

Dr. Muramoto asked what I would do if I came into a hospital and found a patient who was a member of my congregation receiving what looked like a transfusion of whole blood.

I would want to make sure that the patient's wishes were being respected. (Regardless what they were) I would not pry into the patient's treatment as I am not a family member and have no rights in that regard. If the patient were unconscious, my concerns would be primarily for the well being of the patient and the family. I would "make no inquiry on account of my conscience" 1 Cor. 10:25.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Answers to Dr. Muramoto's  
& others questions](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL106)

Email Patrick J. McShea III:  
[pjmciil@juno.com](mailto:pjmciil@juno.com)

Does that sound like a reversal of my previous post? It isn't. I believe that the individual conscience, if troubled will come forward to be treated. If the individual goes against their own conscience and doesn't come forward, then they'll most certainly have to answer to Jehovah for what they've done.

A scripture has bearing here. It's 1 Timothy 5:24-25 "**24** The sins of some men are publicly manifest, leading directly to judgment, but as for other men [their sins] also become manifest later. **25** In the same way also the fine works are publicly manifest and those that are otherwise cannot be kept hid."

Remember how Jesus "knew" that Judas was a thief? Certainly, he "knew" because as the scriptures say, "he knew what was in man", yet he did not know as the result of witnessing the act for himself. If he had witnessed the act, he would have been bound by the Mosaic Law (which he was under) to deal with it. As it was, he left it up to Jehovah to judge, knowing that Jehovah's judgment was righteous. He didn't sneak around and pry to try to "catch" Judas. Judas caught himself and had to deal with Jehovah's judgment.

Likewise as an elder I don't try to "hunt down" "offenders" as if I were a plain-clothes police officer. However, if Jehovah brings something to my attention, and says "Patrick! See here!" Then is when I have to deal with it otherwise my standing with Jehovah is compromised.

Some have asked questions as to how Jehovah's Witnesses go about making a conscientious distinction as to what minor blood "fractions" they accept and those that they don't.

Some want to know why we consider Genesis chapter nine and Acts chapter fifteen binding today when others don't feel the same way.

Some are puzzled as to why we can conscientiously accept and benefit from the donations of others and yet not donate themselves.<p></p>

Some don't understand why other stored blood fractions might be used and yet autologous blood might not be used.

Certainly, I can't presume to speak for anyone except myself, however, for those interested in this discussion I've included this link to my web site. I would have preferred to include the answers to all these things here, however there doesn't appear to be enough space to include my full replies. Perhaps I could have been terser in my reply. Brevity of statement has never been my long suit.

The link is at <http://communities.msn.com/bloodfractions>

## Final remarks to Dr Muramoto

26 March 2001



**Rolf J.Furuli,**  
 Research fellow in  
 Semitic languages  
 University of Oslo

I do not want to continue the discussion regarding Dr. Muramoto's article, but I would like to make a few concluding remarks regarding his two last letters.

### CALCULATION OF MORTALITY RATES

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Final remarks to Dr Muramoto](#)

Dr Muramoto has made some calculations regarding the risks of refusing blood transfusion that are so extremely misleading that they cannot go unchallenged. A student of mine who had handled statistics in the way Dr Muramoto has done would not have gotten his exam. Dr Muramoto writes:

Email Rolf J.Furuli:  
[furuli@online.no](mailto:furuli@online.no)

"The accurate number itself is not as important as the magnitude of the risk. Available data indicates that the mortality of refusing blood is close to one hundred times greater than the mortality of being transfused. In the United States alone, about 1.5% of population has conditions requiring blood transfusion each year according to the statistics of the American Association of Blood Banks. That means about 15,000 of Witnesses in the United States will face such conditions each year. Not all of them need transfusion for major surgeries, but suppose half of them had major surgeries, about 7,500 Witnesses have about 1% of additional mortality according to Kitchens. To put this in perspective, 75 Witnesses are dying each year in the United States alone due to refusal of blood transfusion, whereas only about 0.01% of mortality, or life of less than one Witness, is spared by refusing blood transfusion and avoiding transfusion-related death. We never know the exact number of life lost and life saved by refusing blood transfusion. However we can estimate the magnitude of mortality from this practice with reasonable certainty. If we accumulate the above number over the past thirty years and extend to other countries, "hundreds and thousands of deaths from the blood refusal policy" is not at all an exaggeration."(1)

Those being engaged in scientific research know that numbers cannot just be compared or extrapolated, but all the factors that influence the groups to which the numbers refer must be taken into consideration as well. When discussing dangers and advantages of blood transfusion, a host of factors from the past, present and future must be taken into consideration. And the question should be discussed both generally (from a statistical point of view) and specifically (from the point of view of the individual patient which needs surgery).

### GENERAL STATISTICS

In order to make statistics regarding the advantages and dangers of blood transfusions which have some plausibility, we should compare two groups of patients which are as similar as possible, one



getting blood transfusions and the other being treated with alternatives.(2) We should also be certain that each patient has received the very best treatment.(3) Not only deaths which probably were caused by blood transfusion or by the lack of such should be compared, but diseases and deaths that later occurred and which probably were caused by the transfusion or by the lack of such. Dr. Muramoto's statistics is very far from fulfilling these criteria because it concentrates on just one factor and ignore the others.

I shall not argue at length with quotations from medical journals about the dangers of blood transfusion. A glance at any group of hemophiliacs and their high frequency of diseases caused by blood fractions, definitely shows that infusion of blood components is not safe. But I would like to show that even though blood banks have worked hard to eliminate risks, there is no substantially reduction in the dangers today compared with 15 years ago. In 1988 a journal wrote: "Hepatitis that is attributed to transfusion... develops in [about] 7%-10% of blood recipients in the United States... This frequency of hepatitis occurs even among recipients of volunteer blood, but in recipients of paid-donor blood the frequency is three to four times higher. " (4) Last year professor Neil Blumberg, director of Transfusion Medicine Unit and Blood bank, University of Rochester, New York commented on the situation in the US. In a taped interview he estimates that in the US between 10.000 and 50.000 persons die each year from transfusion related causes.(5)

If we take the whole situation into account, both during and shortly after an operation and some time later, we find the reverse of what Dr Muramoto has claimed, thousands upon thousands of people have died \*because\* they have been treated with blood components. The numbers above show some of the dangers in the industrilized Western countries. But how less safe are blood transfusions in South Africa where 20 % of the people are HIV carriers? What about the rest of Africa, Eastern Europe, Russia, Japan and other countries in the Far East? There can be no doubt that Jehovah's Witnesses have been protected against diseases by their standpoint to abstain from blood!

