



# laetus in praesens

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## Comparability of "Vaxxing Saves" with "Jesus Saves" as Misinformation?

### Problematic challenge of global discernment

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Misinformation: "vaccine hesitancy"?

Religion and vaccination

Misinformation / Disinformation / Fake News: "Jesus Saves"?

"Jesus Saves" as misinformation or "fake news"?

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Adapting an "anti-evil" religious playbook to "vaccine hesitants"

References

### Misinformation: "vaccine hesitancy"?

**Misinformation:** The United Nations and its Specialized Agencies have been very explicit regarding the challenge of misinformation:

- *Dispelling misinformation, countering vaccine hesitancy vital to beat COVID-19, countries affirm* (UN News, 7 April 2021)
- *5 ways the UN is fighting 'infodemic' of misinformation* (United Nations Department of Global Communications, 30 April 2020)
- *UN tackles 'infodemic' of misinformation and cybercrime in COVID-19 crisis* (United Nations Department of Global Communications, 31 March 2020)
- *Battling COVID-19 misinformation hands-on* (United Nations Department of Global Communications, 17 June 2020)
- *UN chief: world faces misinformation epidemic about virus* (Associated Press, 16 April 2020)
- *United Nations Launches Global Initiative to Combat Misinformation* (UN Ethiopia, 21 May 2020)
- *Immunizing the public against misinformation* (World Health Organization, 25 August 2020)
- *A Global Study Shows the Link Between Misinformation on Social Media and Vaccine Hesitancy* (UN Dispatch, 9 December 2020)
- *Misinformation and growing distrust on vaccines, 'dangerous as a disease' says UNICEF chief* (UN News, 28 June 2019)
- *WHO -- Vaccine Hesitancy Top Health Threat* (Science-Based Medicine, 23 January 2019)
- *United Nations: there needs to be "no place for misinformation on social media platforms"* (Reclaim the Net, 6 July 2020)

**Vaccine hesitancy:** The international community strongly deprecates the perspective of the isolated voices associated with [vaccine hesitancy](#). These raise concerns regarding use of experimental vaccines on the global population, citing possibilities of: autism, vaccine overload, paradoxical vaccine responses, autoimmune triggering, prenatal infection, ingredient concerns, sudden infant death syndrome, and infertility (Tara Haelle, *Writing about vaccine hesitancy? There's a study for that*, *Covering Health*, 22 March 2019).

Reference is notably made to the experience with other vaccines in the past and to the incidence of [vaccine-related injuries](#) (readily dismissed by authorities as rare and negligible):

- Jason Garshfield: *When Government Lies Are Routine, Vaccine Hesitancy Is Justified* (TownHall, 27 April 2021)
- Bonnie Meibers: *Hesitancy around vaccines more than misinformation* (Dayton Daily News, 25 March 2021)
- Serena Marshall and Lara Salahi: *COVID Vaccine Hesitancy: Anti-Vax Crazy or Reasonable Caution?* (MedPage, 7 April 2021)
- Caitjan Gainty and Agnes Arnold-Forster: *Vaccine hesitancy is not new -- history tells us we should listen, not condemn* (The Conversation, 27 November 2020)
- Judy Wilyman: *Misapplication of the Precautionary Principle has Misplaced the Burden of Proof of Vaccine Safety Science* (Public Health Policy, and The Law, 2, 2020)
- Eve Watling: *Why Do Some People Believe Vaccines Are Dangerous?* (Newsweek, 25 February 2019)
- Amy Boulanger: *Understanding Opposition to Vaccines* (HealthLine, 15 September 2017)

- Jen Christensen: *Past vaccine disasters show why rushing a coronavirus vaccine now would be 'colossally stupid'* (CNN, 1 September 2020)
- Jeffrey Young: *Here's Why Some Health Care Workers Don't Want The COVID-19 Vaccine* (HuffPost)
- Teresa Carr: *Many Anti-Vaxxers Don't Trust Big Pharma: Here's Why* (Undark, 24 April 2019)
- Gautam Tejas Ganesan: *Is there an intelligible "anti-vaxx" position?* (23 June 2019)
- Alice Dreger: *What if not all parents who question vaccines are foolish and anti-science?* (New Statesman, 4 June 2015)

**Censorship and hate:** Websites raising any concerns about use of experimental vaccines are themselves condemned (if not **de-platformed**) as inherently misleading (*Anti-Vaccine Websites, Vaxopedia*, 13 January 2018; *Anti-Vaxx Websites, We're Onto You, Time*, 11 February 2016). Talk shows and conferences claiming objectivity carefully exclude those critical of the mainstream perspective and righteously deny any irresponsibility in doing so. Expression of vaccine concern is readily and uncritically conflated with misinformation and even "digital hate":

- Daniel Allington and Nayana Dhavan: *The relationship between conspiracy beliefs and compliance with public health guidance with regard to COVID-19* (Centre for Countering Digital Hate, 2020). In actively seeking to suppress all such precautionary voices, there is little academic concern by authorities for the use of the term (*The online anti-vaccine movement in the age of COVID-19, The Lancet*, 2, 2020, 10).
- Joseph Mercola: *State Attorneys General Threaten to Silence Dr. Mercola* (Mercola, 22 April 2021). This notes that government officials are misusing their positions of power to openly call for censorship of certain groups, organizations and individuals in direct violation of Constitutional law
- Greta Jaruseviciute: *The Internet Is Shutting Down Anti-Vaxxers One By One* (BoredPanda, 2019)
- *Facebook removes popular rabbi's anti-vaxxer group that peddled fake news* (The Times of Israel, 9 February 2021)
- *The Disinformation Dozen: why platforms must act on twelve leading online anti-vaxxers* (Centre for Countering Digital Hate, 2020)

By so explicitly framing dissidence as "hate", authorities, and especially academic authorities, cannot avoid a degree of implication in that modality -- in effectively hating those they perceive as expressing hate. They are then faced with the paradoxical situation of seeking digital means to counter that of which they are themselves a partial expression.

