Religion, Spirituality and Infectious Diseases

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Throughout history religion and one’s spirituality and beliefs has had an impact on infectious disease and the understanding of infectious diseases. Many older societies believed that disease was caused by an evil spirit or by the stinging of an evil spirit. There was also the belief that disease was caused by various Gods such as the God of disease or the God of pestilence or by one God as punishment for sins. Specific examples of this have been seen throughout history with the 14th Century Black Death, Lassa fever and most recently AIDS.

Religion and spiritual beliefs have also impacted the way in which infectious diseases have been studied. The most notable example of this is the Taoist theology and their goal of reaching immortality which encourages them to pursue research on disease. Other examples are also seen in the African culture.

Religion has also impacted the way in which societies prevent disease and treat people with certain diseases. Examples of society using religious beliefs to prevent disease are seen in African culture. The AIDS epidemic, leprosy, and the persecution of Jews during the Black Death are all examples in which religious beliefs have allowed society to negatively treat groups of people associated or not associated with certain diseases.

The last way in which religion and spirituality has influenced infectious disease throughout history is seen in medical practices and treatments of patients. Holistic medicine is an example of this. Many examples of spiritual medical practices such as incantations also exist in African culture.