Dr Muramoto's claim that the costs are higher in bloodless medicine are wrong. True, individual cases may be more expensive than similar cases treated with blood. But by and large bloodless surgery is cheaper than surgery where blood components are used. For instance, a Norwegian study of costs of bloodless coronary bypass surgery in 3.637 patients showed a total saving of \$ 1.500.000.(6)

#### THE INDIVIDUAL PATIENT

The patient in need of major surgery does not benefit from statistics, because each patient's situation is special. However, the statistics above show that the alternative, from a medical point of view is not 'a safe treatment with blood components versus a dangerous one without using blood'. While the Witness patient refuses blood because of the Bible's prohibition, the dangers of transfusions, together with the fact that almost any kind of surgery can be performed without using blood components if it is well planned, is also taken into consideration.

A patient with breast cancer may illustrate the the situation. She may have three options, 1) to remove the tumor only, 2) to remove the tumor and the whole breast, or 3) to remove the whole breast and all the lymph glands around. The physician will explain the prognoses in the different cases, and the patient will make her decision. Perhaps she chooses just to remove the tumor because she does not want to loose a breast, even though the physician recommends alternative 2) or 3) as being safer, but she has the right to decide. This is what informed consent is all about, and the physician cannot overrule her decision because he or she thinks it is irrational. In this case any statistics are irrelevant; what counts is the patient's informed decision.

The Witness patient wants to be treated in a similar way. He or she has voluntarily made a decision not to accept major blood components, and what he or she wants is to get the best possible treatment. Statistics is completely irrelevant in this situation; what counts is the informed decision of the individual patient. Because Witnesses take repsonsibility for their own situation, their Hospital Liaison Comittees have made a tremendous lot of work to find doctors who are willing to treat them without using blood, and to inform about the latest achievements in bloodless medicine. This has resulted in cooperation with more than 100.000 physicians world wide.

#### AUTONOMOUS AND INFORMED DECISIONS

I fully agree with Dr Muramoto's statement , "What is important to physicians is to look at this individual person, and obtain the truly autonomous and informed decision from this one person, regardless of how thousands of others believe." (7) I would just like to add that the 9 dissidents (Dr Muramoto and his 8 acquaintances) must be included in "the thousands of others" whose beliefs are irrelevant. I therefore welcome the situation when a Witness is hospitalized and no other Witnesses influence his or her decision regarding blood except someone whom he or she specifically asks to do so, and where no dissident is allowed to influence the decision except those specifically called to do so. However, this is not what the dissidents want.

On the E-mails sent by the founder of the group of dissidents, with the pseudonym Lee Elder, we find their stated goal. As a description of the members we read: "All have volunteered their time and energies in an effort to bring about an end to a tragic and misguided policy that has claimed thousands of lives, many of them children."(8) Dr Muramoto has already shown that most Witnesses stick to their decision to refuse blood when he said, "In reality, I do not expect any significant number of JW's will easily change their stance after one or two private meetings with a physician."(9). Thus

the group whom he recommends, represents the very opposite of what Dr Muramoto calls for. They do not respect "the truly autonomous and informed decision" of the Witnesses who refuses blood, but "use their time and energies to [try to] bring about an end" to such decisions. This group has the right to make their own decisions but should not be allowed to influence the physician-patient relationship when Witnesses are hospitalized.

Before he or she comes to the hospital, the typical Witness has written a document which is signed by him- or herself and two witnesses, where it is specified which treatment that is refused. In addition, the Witness has given a detailed explanation of his or her position to two close friends or family members, and these are authorized to make decisions on the part of the Witness if he or she becomes unconscious. This suggests that the standpoint of the Witness is a "truly autonomous and informed decision". In addition, the physician may want to speak with the Witness in order to make sure that this is the case. By this Muramoto's requirements, in which I agree, are fulfilled.

In order to reach their goal to "bring an end" to the "policy" of refusing blood, the 8 dissidents try to ruin the reputation of the Witnesses by claiming that they cannot answer particular questions regarding their decision to refuse blood. For instance, the dissidents ask: "Where can we read in the Bible that each of the 'major components' are included in the concept haima? This is an impossible question, because, what is found in the Bible is the word haima and not the definition of it. The definition must be given by us as Christians, and this is of course a human judgement. I have in my letters tried to show why I find the Witness standpoint logical and consistent. Others may disagree, but this is our sincere opinion, and this is what counts when an informed decision is to be taken. The claims of the dissidents that we cannot answer questions regarding our standpoint is just a part of their war strategy. It is quite ironic that what Dr Muramoto claims he is working for, is what each Witness most of all wants, namely, to be treated as an individual patient who can make an informed choice. But by introducing the fictional situation that it is the Watchtower Society that makes the decisions for each patient, and that the patient does not necessarily mean what she has written and signed, it is he who asks the physicians to treat the Witnesses en bloc rather than as individuals.

## CONCLUSION

I have stated that "it can be more dangerous to accept a transfusion than to refuse one". Dr Moramoto has claimed that "blood conservation medicine is a safe"(10) and has tried to counter my claim by arguing that the mortality rate in connection with surgery is higher among those who refuse blood than among those who takes blood. He ignores the two basic requirements for making a sound scientific statistic, namely, 1) to compare similar groups, and 2) to include all diseases and deaths which are caused by taking blood/not taking blood, and not only those occurring at the time of the operation. Even if just requirement 2) is fulfilled, my claim is justified, as the statistics above show.

(1) Muramoto, O. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37>, 19 March 2001.

(2) Due to the nature of major surgery it is not possible to use a control group.

(3) In bloodless surgery this could mean that patients were treated with EPO and intravenous iron before the operation, that hemodilution was used or cellcaver was available, and that, as a routine the operation was stopped if the hemoglobin level dropped below a certain level, in order to complete the operation later. For instance, if a team does not have the routine that they stop when the hemoglobin comes down to a certain level, the hemoglobin may become so low and the patient be so weak that the body does not manage to rise the hemoglobin level. If such a person dies, she will statistically be included among those where lack of blood transfusion contributed to their death. However, if the team had taken the right precautions, the patient may not have died.