**Infodemic implications:** With the United Nations framing the level of misinformation as an "infodemic", it is appropriate to ask whether the international community is now in a state of hysterical panic in responding to conflicting claims and sets of data in which it is variously complicit. From a governance perspective, the infodemic has arguably become more problematic than the pandemic (*COVID-19 as a Memetic Disease -- an epidemic of panic*, 2020).

The infodemic and vaccine hesitancy can easily be recognized as obscuring other global challenges in which analogous concerns are evident -- most obviously climate change and hesitancy in that regard: "Climate hesitancy"? "Environmental hesitancy"? "Human rights hesitancy"?

With respect to the pandemic, WHO advocates "*immunizing the public against misinformation*" (25 August 2020). The UN has however been unable to "immunize" the public against misinformation with regard to other global challenges -- potentially of far greater danger in the immediate future. Tragically the vigorous institutional response with respect to the pandemic could be understood as a form of compensation for such failures.

With the response to the pandemic framed by leaders as a "war", this strategic displacement could be recognized as a form of surrogate warfare -- a **memetic war** -- both for the international community and for religion (Andreas Krieg and Jean-Marc Rickli, *Surrogate Warfare: the transformation of war in the Twenty-First Century*, 2019).

An unexplored aspect of the infodemic is that the severe **erosion of public trust** in authorities with respect to the pandemic will carry over to erosion of trust with respect to other issues currently pushed off the strategic table.

## Religion and vaccination

The situation is further complicated by the manner and degree of engagement of **religious authorities with vaccination** (J. D. Grabenstein, *What the world's religions teach, applied to vaccines and immune globulins, Vaccine*, 31, 2013, 12; *Immunizations and Religion, Vanderbilt University Medical Center*):

- *Pope Francis and the Pope emeritus receive Covid-19 vaccine* (Vatican News, 14 January 2021)
- Jason Horowitz: *Pope Calls Coronavirus Vaccinations an Ethical Obligation* (The New York Times, 9 January 2021)
- Joshua J. McElwee: *Pope Francis suggests people have moral obligation to take coronavirus vaccine* (National Catholic Reporter, 11 January 2021)
- Julie Asher: *U.S. Catholic Bishops: getting a COVID-19 vaccine is an 'act of charity'* (Catholic News Service, 14 December 2020)
- Alex Boyd: *How the Catholic Church came to bless the COVID-19 vaccine* (Toronto Star, 21 March 2021)
- *Catholic US bishops approve use of COVID-19 vaccines with 'remote connection' to abortion* (Catholic News Agency, 14 December 2020)
- *English Catholic bishops: Church backs vaccination to protect the most vulnerable* (Catholic News Agency, 31 July 2020)

This Catholic commitment is however in notable contrast with the Evangelical churches in which some express concern about how coronavirus vaccines and masks contain or herald the "**mark of the beast**", a reference to an apocalyptic passage from the *Book of Revelation* that suggests that the Antichrist will test Christians by asking them to put a mark on their bodies:

- David Crary: *Vaccine skepticism runs deep among white evangelicals in US* (ABC News, 6 April 2021)
- Elle Reeve, et al: *Many Evangelicals say they won't be vaccinated against Covid-19* (CNN, 15 April 2021)
- Caitlin Dickson: *Some evangelicals fear the "mark of the beast" from a coronavirus vaccine* (Yahoo News, 15 May 2020)
- Elizabeth Dwoskin: *On social media, vaccine misinformation mixes with extreme faith* (The Washington Post, 16 February 2021).
- Corky Siemaszko: *"Christians and the Vaccine" project: Combating ethical qualms of evangelical communities* (NBC News, 23 April 2021)
- Jonathan Levin: *U.S. Evangelical Leaders Preach Covid Vaccine Benefits to Their Followers* (Bloomberg, 26 March 2021)
- Naveel Krishant: *We should correct those who are calling the COVID-19 vaccine evil and satanic -- Archbishop Chong* (FijiVillage, 1 April 2021)
- Leonard G. Horowitz: *Vaccine Gestapo and Geocide is Staggering: pseudo-science defeats common sense devastating ignorant masses* (War on We the People)
- *Pastor reveals the reasons behind COVID vaccine hesitancy in the evangelical community* (PBS, 8 April 2021)
- *Those Who Take COVID-19 Vaccine Have Agreement With Satan -- Pastor Chris Okotie* (Sahara Reporters, 2 April 2021)

Religions, as with other belief systems, have a long history of problematic engagement with that which they disagree or deplore -- readily framing it as a satanic expression of evil. It is in this sense that fundamental beliefs of "others" are challenged by any authoritarian recognition of disinformation (*Reframing Fundamental Belief as Disinformation? Pandemic challenge to advertising, ideology, religion and science*, 2020).

