

Research Article

Organ Donation through the Abrahamic Religions

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Abstract

Objective: The objective of this work is to illustrate and shed light on the different religious attitudes towards organ donation. The discussion will be devoted to monotheistic Abrahamic religions.

Method: We searched Semantic scholar, science direct, Pubmed databases based on the keywords: “Organ donation, Religion, Islam, Christianity, Judaism. Abrahamic religions, Articles written in French or English and published in the last 20 years. The documents included were those dealing with organ donation from the viewpoints of monotheistic religions.

Results: The monotheistic Abrahamic religions give enormous respect to the human body, which leads to a difference of opinion between different religions and even within the religion. However, the sanctification of human life remains the cornerstone of acceptance of the gift across all three religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Conclusion: Over time, religion has been an essential reference in the attitude and practices of human beings. A knowledge and understanding of religious views toward organ donation is a critical phase in a massive campaign to promote organ donation through whole donation.

Keywords: Organ donation; Monotheistic religions; Judaism; Christianity; Islam

Introduction

Increasing the number of organ donors, living and deceased, is one of the most valuable public health priorities due to the large number of people on the waiting lists for tissue and organ transplants [1,2]. Although survival rates and quality of life for patients undergoing organ transplantation have improved in recent years due to medical and technical developments, multi-organ harvesting (POH) in brain-dead patients remains much less common in Arab-Muslim countries than in Europe or the United States [3].

In Morocco, more than 33,000 patients are treated by hemodialysis; this figure is increasing daily and represents a real challenge for our healthcare system. However, according to the Advisory Council for Human Organ Transplantation, the number of donors registered on the lists today varies from 2000 to 2500. A rate which remains very low compared to neighboring countries [4]. Consequently, the rate of PMH is less than 1 per million inhabitants in Arab-Muslim countries

while this figure is above 20 in most Western countries [3].

There is a consensus of organ transplantation within different communities around the world regardless of their ethnicity and or religion. This consensus consists in encouraging organ donation to remedy the shortage and prevent the possible risks associated with transplantation. To increase cadaveric organ donation, numerous studies have shown that education, socio-economic, cultural and religious factors, as well as knowledge about organ donation affect people's decision on donation [5,6].

Thus, a Horton model developed in 1991 tried to explain the willingness to donate organs. According to this model, there are three factors that can affect the potential willingness of donors: The attitude towards the subject of organ donation which depends essentially on the set of beliefs accepted or shared by individuals [7,8]. Positivity of beliefs and knowledge regarding organ donation is correlated with a positive attitude towards donation [9], also it has been found that compensating the families of the deceased is a possible strategy to increase the availability of organs for transplantation. However, this is a very controversial issue [1,10,11].

Organ donation in Brain-Dead (BD) individuals has increasingly become the primary source of organs worldwide for two reasons: First, recent advances in the pharmacology of immunosuppressive drugs have diminished the need for privilege the living donor. Second, many types of transplants are only possible with a deceased donor [8]. We aim throughout this chapter to deal in particular with the different positions of monotheistic religions in relation to organ donation and to seek a possible association between religion and the attitude towards organ donation.

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Discussion

Judaism

Hebraism is not only a faith, a code of observance, a form of veneration and a system of normal virtues, Judaism constitutes the sum of the experiences lived over time by the Jewish people. It translates its beatitudes and its pangs, its battles and its glories, its memories and its aspirations, also the progression of its moral ideas and its conception of the world [12]. The Jewish people appeared in the second millennium (B.C.E) as a distinct group in the Middle East. Currently Jews bring together a heterogeneous group of people of different nationalities with varying physical determinants and different levels of religiosity [13].

The rabbi is a person whose doctrine in the study of Torah legitimizes him to confiscate decisions or pronounce judgments in matters of Jewish law. It has long been the prominent communal symbol of Judaism. The rabbi being a spiritual guide was always a source of responsibility and regulation and the cornerstone of Jewish legislation [12].

Organ donation has long been considered one of the greatest dilemmas of the Jewish religion. The Halakha represents a guide to ritual life where beliefs are based essentially on the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud, of which there are three prohibitions on removing organs from a deceased [14]. The first, forbidden to derive any benefit from the body of the dead was reported in the Gemara, treaty of Avodah Zara. The second prohibition finds its legitimacy in the obligation to bury the dead without any manipulation of its organs. The third prohibition lies in the coercion of total respect for the body of the deceased and his relatives [14].

These prohibitions ruled in the Torah obligate us to respect and care for our dead and protect their honor. Notwithstanding in the face of a situation of distress and imminent danger of death (Piqua Nefesh) the previous prohibitions become null and void. Otherwise, removing organs to preserve the life of another human becomes a commandment and instruction called a mitzvah. This principle was dictated within the verse of the Torah which states "And lives by them" [15].

Ezekiel proclaims "I will give you a new heart and inspire you with a new spirit; I will remove the heart of stone from your body and I will give you a heart of meat". This metaphorical diction has a meaning beyond the spiritual expressing the value and extent of an organ donation or even transplantation [16]. In 1990, the Orthodox Rabbinical Assembly of the United States of America passed a resolution aimed at motivating all Jews to be tissue and organ donors [17]. Attentive to the particularity and specificity of the circumstances of the organ donation process, the Jewish authorities have proposed several benchmarks based on the relevance, values and challenges of organ transplantation.

Organ donation during one's lifetime is based on two fundamental principles, that of *primum non nocere* "first don't harm oneself" and the duty of non-abandonment of others. That is to say, we are under an obligation to help others but on condition that we do not harm ourselves. These two adjoining principles are in absolute contradiction, challenging our own ability to decide independently in the process of organ donation.