(4) Seeff, L. B. et al., 95 "Gastroenterology", 530 (1988), 531.

(5) See the video "Transfusion-Alternative Strategies - Simple, Safe, Effective". (2000) Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.

(6) Ovrum, E. et al., "Autotransfusion in coronary bypass surgery reduces costs", Tidsskrift for den Norske Laegeforening, 18 (1997);117:2616-8.

(7) Muramoto, O. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37>, 13 March 2001.

(8) Personal E-mail.

(9) Muramoto, O. "Bioethics of the refusal of blood by Jehovah's Witnesses: Part 2. Anovel approach based on rational non- interventional paternalism." Journal of Medical Ethics - October 1998, p 300.

(10) Muramoto, O. <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37>, 19 March 2001.

## Clarification

26 March 2001



**Thomas Daniels**

Send response to journal:

[Re: Clarification](#)

Email Thomas Daniels:

I had hoped that by providing a very basic example of the degree to which the "use" of blood is intertwined with human life itself I could illustrate the inconsistencies in the contention that Witnesses believe it is the unqualified "use" rather than the "misuse" of blood that God has forbidden. Since at this point that hope seems to have been in vain, I would like to backtrack slightly and correct two misconceptions that I have allowed to stand.

[ocotillo50@hotmail.com](mailto:ocotillo50@hotmail.com)

There has been a certain amount of confusion generated as to the question of the "use" of blood as it relates to Witness teaching and beliefs. Are Jehovah's Witnesses taught that all uses of blood even if not mentioned in the Bible individually are forbidden?

If one of Jehovah's Witnesses were a biology teacher for example, may he or she use blood for teaching purposes? In other words, if a "hands on" approach as opposed to complete reliance upon textbook descriptions and illustrations was deemed more desirable, could the students be taught simple procedures involving the use of blood? Could they be taught how to withdraw and type blood, be it their own or that of a lab partner? Could the identification of the various cellular components of blood be taught by having the students stain and prepare slides from blood to view under a simple optical microscope? Conversely if a Witness student was enrolled in such a course, could they participate in these procedures in good conscience?

If a Witness worked for a pharmaceutical company could they use blood for testing purposes? What if the company needed to know if a particular drug is safe to administer to pregnant women? Could the Witness devise a simple simulation of the maternal/fetal relationship by setting up two circulating loops of a plasma-based perfusate separated by an isolated cotyledon of human placenta and then measuring the amount and/or rate of transference when the preparation in question is introduced into the "maternal" side?

As far as pharmaceuticals are concerned, how about the use blood for production purposes? In other words could a Witness be directly involved in the preparation of products fractionated from "major" blood components?

If a Witness happened to work for a manufacturer of commercial laboratory equipment such as fractionation, kidney dialysis, cell salvage equipment etc., could they use blood in the development, testing and evaluation of this equipment? Could they subsequently use blood in teaching proper operational procedures to the customer's personnel?

Although there are many such examples that could be given, these should be sufficient to illustrate the point. Witnesses can and do hold occupations that involve the "use" of blood. For individual Witnesses who may be struggling with reconciling their occupational duties with their faith, the WTB&TS has offered specific guidance in response to written inquiries as well as general guidance through the official periodical The Watchtower. For many years, the WTB&TS position on this particular question has been basically the same. As long as the blood is not primarily being handled or used for purposes of consumption or transfusion, then such uses are considered to be "matters of conscience." (1,2) Therefore within the framework of Witness theology, the broader question of the "use" of blood is not comparable to the specific question of the consumption (and by extension the transfusion) of blood. There are certainly ways that a Witness may "use" blood and still be considered a member in good standing.

Closely intertwined with this issue is the question of whether Jehovah's Witnesses are taught to consider blood fractions as something other than "blood." The WTB&TS has offered four separate rationales for the allowance of various blood fractions. Initially, some were allowed in 1958, on the basis that they "did not nourish the body." (3) In 1982, blood components were classified as being either "major" or "minor." (4) In 1990, it was suggested that the allowable blood components are only those that cross the human syncytial membrane during gestation. (5) Most recently, blood components have been classified as either "primary" or "secondary." (6)

However at no point was it ever specifically asserted that the allowable fractions are not "blood." On the contrary, acknowledgement of the fact that these are still considered to be "blood" is not uncommon in WTB&TS literature. For example, note the reasoning offered in 1978 regarding the acceptance of post exposure immunizations, clotting factors, etc.:

"What, however, about accepting serum injections to fight against disease, such as are employed for diphtheria, tetanus, viral hepatitis, rabies, hemophilia and Rh incompatibility? This seems to fall into a 'gray area.' Some Christians believe that accepting a small amount of a blood derivative for such a purpose would not be a manifestation of disrespect for God's law; their conscience would permit such. (Compare Luke 6:1-5.) Others, though, feel conscientiously obliged to refuse serums because these contain blood, though only a tiny amount." (7)

Here it was clearly stated that the preparations in question "contain blood, though only a tiny amount." Therefore while some Jehovah's Witnesses might refuse them on this basis, others would look upon the whole situation as similar to Jesus' disciples picking heads of grain on the Sabbath --- a violation of the "letter" rather than the "spirit" of the Law. (Note the scriptural reference.)

It is not uncommon for otherwise intelligent Witness to construct an argument in defense of the blood doctrine which they feel is ideologically sound, but cannot be fully reconciled either with the reality of the many varied situations that Witnesses may find themselves in nor with published statements made in regard to these situations. I don't offer this observation because I feel this is necessarily "right" or "wrong." I think it further serves to show that not all Jehovah's Witnesses think and react alike when confronted with this issue, which seems to have been the point to begin with.

(1) Anonymous, The Watchtower, Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1975, April 1:215,216

(2) Anonymous, The Watchtower, Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1964, November 15:682

- (3) Anonymous, The Watchtower, Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1958, September 15:575
- (4) Anonymous, Awake!, Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1982, June 22:25-27
- (5) Anonymous, The Watchtower, Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1990, June 1:30,31
- (6) Anonymous, The Watchtower, Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 2000, June 15:29-31
- (7) Anonymous, The Watchtower, Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1978, June 15:30,31

## Regarding Blood Transfusion and Jehovah's Witnesses, Furuli's Not So Grand Finale To Dr. Muramoto

27 March  
2001



**Marvin Shilmer,**  
Elder  
*Jehovah's Witnesses*

Furuli writes, "There can be no doubt that Jehovah's Witnesses have been protected against diseases by their standpoint to abstain from blood!"