## Misinformation / Disinformation / Fake News: "Jesus Saves"?

**Misinformation:** As clarified by *Wikipedia* with extensive references::

**Misinformation** is false, inaccurate, or misleading **information** that is communicated regardless of an intention to deceive. Examples of misinformation are false rumors, insults, and pranks. **Disinformation** is a subset of misinformation that is deliberately deceptive, e. g. malicious **hoaxes**, **spearphishing**, and **computational propaganda**. The principal effect of misinformation is to elicit fear and suspicion among a population. [ News parody or satire can become misinformation if it is believed to be credible and communicated as if it were true. The words "misinformation" and "disinformation" have often been associated with the concept of "**fake news**", which some scholars define as "fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent"...

Information conveyed as credible but later amended can affect people's memory and reasoning after retraction. [ Misinformation differs from concepts like **rumors** because misinformation is inaccurate information that has previously been disproved. According to Anne Mintz, editor of *Web of Deception: Misinformation on the Internet*, the best ways to determine whether information is factual is to use **common sense**. Mintz advises that the reader check whether the information makes sense and whether the founders or reporters of the websites that are spreading the information are biased or have an agenda. Professional journalists and researchers look at other sites (particularly verified sources like news channels) for that information, as it might be reviewed by multiple people and heavily researched, providing more concrete details.

Martin Libicki, author of *Conquest In Cyberspace: National Security and Information Warfare*, [ noted that the trick to working with misinformation is the idea that readers must have a balance of what is correct or incorrect. Readers cannot be **gullible** but also should not be **paranoid** that all **information** is incorrect. There is always a chance that even readers who have this balance will believe an error to be true or that they will disregard factual information as incorrect.

According to research, the factors that lead to recognizing misinformation is the amount of education a person has and the information literacy, or **media literacy**, they have. This means if a person is more familiar with the content and process of how the information is researched and presented, or is better at critically evaluating information of any source, then they are more likely to identify misinformation. Increasing literacy may not lead to improved ability to detect misinformation, as a certain level of literacy could be used to "justify belief in disinformation". Further, research reveals that content descriptors can have a varying effect in people in detecting misinformation.

Prior research suggests it can be very difficult to undo the effects of misinformation once individuals believe it to be true and fact checking can even backfire. An individual may have a desire to reach a certain conclusion, causing them to accept information that supports that conclusion. This is known as **Motivated reasoning**, and can cause individuals to accept misinformation as true. Individuals create **mental models** and schemas that are used to understand physical and social environments. Misinformation that becomes incorporated into a mental model, especially for long periods of time, will be more difficult to address as individuals prefer to have a complete mental model. [ In this instance, it is necessary to correct the misinformation by not only refuting it, but also by providing accurate information that can also function in the mental model. When attempting to correct misinformation, it is important to consider previous research which has identified effective and ineffective strategies. Simply providing the corrected information is not enough to correct any effects of misinformation, and it may even have a negative effect. Because of the familiarity heuristic—information that is familiar is more likely to be believed to be true—corrective messages which contain a repetition of the original misinformation may result in an increase in familiarity and cause a **backfire effect**

**"Jesus Saves"**: This is a popular phrase seen on shirts, bumper stickers, and banners (especially in relation to churches). There is concern that people do not really understand the depth of that statement. The saving grace of Jesus Christ is upheld as revealing humanity's greatest need for him, proves his deity and divine authorities, and represents the best love gift from God to humanity:

- Philip Wijaya *What Does It Mean that Jesus Saves?* (Christianity.com)

- Femi Aribisala: *What Does Jesus Save Us From?* (*Vanguard*, 2 August 2015)
- *Bible Study: Jesus saves and satisfies* (Baptist Press, 30 July 2020)
- *What does the Bible say about Jesus saves* (*OpenBible.info*)

The phrase has the implication of saving individuals and humanity from evil, as variously recognized explicitly (*Jesus Saves from all Evil, Full Gospel Businessmen's Training*, 2017; *Jesus Saves Us from Sin*, *OpenBible.info*). Such considerations then frame any Christian understanding of COVID-19:

- R. Scott Smith: *COVID-19 and the Problem of Evil* (Biola University)
- Tim Duff: *COVID's Evil Origins* (*LA Progressive Newsletter*)
- Verónica Ortiz-Ortega: *COVID-19: The Global Evil* (*Wilson Center*, 20 March 2020)
- Stewart Perrie: *Anthony Mundine Believes Covid-19 Vaccine Is An 'Evil Plan' To Reduce World's Population* (*LAD Bible*, 11 May 2021)
- Trent Horn: *Is Covid-19 a Punishment from God?* (*Catholic Answers*, 24 March 2020)
- *Covid: through a common evil we rediscover the common good* (*Vatican News*, 30 October 2020)
- *Faith-Based Organisations told COVID-19 vaccine cannot be evil* (*FijiVillage*, 1 April 2021)

Given the variety of forms of information which could be considered "fake news" -- notably including much advertising -- how should "Jesus Saves" be distinguished by such criteria? (*Varieties of Fake News and Misrepresentation: when are deception, pretence and cover-up acceptable?* 2019).