Leviticus prescribes: "Do not go peddling evil among your own people; do not be indifferent to the danger of your neighbor: I am the

Lord" [18]. This verse stipulates that the person must not remain idle when the life of a human being is in danger. Rabbinical authorities have often referred to this text to exculpate organ transplants, believing that the person awaiting a transplant is a person in danger. In addition, the removal of the kidney poses a problem if the donor is likely to be affected by a disease because of his donation. In this situation, the preservation of the donor's health prevents any donation on his part.

Organ donation after death is one of the questions that concerns potential organ donors. Indeed, one of the fundamental principles of Judaism is the resurrection of the dead, which is part of the 13 articles of faith of the Rambam, and which stipulates that the Jewish people are awaiting the arrival of the Messiah at a time when all souls will rise and be part of this messianic age. However, the resurrection is a miracle which makes it unnecessary to reflect with certain logic because if God has the power to give life to a body after its total degradation, the good Lord can restore life to a human being who has given his organs after death [19].

Christianity

Christianity is one of the major and most widespread religions in the world. It is a monotheistic religion that professes faith in one and only God. The Christian Churches are grouped into different branches, the main ones being Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity and Protestantism (with its evangelical branch) representing respectively 51%, 11% and 37% of the total Christians [20].

The Christian approach does not believe in a holy human body unlike Judaism and Islam. According to biblical references, the human body belongs to the creator who sculpted and made it and who strips its breath when he wants and where he wants [21]. However, the Bible also lets us know that God entrusted the body to the person who resides in it. This biblical theory implies that the person is free in the use of his body. Nevertheless, the human being must respond to this responsibility before the creator [22]. To spread his message of infinite love, Jesus urged caring for those who are hungry and thirsty, those who are sick, prison or homeless. Identically, John summed up his loving instructions in these words: "Beloved, since God has loved us so much, we too must love one another.

Moreover, some Christian thinkers consider organ donation as a mutilation of the human body. To defend their ideas, they are inspired by a few passages that encourage total respect for the body, which belongs to God and only to God.

Thus, Paul reminded the Corinthians of the existence of an afterlife in which the whole body must be preserved: "We know that if our earthly habitation, which is only a tent, is destroyed, we have in heaven a building which is the work of God, an eternal habitation which is not made by the hand of man [23].

The recognition by the church of the simultaneous existence of a natural body and a spiritual body; thus, the Bible approves that our earthly body made of flesh and blood will have no place in our heavenly inheritance. This reinforces and consolidates the opinion and the favorable tendency of Christians with regard to organ donation.

Islam

Islam is, chronologically, the third great monotheistic current of the family of Abrahamic religions after Judaism and Christianity. Muslims are divided into two main branches: Sunnism, which brings together about 90% of Muslims, and Shiism, which concentrates

about 10%. Sunni Muslims, related to an orthodox vision of Islam, overwhelmingly belong to one of the four major schools of jurisprudence. These schools are, in the order of their appearance: Hanafism, Malikism, Chafism, and Hanbalism. These schools accept each other, thus organizing a relative pluralism in terms of legal solutions (fatwa) [24].

The majority of Shia and Sunni jurists authorize organ transplantation based on the principle that the living takes precedence over the dead. Transplantation has long been controversial in the medical ethics of the Muslim community. Faced with such a situation where decision-making is delicate and where the Quran or the hadiths do not clearly set out the appropriate instructions to follow; Islamic jurisprudence refers in the elaboration of the commandments to the efforts of personal reflection based on the general principles of Islam (Ijtihad), to a consideration of the general interest (Istislah) and to customs (The Urf) [25,26].

In the case of a living donor, two essential commandments must be respected. First, the life of a living donor should not be endangered; second, the consent of the donor is a sine qua non condition for an ethically valid donation [27].

In Islam, the dead have the right to sanctity and the fullness of their bodies. Also all the dead, without distinction, must have a worthy burial. Islamic law therefore prohibits any discrimination between Muslims and non-Muslims. The obligation of prompt burial remains a general preference, but classical Islamic sources do not set a precise deadline [28].

Organ harvesting after death was a source of debate within the scientific and religious community. Death is defined as an ephemeral and migratory phenomenon in time and space. Physical death is characterized by the cooling of the body following a cardiac arrest based on empirical observation alone, while metaphysical death is characterized by a separation of the soul from the physical body [29]. However, any manipulation of the body before the heart actually stops is considered physical torture and a sin that lies in taking the life of a beating-hearted human being [29].

Even though brain death is not considered physical death according to Islamic jurisprudence, it is accepted to withhold medical support due to the irreversible state of physiological damage of the donor based on clinical, physiological and radiological [30]. All things considered, saving a life is of paramount value in Islam, referring to the Qur'an in sura "Al-Ma'ida" verse 32 which states ... "whoever saves a life has saved all mankind".

The responsibility of the human being is formally engaged when the fact of giving a regenerative part of the human body seems less threatening than the distress of others. The obligation of non-indifference pushes us to affirm through generosity our esteem for all. The approach of the three monotheistic religions towards organ donation was based on three principles whose importance differs from one religion to another and within the same religion, Respect for the human body, the resurrection of the dead, and saving the lives of others without harming your own.

Conclusion

A crucial question that arises today more than ever is that of the role of religion in the cognitive process of decision-making among religious people. Several works have been dedicated to highlighting religious and socio-cultural representations of the human body.

However, there is still a discrepancy between the beliefs, attitudes and practices of people with regard to organ donation.

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