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Regarding Blood Transfusion and Jehovah's Witnesses, Furuli's Not So Grand Finale To Dr. Muramoto](#)

Email Marvin Shilmer:  
[mshilmer@hotmail.com](mailto:mshilmer@hotmail.com)

What is that supposed to mean? Certainly the same can be said of anyone who happens to benefit from refusing a medical treatment that could potentially spread disease. The same can be said of people who refused smallpox vaccinations and happened to have avoided adverse consequences in some cases! The real question is, can Jehovah's Witnesses claim unique protection based upon the Watchtower Society's policy regarding blood? The answer to that question is a resounding, No! The answer is "No" because Witnesses who accept ANY part of blood at all are still exposed to disease laden blood because diseases do not necessarily pick and choose which part of blood to reside in. Will Furuli argue that HIV will mingle with platelets yet avoid albumin? Furuli wrote, "A glance at any group of hemophiliacs and their high frequency of diseases caused by blood fractions, definitely shows that infusion of blood components is not safe." Well, in case Furuli does not realize it, hemophiliacs who happen to be Jehovah's Witnesses have also suffered the "high frequency of diseases caused by blood fractions." That is true because the Watchtower Society's policy on blood allows fractions used by hemophiliacs. Where is the protection you claim for those Jehovah's Witnesses, Furuli?

Because the Watchtower Society's policy on use of blood allows every single part of blood as long as it is processed enough, it is a false claim to assert that Jehovah's Witnesses are protected from blood borne diseases "by their standpoint to abstain from blood." Furuli's claim is absurd!

Furuli then goes on to advance a classic ad hominem attack against what he calls "the 8 dissidents." In his diatribe Furuli again concentrates on personalities rather than legitimate questions, concerns, reasoning and counter argument. One can only wonder why he acts this way and to what purpose he thinks it serves. Such an action hardly fits the profile of reasonable persons or those seeking truth.

Part of Furuli's comments regarding "the 8 dissidents" includes the following:

"In order to reach their goal to "bring an end" to the "policy" of refusing blood, the 8 dissidents try to ruin the reputation of the Witnesses by claiming that they cannot answer particular questions regarding their decision to refuse blood. For instance, the dissidents ask: 'Where can we read in the Bible that each of the 'major components' are included in the concept haima?[] This is an impossible question, because, what is found in the Bible is the word haima and not the definition of it. The definition must be given by us as Christians, and this is of course a human judgement."

Remarkably, though Furuli began his participation on this forum by asserting that our belief as Jehovah's Witnesses is biblical, he now asserts that the definition of the scriptural "blood" (Greek: haima) is a human judgment. What does that mean other than "We can define blood however we bloody well please!" As was his initial response on this forum, this latter one is no more than a defense of a right to believe rather than a defense of a belief as biblical. I am not sure what drives Rolf Furuli, but what drives me is striving my very best at determining truth, in this case the truth of God's will from His word the Bible rather than my own judgment or the judgment of other humans. Perhaps Furuli is acquainted with the scriptural advice to "Trust in Jehovah with all your heart and do not lean upon your own understanding. In all your ways take notice of him, and he himself will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5,6 NWT) Another one like it says, "All Scripture is inspired and beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness, that the man of God may be fully competent, completely equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16,17 NWT) In the end, what seems to gall Furuli is that some of us Christians want and require that a potentially life threatening doctrine be actually evidenced from the Bible to the same extent that it is imposed. By Furuli mocking as engaging in "war strategy" those of us who have done no more than insist upon a corresponding level of scriptural evidence, he has disowned the very thing he intends to defend, Biblical and Christian faith.

On that final note, I am not sure whether Furuli classes me in his supposed "group" of dissidents. If he does then I want to point out that not once has he responded to me privately or on this public forum. He has no idea of whether I have ties with the one calling himself Lee Elder. For the record, Rolf Furuli, I have no ties whatsoever with Lee Elder or his initiatives. My efforts are not toward changing anyone or anything. My efforts are the very same as yours should be, to arrive at truth! Why is that simple quest so hard for you to fathom and respond to as any decent man would? Is that not what drew you initially to become associated with us, to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses? If so, what changed for you? Who or what hindered you from considering what is or may be truth? (Galatians 5:7) It is bizarre that you lay claims to logical conclusions of truth yet you consistently

ignore sincere and valid questions, concerns, reasoning and counter argument presented to you here for all to see. What has happened to you? What has happened to our brotherhood of Jehovah's Witnesses? Where is that ardent insistence to address issues with the Bible that we once had? What is your efforts here about if not for a defense of scriptural teaching? Is it irrelevant to you that persons seek scriptural answers for a purported scriptural teaching? Sadly it appears you have traded biblical reasoning with the judgment of men. Even more sad is the fact that people die prematurely as a result of such judgments, and that without adequate scriptural answers to sincere questions! If all we want to do is argue in favor of some human judgment then what separates us from anyone else? What?

As for statistics (which are irrelevant to a supposed biblical belief), here is a statistic that is beyond debate: The premature mortality rate for Jehovah's Witnesses who would die without a transfusion of blood is 100% for those rejecting that transfusion.

M. Shilmer

## Re: Final remarks to Dr Muramoto

29 March 2001



**William Edmonds,**  
Elder  
*Jehovah's Witnesses*

### ILLUSTRATION RE: INFORMED CONSENT

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Re: Final remarks to Dr Muramoto](#)

Email William Edmonds:  
[wedmonds45@hotmail.com](mailto:wedmonds45@hotmail.com)

In his last reply on this forum, Rolf Furuli proposed the following situation with respect to the issue of informed consent:

"A patient with breast cancer may illustrate the the situation. She may have three options, 1) to remove the tumor only, 2) to remove the tumor and the whole breast, or 3) to remove the whole breast and all the lymph glands around. The physician will explain the prognoses in the different cases, and the patient will make her decision. Perhaps she chooses just to remove the tumor because she does not want to loose a breast, even though the physician recommends alternative 2) or 3) as being safer, but she has the right to decide. This is what informed consent is all about, and the physician cannot overrule her decision because he or she thinks it is irrational. In this case any statistics are irrelevant; what counts is the patient's informed decision"(1)

That is a fine illustration, in many ways. I particularly like the way it shows that a person's individual choices, while certainly factoring in medical risk, may ultimately be based on more than that. Perhaps the woman in this illustration has intense fear that losing her breast would leave her sexually repulsive to her husband, and she would accept greater medical risk in exchange for what, in her mind, is a higher quality of life.