"Evil": As clarified by *Wikipedia*:

*Evil*, in a general sense, is defined by what it is not -- the opposite or **absence** of **good**. It can be an extremely broad concept, although in everyday usage it is often more narrowly used to talk about profound **wickedness**. It is generally seen as taking multiple possible forms, such as the form of personal **moral evil** commonly associated with the word, or impersonal **natural evil** (as in the case of natural disasters or illnesses), and in **religious thought**, the form of the **demonic** or **supernatural**/eternal. While some religions, **world views**, and philosophies focus on "good versus evil", others deny evil's existence and usefulness in describing people.

A particular difficulty is that those in disagreement with a preferred world view (held to be inherently "good") tend to be readily characterized as "evil". This may be evident with respect to explicit declarations by leaders with regard to an opposing political party, a competing superpower, or any "enemy" (*Existence of evil as authoritatively claimed to be an overriding strategic concern*, 2016). Socialism and Communism have long been qualified in this way, as with Environmentalism (Leo Hickman, *The US evangelicals who believe environmentalism is a 'native evil'*, *The Guardian*, 5 May 2011; Dinesh D'Souza, *United States of Socialism: Who's Behind It, Why It's Evil, and How To Stop It*, 2020; Shane Bradley, *Socialism Is Inherently Evil: the moral case against socialism*, *Odyssey*, 8 November 2016).

It is common for religions, such as Christianity, to frame the views of other religions as "evil". Perhaps more confusingly, there is also a marked tendency for those claiming others to be evil to be so framed in return (*Framing by others of claimants of evil as evil*, 2016).

Within this context, there is considerable irony to assertions that international institutions are themselves to be understood as evil or promoters thereof:

- John C. Willke: *The UN: An Evil Institution?* (*Life Issues Institute*, October 1997)
- *The Top 10 Most Evil U.N. Actions of 2017* (*UN Watch*, 25 December 2017)
- *The United Nations "works"... ...to outlaw individual rights* (*The United Nations is Evil*)
- *Actual Evil Within the United Nations* (*Free Republic*, 7 April 2011)
- *The World Council of Churches is an evil, pro-abortion organization ~ why is the Catholic Church associated with it?* (*Toronto Catholic Witness for Christ and Church*, 16 November 2015)
- *World Economic Forum Wheel of Evil* (*Canadian Truths*, 26 April 2020)
- Liz Payne: *NATO: seven decades of the evil alliance* (*The Morning Star for Peace and Socialism*)

Especially when leaders subscribe authoritatively to the existence of evil, it is to be expected that those promoting or justifying vaccine hesitancy in any way would be characterized as "evil":

- Lee Moran: *'Truly, Truly Evil': Tucker Carlson Slammed For Sowing Doubt About COVID-19 Vaccines* (*HuffPost*, 2021)
- Vivek Saxena: *'Evil' and 'Psychotic': Chris Hayes goes after Tucker Carlson for calling masking-up children child abuse* (*Business and Politics*, 28 April 2021)
- Nathan Barton: *Demonizing the "Anti-Vaxxers" in America* (*The Price of Liberty*, 30 April 2019)
- Laura Perrins: *Covid fascists are demonising the non-vaccinated* (*The Conservative Woman*, 15 February 2021)

With the Catholic initiative in framing vaccination as a "moral obligation", it is to be expected that vaccine hesitancy will become recognized as a sin -- and a form of evil, justifying any response.

## "Jesus Saves" as misinformation or "fake news"?

The United Nations suggests that misinformation is clearly identifiable -- without going so far as to specifically frame it as inherently "evil". There are now an estimated 4,200 different religions in the world, although these may be selectively grouped (*Stephen Prothero, God Is Not One: the eight rival religions that run the world -- and why their differences matter*, 2010). Clearly it is only for one of them

that "Jesus Saves" is beyond question as unquestionably "good news".

By the definition of the United Nations, **it must therefore be asked whether "Jesus Saves" constitutes misinformation (if not disinformation or "fake news") -- for the non-Christian religions of the world, and for atheists.** More problematic is any sense in which promotion of the belief in "Jesus Saves" would be considered dangerously misleading by such religions -- if not an expression of "evil" as they understand it. Every effort would then be justified by those religions to reduce or eliminate the expression of that belief.

Historically Christianity has considered itself entirely justified in acting in a similar manner against the beliefs of other religions held to be dangerously misleading -- and therefore inherently evil. Hence the contribution of Christianity to the articulation of [just war theory](#) -- whereby others can be appropriately shot and killed when threat to oneself and one's community is perceived. Could this now be extended in response to misinformation and those who are held to be expressing it -- possibly as "just vaccination theory" or "just jab theory"? Curiously, as with widespread [use of military metaphors in support of social change](#), "vaccination" is already described in terms of "getting the jab". As yet any use of "getting a shot" has however excluded the further implication of "being shot" -- as a consequence of soliciting self-harm.

A particular concern with misinformation and "fake news" in promoting vaccine hesitancy is the vigorous assertions that there is a total lack of scientific evidence to justify such concerns. By such criteria it is then appropriate to ask what hard evidence of similar quality is available to substantiate any belief in "Jesus Saves".

The question of relevance is whether the message that "Jesus Saves" is perceived as worthy of the same repressive treatment as is accorded to those of the so-called anti-vaxxing community. A case is being made for criminalizing those articulating arguments for vaccine hesitancy (Melinda C. Mills, [Should spreading anti-vaccine misinformation be criminalised?](#) *British Medical Journal*, 2021, 372). Should similar justifications be advanced with respect to those promoting the belief in "Jesus Saves" -- held to be dangerously misleading by many other religions of the world and by the scientific community (Richard Dawkins, [The God Delusion](#), 2006)?

The difficulty for the United Nations is that it is in principle constrained by Article 18 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) which reads:

Article 18: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

From this perspective, if the many other religions of the world consider "Jesus Saves" to be a form of misinformation -- if not disinformation -- how is it incumbent on the United Nations to act? Does any interpretation of the concluding article of that Declaration offer a means of avoiding the issue -- since it reads:

Article 30: Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

Are those articulating prudence -- with regard to global vaccination using inadequately tested vaccines -- expressing the right to "freedom of thought, conscience and religion" (Article 18)? Or are they to be interpreted as promoting an "act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms" identified in the Declaration (Article 30)? If the latter is the case, is promotion of "Jesus Saves" to be seen in the same light, given the severe deprecation of any such belief by other religions -- as a fundamental danger to the future of humanity as they envisage it?

Science is especially articulate regarding the danger of religious belief. [Critics of religion](#) may portray religion as one or more of: outdated, harmful to the individual, harmful to society, an impediment to the progress of science, a source of immoral acts or customs, a political tool for social control. Curiously it is scientists who stress the importance of evidence-based arguments in evaluating the potential dangers of inadequately tested vaccines -- whilst being variously complicit in promoting the perspectives of particular religions ([List of Christians in science and technology](#), *Wikipedia*; [34 Great Scientists Who Were Committed Christians](#), *Famous Scientists*).

## Denial of "vaccine salvation" comparable to denial that "Jesus Saves"?

There is a trend to frame global immunization in terms of the language of salvation, whether sarcastically or otherwise -- "salvation by vaccination", "salvation in a syringe":

- Gerry Bowler: [With vaccine salvation on the horizon, many questions will linger](#) (*The Hamilton Spectator*, 11 January 2021)
- Darius Osei: [Coronavirus vaccine is our salvation](#) (*Ghana Web*, 5 March 2021)
- Ruby Darling: [Believe and receive the vaccine for your soul's salvation](#) (*The Nassau Guardian*, 16 October 2020)
- [Covid-19 Vaccines Are Chance at Salvation, Financial and Beyond, for Drug Makers](#) (*The New York Times*, 13 October 2020)
- [Pope Francis Says Covid Vaccine Will Now Be Required To Enter Heaven](#) (*Babylon Bee*, 30 November 2020)

This tendency merits comparison with the much more widespread preoccupation with denial of Jesus:

- [38 Bible Verses about denial of Jesus Christ](#) (*Knowing Jesus*)
- J. P. Nunez: [Refuting a Clever Denial of Jesus' Divinity](#) (*Catholic Stand*, 9 February 2019)
- Donna Calvin: [Western Civilization is Doomed unless We Embrace Jesus](#) (*Belief.net*, January 2012)

These trends merit comparison with denial in relation to the pandemic and the role of vaccination:

- Ed Stetzer: *Pandemic Denial Sows Division and Endangers Others* (*Christianity Today*, 23 September 2020)
- David A. Graham: *It's Not Vaccine Hesitancy. It's COVID-19 Denialism* (*The Atlantic*, 28 April 2021)
- Cliff Weathers: *The deadly truth about vaccine denialism* (*Salon*, 18 September 2014)
- Joe Pierre: *Antivaxxers and the Plague of Science Denial* (*Psychology Today*, 8 February 2019)
- Nicholas Kristof: *The Dangers of Vaccine Denial* (*The New York Times*, 7 February 2015)
- Mark Wingfield: *Here's the link between COVID vaccine denial and opposition to sensible gun control* (*Baptist News*, 24 March 2021)

There is a curiously unexplored process of conflation suggesting that "immunization" (or "inoculation") in response to the pandemic is now inextricably confused (by some) with "indoctrination" -- as the long-term project of Christianity articulated as the [Great Commission](#) ([Matthew 28:16–20](#)). This is the instruction of the resurrected Jesus Christ to his disciples to spread the gospel to all the nations of the world.

With respect to the prospect and conditions of salvation in religious terms, there is the further problem of the historical advocacy of [indulgences](#). These have been understood by Christianity to be a way to reduce the amount of punishment in the afterlife that individuals have to undergo for sins. Is the advocacy of immunization to be understood in that light? Is the sale of vaccines at exorbitant prices to be compared to the abusive marketing of indulgences which gave rise to the Reformation? (Robert Wilde, *Indulgences and their Role in the Reformation*, *ThoughtCo*, 28 April 28 2020)

Science, as central to the current mainstream advocacy of vaccination, is in a position curiously resembling that of the Catholic Church in that pre-Reformation period. Science indeed deplores denialism with respect to its central methodology (Sean B. Carroll, *The Denialist Playbook: on vaccines, evolution, and more, rejection of science has followed a familiar pattern*, *Scientific American*, 8 November 2020).

However a proportion of scientists protests the complicity of science in denial of arguments challenging the hard evidence with regard to the efficacy and dangers of vaccination -- a complicity extending to ensuring repression of such voices. This recalls the earlier arguments of historians of science (Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: how a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming*, 2010).