I have two comments, though, on this illustration:

Firstly, it would seem Furuli's illustration is leaving out the **\*\*key\*\*** element being debated here. Namely; What if a woman choosing option 2 or 3 would face religious sanction for that choice? What if this sanction involved being separated from the religious community she had known and loved--perhaps since childhood--unless she "repented"?

Secondly, Furuli's illustration implies that two different women could make two **\*\*different\*\*** choices, based on their **\*\*personal\*\*** beliefs, fears, etc. That is not the case with either whole blood, or any of the 4 "major" components under present WTS policy.

### NUMBER OF "DISSIDENT" WITNESSES & RELEVANCE OF ARGUMENT

I also wish to address the issue of "dissident" Witnesses. Dr. Muramoto has stated that he has personally met 8 Witnesses who take issue with the current WTS blood policy. It has been argued in return that such comprise nothing more than an extremely small group of "zealots" who are out of step with by far the majority of Jehovah's Witnesses. It has further been at least inferred that their views and questions, however logical and reasonable, should be summarily dismissed, apparently because they don't agree with what the WTS teaches.

Is such reasoning sound? In its pages over the years, the Watchtower has commented favorably concerning individuals such as John Wycliffe, William Tyndale, Jan Hus, Mary Jones and others for their roles in making the Bible available to the common man. These individuals were considered "dissidents" and "heretics" by the Church, in some cases even paying for their efforts with their lives. Why did this happen? Essentially, it was because they believed the Church had developed teachings that could not be supported from the Bible. Unfortunately, in their day, the common man could not even read the Bible in his own language to see for himself. So, these pioneers tried to change this, by working on Bible translations in common tongues. The Church did not like this, precisely **\*\*because\*\*** it undermined their authority.

Though in the minority, the Watchtower has held them forth as heroes for acting upon their convictions. Are there not some parallels here? It seems to me that the supposed "dissident" Witnesses are not much different. They apparently feel that their organization has developed a particular teaching, reinforced by sanctions, which cannot be fully supported from the Bible. It seems to me that their efforts are not so much around attempting to change individual belief as they are around trying to eliminate what they perceive as organizational control of belief.

Further, with respect to numbers: There may be no definitive way of knowing how many of Jehovah's



Witnesses privately share at least some of the views held by the “dissidents.” However, an interesting piece of historical information may have a bearing here. At their annual District Conventions in 1993, Jehovah’s Witnesses released what might be called an “authorized” history of their modern-day organization. The desire was to initially release this book only to individuals who had been dedicated, baptized Witnesses for some period of time; to my recollection, 10 years or more. To verify how long they had been baptized, Witnesses were asked to present their Advanced Medical Directive (this information is on that card).

The following January, at the annual congregation meeting where the Advanced Medical Directive is discussed, the following information was shared:

“km 1/94 2 Service Meetings for January 15 min: Are You Ready to Face a Faith-Challenging Medical Situation? Stirring talk by capable elder to help brothers appreciate protective value of Advance Medical Directive/Release card, using points from paragraphs 1-3 of November 1990 Our Kingdom Ministry insert. At some “Divine Teaching” District Conventions, more than 50 percent of the cards used to obtain a new release were unsigned, not witnessed, or out-of-date.”(2)

In the above quote, the words “more than 50 percent” were italicized. Bear in mind that the individuals presenting these cards in an attempt to get their publication were long-time (10-year plus) dedicated Witnesses. This indicated, at the very least, that a substantial number of these “veteran” Witnesses had been somewhat careless in completing these cards.

Is it possible, however, that this indicated more than just carelessness? What if even one out of every ten of those occurrences was indicative of an individual with reservations as to our policy? I don’t wish to venture too far into speculation. However, evidence has been presented earlier in this discussion that, prior to 1961, several individuals indicated in writing their disagreement with our organizational position, and even that some of the “anointed” (a term Jehovah’s Witnesses use to designate one who proclaims a heavenly “calling”) among us accepted blood.(3) Presumably, at least some individuals present at the 1993 convention were baptized prior to 1961, when sanctions were first imposed over this issue. Is it possible that at least some individuals from this group never fully accepted this change?

A second group of Jehovah’s Witnesses who may have issues with our position are individuals raised from birth as Jehovah’s Witnesses. Many of these get baptized as either pre-teens, or in their teens. While it is true that they went through a review process prior to their baptism—which does include questions concerning our beliefs on blood—is it reasonable to expect that they made a truly educated decision on this issue? What, if any, different views had they likely considered at that tender age? I find it interesting that the WTS comments in their publications on the risks of marrying too young, because people in even their late teen’s or early 20’s are typically still “finding themselves,” and couples that marry young may incur greater risk of “growing apart” as they gain further maturity and perspective. Is it unreasonable to believe that this may also take place with respect to certain beliefs that one held at an even younger age?

A third group would be those who have gradually become confused as what once seemed to be a simple, clear position has become blurred.

Let’s not be too quick to conclude, therefore, that the number of Jehovah’s Witnesses who may have reservations with this particular policy is negligible.

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PERSONAL STATEMENT: For the record, I am in no way affiliated with any “dissident” group opposed to Jehovah’s Witnesses. Neither do I consider myself a “dissident.” I actively support the activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses, with both my time and financial resources.

As an active elder in good standing with my congregation, I am designated as either the primary or secondary health care agent on several Durable Power of Attorney (DPA) forms. Should I ever be called upon, \*\*I would uphold with all my effort\*\* the wishes of my brothers and sisters as expressed on their individual DPA forms. All for whom I have agreed to provide this service \*\*voluntarily\*\* completed their DPAs, were able to explain their personal choices, and were under no duress. As a side note, while admittedly a very small sampling, it is of interest to me that every individual I have been involved with in this fashion has elected to accept \*\*all options allowed\*\* under the WTS policy, and this without \*\*any\*\* influence in that direction from me.