Is mainstream secular science now emulating uncritically the historical doctrine of Christianity with regard to "Jesus Saves" -- by indulging in the promotion of a doctrine that "Science Saves" through advocacy of vaccination:

- [Science Saves](#)
- [Science Saves Lives](#)
- [Science Saves lives!](#) (*TheSocialMedNetwork*)
- Marc Shaffer et al: [Science Saves Lives](#) (*Environmental Health News*, 23 March 2020)
- David Driesen: [How science will save the world](#) (*The Hill*, 16 December 2020)
- Eva Emerson: [Science can save lives, but only if society lets it](#) (*ScienceNews*, 4 April 2014)
- World Economic Forum: [How science will save the world](#) (*Davos* 2016)

## Authoritative science or Authoritarian science?

**Challenge of the insubstantial?** Such considerations frame a more general concern regarding anything that is claimed to be inadequately substantiated. Many of the consequences of climate change are held to be myths by some -- as with other challenges ([The Overpopulation Myth and its Dangerous Connotations](#); [Myth of Human Equality](#); [The Myth of Progress](#)).

In contrast to the concerns of anti-vaxxers, especially embarrassing for science is the extensive research by physicists into theoretical possibilities readily defined as myths, including the Big Bang, string theory, and parallel universes ([Physics Myths and Physics Facts: flaws in concepts and theories of modern physics](#), [Physicsmyths.org](#))

**Problematic applications of scientific method:** Tom Feilden notes reports that [Most scientists 'can't replicate studies by their peers'](#) (*BBC News*, 22 February 2017). The editor of *The Lancet*, [Richard Horton](#), has written that something has gone fundamentally wrong with one of our greatest human creations, indicating that:

Much of the scientific literature, perhaps half, may simply be untrue. Afflicted by studies with small sample sizes, tiny effects, invalid exploratory analyses, and flagrant conflicts of interest, together with an obsession for pursuing fashionable trends of dubious importance, science has taken a turn towards darkness... The apparent endemicity of bad research behaviour is alarming, ([Offline: What is medicine's 5 sigma?](#) *The Lancet*, 11 April 2015)

A comparable remark had been previously made by [Marcia Angell](#):

It is simply no longer possible to believe much of the clinical research that is published, or to rely on the judgment of trusted physicians or authoritative medical guidelines. I take no pleasure in that conclusion, which I reached slowly and reluctantly over my two decades as an editor of *The New England Journal of Medicine* ([Drug Companies and Doctors: a story of corruption](#), *The New York Review of Books*, 15 January 2009).

Claims have been systematically made by governments that their response to the pandemic has been based on the hard evidence supplied by science. Unfortunately it has now been shown that the pandemic stress-tested the way the world produces evidence -- and revealed

all the flaws -- as noted by Helen Pearson (*How COVID broke the evidence pipeline*, *Nature*, 12 May 2021):

With the pandemic now deep into its second year, it's clear the crisis has exposed major weaknesses in the production and use of research-based evidence -- failures that have inevitably cost lives. Researchers have registered more than 2,900 clinical trials related to COVID-19, but the majority are too small or poorly designed to be of much use... Organizations worldwide have scrambled to synthesize the available evidence on drugs, masks and other key issues, but can't keep up with the outpouring of new research, and often repeat others' work.

**Authoritarianism in science:** For [Karl Popper](#), as one of the most influential philosophers of science, framed historicism as the principal theoretical presupposition underpinning most forms of [authoritarianism](#) and [totalitarianism](#) (*The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 1945), later arguing that:

Authoritarianism in science [is] linked with [...] proving or verifying theories. [While] the critical approach is [...] trying to refute, or to falsify its conjectures (*The Myth of the Framework: in defence of science and rationality*, 1994)

The issue has been proposed as an object of research in its own right (Dmitry Nikolaenko, *Authoritarianism in science as an object of scientific research*, *Environmental Epidemiology*, 14, 2020, 3). It features in criticism from a religious perspective (Bill Nugent, *How Authoritarianism in Science Slows Down Scientific Progress*, *Defending the Faith*, 1 April 2021).

A quite exceptional articulation of the issue is provided by Stephen D. Ricks:

The widely held notion that science has delivered us an absolutely authoritative source of knowledge simply cannot withstand close scrutiny... The occurrence of authoritarian behavior patterns appears at first glance to be completely pathological in view of our idealization of science as an objective inquiry after "stubborn irreducible facts". But the personal vanities and insecurities of individual scientists cannot reasonably be invoked to explain widespread authoritarianism in science. Moreover, since the stigmata of rigidity and dogmatism are observable in physics as well as archaeology, the problem cannot arise simply from the peculiarities of individual disciplines, but must be connected with general features of science. (*Is There a Cure for Authoritarianism in Science?* In: *By Study and Also by Faith*, Neal A. Maxwell Institute, Brigham Young University, 1990)

**Passport to the heavens?** Widespread promotion of an [immunity passport](#) (or vaccine passport) is now framed as vital to "get people flying again" and to ensure recovery of the tourism-related industries. Such public certification is an action that governments can take to mitigate an epidemic. It is however extraordinary that the pandemic crisis has been paralleled by the most costly crisis in aviation history, namely the [grounding of the Boeing 737 MAX](#) and the cancellation of planes on order -- following fatal crashes. 387 planes were banned from service as the COVID-19 crisis reached pandemic proportions. The grounding cost Boeing an estimated US\$20 billion in fines, compensation and legal fees, and indirect losses in the form of 1,200 cancelled orders valued at more than US\$60 billion.