Finally, while I do have some personal reservations regarding current WTS blood policy, I have never personally undermined this policy to any of my brothers or sisters. I feel it worth noting that, while I have participated here, I have not in any way directed any Jehovah’s Witness to this site. I feel conscientiously able to participate in this forum because I believe the \*\*discussion\*\* of this issue is both necessary and valuable, and that any Jehovah’s Witnesses viewing this information have made an individual choice to do so of their own free will.

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(1) <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL100>

(2) Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. Service Meetings for January. Our Kingdom Ministry

1994;January:2

(3) <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/322/7277/37#EL12>**Reply to Furuli and Concluding Statement**

31 March 2001



**Lee Elder,**  
 Founder  
*AJWRB - Ass. JWs for  
 Reform on Blood*

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Reply to Furuli and  
 Concluding Statement](#)

Email Lee Elder:  
[LeeElder@ajwrb.org](mailto:LeeElder@ajwrb.org)

I believe that Rolf Furuli's concluding statement warrants a reply. Furuli exhibits the same attitude that physicians frequently encounter from ultra conservative Jehovah's Witnesses who are convinced they know more about blood transfusions and associated risks than their physicians. I will only touch on specifics, as I am sure that Dr. Muramoto will cover that ground when he returns from Japan.

It bears pointing out that Jehovah's Witnesses do not die simply from rejecting blood transfusions associated with surgery as studied by Kitchens. They also die when they reject platelet transfusions and must discontinue their chemotherapy. I have already presented evidence, which Furuli ignores, that at least 50 JW children die every year from leukemia as a result of adherence to Watchtower policy. Additionally, there is also the matter of trauma to consider. Some Jehovah's Witnesses never make it to surgery because they exsanguinate. Our estimates of 900 to 1000 deaths annually in the JW population are conservative. My belief is that since JWs in 3rd world countries do not have access to cell salvage, EPO, hyperbaric chambers and other advanced blood conservation strategies, the actual death toll is higher.

If Furuli would like to see better statistics, and wouldn't we all, perhaps he should write to the Watchtower and recommend that they start instructing local elders to collect and report hard data or better yet, hire an independent firm to gather data. If Furuli and the present leadership truly believe that their policy saves lives, why not grasp this opportunity to scientifically demonstrate that with some hard science?

Furuli's comments regarding hemophiliacs are disingenuous since he fails to acknowledge that long before the AIDS scare became known the WTS granted permission for JWs to accept the clotting factors, despite the fact that these treatments require the donation, storage and processing of enormous quantities of human blood plasma. JW hemophiliacs did not enjoy any divine protection, and by and large suffered through the heart of the AIDS crisis with the rest.

Furuli states, "infusion of blood components is not safe". This issue here is supposed to be a religious one but Furuli's comments illustrate how the WTS distorts the risks associated with the use of blood products to "shore up" support for its policy. As far as safety is concerned, it is all relative. Of course there are risks associated with the use of blood products. There is also the risk of bleeding to death or being forced to abandon chemotherapy or some necessary surgery that cannot be performed without blood. Doctors, not HLC members like Furuli, are in the best position to discuss the risk/benefit ratio and offer recommendations regarding the use of blood products or alternative strategies. This is precisely why the Watchtower and HLC members like Furuli should extricate themselves from the doctor/patient relationship. Furuli and other HLC members like him exert undue influence into potential life and death matters, they distort the risks associated with the use of any blood product not presently permitted by the WTS, and they don't hesitate to exert pressure that makes it difficult for the JW patient to make an autonomous decision.

Consumer Reports magazine, September 1999 issue, shows how remarkably safe the blood supply has become: <http://ajwrb.org/science/consumer.shtml> This is a good reference for doctors to use with their JW patients. The graph places the risk of death from a blood transfusion (tainted with AIDS or Hepatitis C) between being struck with lightning and being murdered. Roughly equivalent to your chances of dying in a plane crash. I would suggest that physicians keep a copy handy to review with their JW patients.

As for any statistic offered by Furuli or through WTS publications regarding blood, a healthy dose of skepticism is necessary since they have historically presented only one side of the argument and this has unquestionably resulted in JWs believing that blood is unnecessary and simply bad medicine.

What clearly remains lacking in Furuli's closing statement is a cogent explanation of why the Bible prohibits some blood products and permits others. Additionally, he ignores the fact, or is simply misinformed in thinking that there is no medical need for the blood products the WTS continues to prohibit.

His analogy regarding the breast cancer patient is false because the breast cancer patient hasn't been indoctrinated with only the arguments against mastectomy, nor led to believe that God will destroy her if she has her breast removed. In his analogy, the physician presents accurate scientific information and the patient selects a choice without a religious organization breathing down her throat and threatening sanctions and eternal destruction if she chooses to have a mastectomy. I am simply bewildered by all of the logical fallacies in Furuli's arguments. Though clearly a well-educated person, he allows his faith in the Watchtower Society as God's organization to thoroughly cloud his judgement and academic integrity as he plays the role of Watchtower apologist. Physicians can expect to see similar responses from some of their JW patients when the patient is unable to explain the large discrepancies in the WTS blood policy, this is particularly true of older members.

Despite all of Furuli's rhetoric the fact remains that the average JW is ill prepared to make an autonomous and informed choice about the use of blood products. They are confused and do not understand the WT policy and as a result the vast majority will not execute the WTS' durable medical

power of attorney. [1] If as a physician I were presented with an exsanguinating JW patient who did not possess a fully executed WTS medical durable power of attorney, I would not hesitate to transfuse him and stabilize his condition until I could have a private meeting and ascertain his wishes and informed consent.

The varied responses to Dr. Muramoto's article in this electronic forum illustrate the bloody quagmire the Watchtower policy has created in the JW community where there is no general agreement or understanding of the policy. There are no answers provided to the difficult issues that members must reconcile in life and death situations and those who are unsatisfied by WT non-responses are likely to be harshly treated as heretics and apostates.

Physicians who grasp the "big picture" will hopefully see the need to present their patient with some additional information so that they can be comfortable with the fact that the choice made by the patient is informed and autonomous, even if a measure of coercion and duress remains. They will also be diligent in taking steps to preserve the patients confidentiality from potential informants since the Watchtower has thus far refused to withdraw its encouragement for JW medical personnel to report on other members who violate the blood policy.

Furuli is correct that AJWRB represents a minority of JWs. A minority that he wants to marginalize or discount. AJWRB represent a serious threat to the belief system of ultra conservative JWs. What concerns Furuli even more is that he has no answers to the questions that we have raised and he knows that JW patients who are engaged by their doctors will not be able to answer the questions either. The result is that the thinking of many JWs is at risk of being altered.

In my frequent discussions with JWs over the last five years I have found that over 3/4 of those who take the time to carefully consider these issues eventually conclude that the Watchtower position is unsupportable and in error. This conclusion is upsetting to them and in some cases disrupts their entire belief system. That is unfortunate but their untimely death is even more unfortunate in my view.

When there is a 2/3-majority vote on the governing body of JWs, this policy will once again be modified, perhaps discarded and Furuli will be arguing for the new policy. That is simply a part of being a "loyal" Jehovah's Witness. I understand that and feel no animosity towards Furuli. In his mind, the connection between the Watchtower and God is so strong that any perceived threat must be vanquished. AJWRB is a threat and must therefore be subjugated. That fact that our arguments are sound is inconsequential, the fact that our conscience permits us to use all blood products, immaterial.

With regard to AJWRB, Furuli stated, "they do not respect 'the truly autonomous and informed decision' of the Witness who refuses blood, but 'use their time and energies to [try to] bring about an end' to such decisions. This group has the right to make their own decisions but should not be allowed to influence the physician-patient relationship when Witnesses are hospitalized."

This comment of Furuli is a gross misrepresentation of what AJWRB is all about. Yes, we would like to see an end to the current policy but by no means do we want to bring an end to the autonomous and informed decisions of other Jehovah's Witnesses. This is the very thing we are striving to achieve - a fully informed, autonomous choice without controls or sanctions from the Watchtower.

My wife recently had major surgery. She elected for blood conservation techniques and did not want blood. This was her informed, autonomous choice. For many of us as JWs, the thought of using blood may always be the equivalent of a Jew eating pork. We just don't want it and that's our choice. The issue, however, is whether that choice is fully informed and autonomous. Until the Watchtower and HLC members like Furuli begin to show respect for the confidential nature of the doctor/patient relationship and personal medical decisions, there will always be a question as to whether a JW is making their own choice or whether they were being pressured or coerced.

AJWRB's position is quite simple and was recently endorsed by the editor of the Journal of Medical Ethics. We seek to keep the Watchtower out of the doctor/patient relationship. Let the doctor explain the potential risks and benefits of various approaches and let the JW patient make a free choice without control or sanctions from the Watchtower. The Watchtower needs to respect the patients right to 100% medical confidentiality.

Furuli argues that, "dissidents try to ruin the reputation of the Witnesses by claiming that they cannot answer particular questions regarding their decision to refuse blood."

The simple truth is that Furuli hasn't answered the simple questions that we have conscientiously posed and since when does asking a question "ruin the reputation" of another?

Furuli goes on to say: "For instance, the dissidents ask: 'Where can we read in the Bible that each of the 'major components' are included in the concept haima? This is an impossible question, because, what is found in the Bible is the word haima and not the definition of it. The definition must be given by us as Christians, and this is of course a human judgement."

Finally we get to the crux of the matter. Furuli is forced to admit that his definition of what constitutes blood is nothing more than a "human judgement". Human judgement that has repeatedly changed over the last four decades, human judgement that has been the required basis for thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses to make life or death decisions. Human judgement that Furuli and the

Watchtower force upon on others who clearly disagree and have sound reasons for doing so.

Why should six million members be coerced into accepting Furuli's "sincere opinion" in matters of life and death? Many of us were raised as JW's and baptized when we were very young. In my case, I was nine years old. What real choice were we given to examine these complex issues with any significant chance of considering critical views and making an informed choice?

Here is my challenge to Furuli and the current leadership of the Watchtower:

1. Provide a sound biblical basis for permitting the of 100% of blood in fractionated form (including cow blood) or 2. Get out of the doctor/patient relationship, and quit threatening and using enforced shunning sanctions against members who disagree with your "human judgements" and "sincere opinions."

No one should be placed under this kind of duress when faced with issues of life and death, especially when minors are involved. It is not only ethically wrong, it is morally wrong and incompatible with Christianity.

Won't it be interesting to see how many Jehovah's Witnesses will agree with Furuli once the Watchtower finally gives Witnesses a free choice without controls or sanctions. A promise that they have already made to Bulgarian Jehovah's Witnesses in their written agreement with the European Commission on Human Rights. [2]

When this policy is finally discarded (like previous bans on vaccines, organ transplants and hemoglobin), and I believe that could be relatively soon, I believe that a majority of Jehovah's Witnesses will accept the medical use of all blood products. There will, of course, be those older JW's who will struggle with the change and conscientiously refuse to use blood or blood products. If their choice is informed and autonomous, their physicians and other Jehovah's Witnesses should respect it.

This policy will leave its mark on Jehovah's Witnesses for many decades to come. Though the vaccine ban was dropped nearly 50 years ago (1952), I still see the remnants of it in the views of my elderly mother. Indoctrination dies a very slow death. It's time for Watchtower's blood policy to be taken off life support and allowed to die as well. We as Jehovah's Witnesses have a great deal of work before us in undoing all of the damage this policy has caused over the last four decades. The true test of faith for our religious community lies in having the courage to admit that we were wrong and doing what we can to put this behind us quickly so as to mitigate additional and unnecessary death and disability among our community. I believe that both God and history will judge us very harshly if we cower or delay the inevitable through a policy of staged disentanglement. What a sad state of affairs we as Witnesses find ourselves in. The "sins of the father have come upon the son even to the third generation" in our case. We are victims of victims.