The [FAA](#) had resisted grounding the aircraft until obliged to do so after receipt of further evidence of accident similarities -- long after other regulators had banned the aircraft. [FAA certification of the MAX](#) was subsequently investigated by the U.S. Congress, by multiple U.S. government agencies, and by special panels. Lawmakers investigated Boeing's incentives to minimize training for the new aircraft. The FAA revoked Boeing's authority to issue airworthiness certificates for individual MAX airplanes and imposed a fine on Boeing for exerting "undue pressure" on its designated aircraft inspectors.

Science and technology have necessarily been complicit with the FAA in the design, testing and certification of the Boeing 737 MAX. In the case of the pharmaceutical industry and its research and testing regimes, history will no doubt compare that complicity in relation to the [FDA](#) (Food and Drug Administration) -- through which vaccines have been variously approved. The FDA has regulatory processes in place to facilitate the development of COVID-19 vaccines that meet the FDA's rigorous scientific standards (*COVID-19 Vaccines*, FDA). It is to be assumed that those standards have been as rigorous as those of the FAA. Whether pharmaceutical manufacturers have a "Boeing 737" crisis has yet to emerge.

As yet to become evident is whether the guarantee offered by the certification of vaccine passports is as flawed as that offered by the FAA with regard to the Boeing 737 MAX. To an extraordinary degree, those acquiring such a passport will then be encouraged to fly on faith -- effectively "[on a wing and a prayer](#)". Whilst the passport may indeed be a "passport to the heavens" for the travel-and-tourism industry, it may well be a passport to heaven (Owen Bourgaize, *Passport to Heaven*, 11 November 2002; Robert Jeffress, *How Can I Prepare For My Journey To Heaven?* 2016; *Jesus Is My Personal Passport To Heaven*).

Framed as "immunity passports", the historical parallel with the abusive "sale of indulgences" by the Catholic Church, merits comparison with the massive transfer of wealth via governments to the pharmaceutical industry -- variously estimated at \$28 per shot or more, plus that of a second shot (Laura Woods, *What Are the Hidden Costs of the COVID-19 Vaccine?* *MSN*, 5 February 2021; Julia Ries, *How Much Will It Cost to Get a COVID-19 Vaccine?* *HealthLine*, 29 November 2020). Although the shots may be "free", the costs to tax payers are evaluated in hundreds of billions. This can be seen as a strange reframing of spiritual health with physical health. If wishes were passports, guinea pigs might fly?

**Scientism and the pandemic?** [Scientism](#) is the promotion of science as the best or only objective means by which society should determine normative and epistemological values. As a form of unquestionable dogma, scientism sees science as the absolute and only justifiable access to the truth.

The implications of scientism in the response to the pandemic has been variously explored -- presumably to be reframed by science as

misinformation:

- Mark Pennington: *Scientism and the Coronavirus Pandemic: A Hayekian View* (IEA: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1 September 2020)
- Dorothy Cummings McLean: *Former Vatican Bank chief condemns new religion of 'scientism' regarding COVID response* (Life Site, 14 April 2021)
- Michael Esfeld: *The Abuse of Science in the Corona Crisis* (American Institute for Economic Research, 11 January 2021)
- Nassim Nicholas Taleb and Yaneer Bar-Yam: *The UK's coronavirus policy may sound scientific. It isn't* (The Guardian, 25 March 2020)
- Thomas P Seager: *When 'Science' becomes the New Religion, it is time for heresy: the political masquerade of scientism is killing science.* (21 October 2020)
- John West: *Science and Scientism in the Age of COVID-19: wisdom from C.S. Lewis* (YouTube, 20 August 2020)
- Matthew Crawford: *The pandemic has revealed a darkly authoritarian side to expertise* (Hot Air, 8 May 2021)
- Chad Ragsdale: *Two -isms shaping the pandemic: scientism* (23 July 2020)
- Lionel R Milgrom: *Against Scientism: Corrupted Science and the Fight for Medicine's Soul* (Complementary Medicine Research, September 2020)
- Henry M. Cowles: *The scientific method can't save us from the coronavirus: what we need is problem-solving, creativity, flexibility* (The Washington Post, 23 April 2021)
- *Science's War On COVID-19* (Tao of Scientism, 16 March 2020)

**Future history of medicine?** In *The Half-Life of Facts: why everything we know has an expiration date* (2012) by Samuel Arbesman, an anecdote is related to the effect that:

Many medical schools tell their students that half of what they have been taught will be wrong within five years – the teachers just don't know which half. What we know about the world is constantly changing, yet our approach to knowledge and the communication of that knowledge has remained the same. (As noted by Jody Jensen, *The Role of the Social Sciences in an Age of Uncertainty*, 2015)

Given the **half-life of knowledge**, will the future history of medicine place current recourse to vaccination in the same category as **bloodletting**, trepanation, lobotomy, lithotomy and rhinoplasty? (Adam Taylor, *Five bloodcurdling medical procedures that are no longer performed ... thankfully*, *The Conversation*, 18 May 2017; *10 Of The Most Bizarre Medical Practices And Theories*, *Online Nursing Degrees*).

## Adapting an "anti-evil" religious playbook to "vaccine hesitant"

**Heresy:** It is appropriate to recognize that religions have a tendency to frame their spiritual struggle as effectively a "war against evil" (*Church Militant*, *The Salvation Army*, *Militia Christi*). As a consequence, **heretics** are defined as proponents of a belief or theory that is strongly at variance with established beliefs or customs, in particular the accepted beliefs of a church or religious organization. The term is typically used in reference to violations of important religious teachings, but is also used of views strongly opposed to any generally accepted ideas (*List of people burned as heretics*).