[1] WTS, Letter to All Bodies of Elders, dated 12/1/00

[2] Elder L. Watchtower Blood Policy in Bulgaria, <http://ajwrb.org/basics/abandon.shtml>

## Final reply to Rolf Furuli

31 March 2001

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Furuli wrote in his "final remarks"[1] that the statistics I presented[2] for risks of receiving blood transfusions are not sound. He stated "[Muramoto] ignores the two basic requirements for making a sound scientific statistic." The statistics I presented are not mine. They are the best statistics published and available to the public in the most authoritative medical literature. If Furuli wants to challenge the statistics and data published in those peer-reviewed medical journals, he should present his argument and better statistics to those journals himself.

Send response to journal:  
[Re: Final reply to Rolf Furuli](#)

Furuli should know that medical science is not always based on exact statistics because we are not treating mice, but human beings who may not always be subjected to totally controlled conditions for a perfect statistical analysis. There are inherent limitations in statistics of medical interventions we use, even if a similar statistical analysis may be perfect in animal experiments. Can we not make any quantitative judgment in clinical medicine as long as the statistics are not perfect then? We sure can.

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A perfect statistical analysis is not always an absolute necessity for making clinical decisions. What is important is how scientists and physicians interpret limited data and make practical decisions on medical intervention. For example, there are several medications we use to treat tuberculosis. Some of them were introduced many decades ago and are still used, but statistical analysis of the risk-benefit ratio is far from satisfactory. Are physicians discouraged from using those medications because of this limitation? Not at all. It is obvious to most physicians that people are dying and disabled from untreated tuberculosis much more frequently than dying and disabled from the side effects of the drug. That is a sufficient reason to use the drug in clinical settings even if there is no perfect statistical analysis.

Despite his remark that "statistics is completely irrelevant in this situation; what counts is the informed decision of the individual patient"[1], it is Furuli who first quoted Kitchens' article[3] to support his argument "it can be more dangerous to accept a transfusion than to refuse one." [4] If Furuli truly believes "statistics is completely irrelevant", why did he have to bring up such statistics? One wonders if Furuli needs some "emotional support" to drive the fear against blood transfusion,

when his "theology" of "major components" cannot withstand the criticism from his fellow Witnesses. In response, I presented Sazama's data[5] which is the closest to Kitchens' data because both were counting the short-term fatality after surgery in comparable years. Neither data is perfect for comparing every aspect of risks and benefits of blood transfusion, but the two studies are comparable. The risks of refusing blood transfusions clearly outweighed the risks of accepting blood transfusions in those comparable data.

The data I quoted from the New England Journal of Medicine[6] is different from Sazama's data because they counted almost all known complications from blood transfusions, not just short-term fatality. This is the most comprehensive data currently available for blood transfusion risks, and now widely quoted in medical literature. It is the closest to Furuli's requirement "to include all diseases and deaths which are caused by taking blood/not taking blood, and not only those occurring at the time of the operation." [1] As I quoted, based on this comprehensive data, the authors of this authoritative article in transfusion medicine concluded that "techniques or strategies to avoid blood transfusion will no longer be driven by the known risks of death from blood transfusion, since they are now so low that no alternative is currently as safe as a blood transfusion." [6] It is not I but the authorities of transfusion medicine who are telling us that blood transfusion is safer than alternatives, including refusal of blood.

It is Furuli who claimed "thousands upon thousands of people have died \*because\* they have been treated with blood components", [1] yet showed no data published in peer-reviewed medical journals to support his claim, whether the statistics is perfect or imperfect. His claim was based only on a video published by the Watchtower Society and an outdated quote without real data. Of course, thousands of people may have died over many years due to complications of blood products. But out of how many million people who were treated and had no complications? And how the number is compared to the number of Jehovah's Witnesses who died by refusing blood products? Show us any data or any statistics which can withstand vigorous scientific peer-review, Mr. Furuli, before making such a conclusion.

In all fairness, it is true that there is no perfect data to serve the purpose of our discussion here, because the perfect statistics Furuli described is almost impossible to obtain. We have to do some extrapolation and estimation. Yet, the difference between Furuli and myself is clear; he cannot present any data or statistics to support his argument, whereas I presented the best possible data available in the medical literature today. I know Furuli cannot produce any comparable data, because there is none to support his claim that "it can be more dangerous to accept a transfusion than to refuse one" [4], other than the distorted data provided by the Watchtower Society in order to drive emotional fear.

Furuli concluded his comment on the risk of blood transfusion as follows: "Jehovah's Witnesses have been protected against diseases by their standpoint to abstain from blood!" What Furuli is telling the world is like this: "There are thousands of people dying due to side effects of anti-tuberculosis medications. There is no sound statistics to show that these medications are safe. These medications are known to be dangerous. We will refuse any use of anti-tuberculosis medications. We are therefore all protected against the side effects of these medications." What is missing in this argument?

Finally, Furuli and I agreed upon one point. That is "what is important to physicians is to look at this individual person, and obtain the truly autonomous and informed decision from this one person, regardless of how thousands of others believe." [7] I also agree with him that there should be no intrusion upon the doctor-patient relationship by the third party, whether it is the Watchtower representatives such as Furuli, or dissident Witnesses. Furuli however became confused and somewhat incoherent about who the dissidents are. Furuli wrote "[Muramoto] wrote 9 dissidents (Dr Muramoto and his 8 acquaintances [sic])." However Furuli himself wrote to me that "according to yourself, you are a "third party" because you are not a Witness." [8] Now Furuli thinks I am a "dissident"!?

He also emphasized "8 dissidents", but the number eight has no significance. I have acquainted with probably total fifty loyal Jehovah's Witnesses in my life. They are the only Witnesses I personally know. Does the number fifty have any significance? Or does the ratio of eight dissidents to fifty loyal Witnesses have any significance? The total number of Witnesses who disagree with or question the current blood policy is unknown, but it is substantial judged by the responses we receive from all over the world. They are just the tip of the iceberg. There are no ways for those dissidents or doubters to influence the doctor-patient relationship of other Witnesses because they have no such lobbying systems as Hospital Liaison Committees and Hospital Visitation Groups. However they have a freedom to express themselves publicly, as much as the Watchtower Society has the right to express its agenda publicly. If my papers and this kind of discussion can promote further exchange of information and opinions among Jehovah's Witnesses themselves and the medical community, my goal is almost achieved. Final decisions always belong to an individual Witness patient and his or her doctors, not to the collective "Jehovah's Witnesses" or the Watchtower Society.

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