So framed, vaccine resisters could readily be recognized as "heretics" worthy of modern variants of the treatment traditionally accorded to them by Christianity, Judaism, and Islam -- for which espousing ideas deemed heretical has been (and in some cases still is) met with censure ranging from excommunication to the death penalty. In the light of that earlier pattern, and the doctrinal pressures which gave rise to the Inquisition (inherited institutionally by the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*), more curious is whether an analogue in systemic terms is emerging with respect to the requirements for belief in authoritative pronouncements regarding engagement with the pandemic as the evil of the day (Jan Hoffman, *Clergy Preach Faith in the Covid Vaccine to Doubters*, *The New York Times*, 14 March 2020).

Historically, despite such strictures, many originally framed as heretics have been reframed as courageous and martyrs -- even to the point of being beatified. Others, in their instigation of schism, have been honoured as the founders of new religions -- as with the Reformation and the emergence of Protestantism in reaction to the abuses of the Catholic Church.

**Longer-term precautions:** From such a perspective a fundamental question is how what is considered unquestionably "right" in one period (slavery, torture, male dominance, colonialism, geocentrism, etc) have come to be reframed as essentially "wrong". It is now authoritatively asserted that vaccine hesitancy is fundamentally wrong -- despite the inadequacy of testing. It is argued that the **short term efficacy**, which current testing regimes confirm to a limited degree, justify the level of vaccine injuries in what is held to be a negligible proportion of cases.

Especially problematic however is the failure to consider the possibility of unsuspected **long term disastrous consequences** of COVID-19 vaccination and its interference with the human genome. Under other circumstances these would be respected in terms of the **Precautionary Principle** (John O'Sullivan, *Vaccine Safety and The Precautionary Principle*, *Principia Scientific*, 1 December 2020).

The ambition to vaccinate the entire global population with experimental vaccines avoids any consideration of the value of precautions and controls, as argued separately (*Controls and Guinea Pigs in the Pandemic Experiment*, 2021). As such it could be challenged as a curious collective exercise in self-harm. Deprecated as anti-vaxxers, the vaccine refuseniks then merit recognition as constituting a genetic pool vital to evaluation of the long term effects of the experiment. Ironically this may prove vital, if the experiment exacerbates



the levels of human infertility currently acknowledged as rising (*Infertility is a global public health issue*, WHO).

However, in the obvious absence of **long-term** scientific evidence to the effects of use of experimental vaccination, it is now vigorously asserted as factual (from a **short-term** perspective) that there can be absolutely no causal relation to the statistically documented rise of infertility.

- Sandee LaMotte: *There is no link between the Covid-19 vaccines and infertility. Here's why* (CNN, 10 May 2021)
- Laura Ramirez-Feldman: *COVID-19 vaccines do not cause infertility, health experts say* (Yahoo News, 12 May 2021)
- Catalina Jaramillo: *No Evidence Vaccines Impact Fertility* (FactCheck.org, 26 February 2021)
- Brenda Goodman: *Why COVID Vaccines are Falsely Linked to Infertility* (WebMed, 2011)
- *Here's Where That COVID-19 Vaccine Infertility Myth Came From -- And Why It Is Not True* (Henry Ford Health Live Well, 23 April 2021)

This understanding is now authoritatively confirmed by Katherine O'Brien of the World Health Organization:

The vaccines we give cannot cause infertility. This is a rumor that has gone around about many different vaccines and there's no truth to the rumor. There's no vaccine that causes infertility (*Episode #24 - Vaccine myths vs science*, WHO, 5 February 2021)

How is the authoritative deprecation of vaccination concerns as "myths" to be compared with promulgation of "Jesus Saves"? Is this too a dangerous myth -- requiring condemnation as misinformation by world authority?

**Celebration of belief in vaccination?** Christianity has cultivated its fundamental beliefs through many popular hymns -- notably articulating its opposition to the evil it recognizes and the possibility of overcoming it. The United Nations and other international bodies have been lax in articulating their fundamental values in that form, despite the possibility (*A Singable Earth Charter, EU Constitution or Global Ethic?* 2006).

Considerable use is now made by government funded mass media in order to promote vaccination and overcome vaccine hesitancy. There is therefore perhaps a strong case for developing popular analogues to such hymns, as suggested by the following.

<b>Jesus Loves Me</b> by <a href="#">Anna Bartlett Warner</a> (1827–1915).	<b>Vaxxing Saves Me</b> as promoted by WHO (2019-2021)
Jesus loves me -- this I know, For the Bible tells me so; Little ones to him belong, -- They are weak, but he is strong.	Vaxxing saves me -- this I know, For the UN tells me so; Little minds to it belong, -- They are weak, but WHO is strong.
Jesus loves me -- loves me still, Though I'm very weak and ill; From his shining throne on high, Comes to watch me where I lie.	Vaxxing saves me -- saves me still, Though it makes me weak and ill; From WHO's shining throne on high, Science says it cannot lie.
Jesus loves me -- he will stay, Close beside me all the way. Then his little child will take, Up to heaven for his dear sake.	Vaxxing saves me -- it will stay, Close inside me all the way. Then its little child will take, Up to heaven for WHO's dear sake.

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