

A BIOETHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS ORGAN AND TISSUE TRANSPLANTATION IN HUMANS

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Abstrakt

The article examines Christianity's attitude toward the issue of human organ and tissue transplantation. It analyzes the theological, anthropological, and ethical foundations of Christian teaching on the body, soul, and human dignity. Special attention is given to the positions of various Christian denominations — Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism — regarding donation and transplantation. It is shown that in contemporary Christian theology, transplantation is generally permitted and considered an act of love and self-sacrifice, provided that moral standards, voluntary consent, and respect for the human person are observed.

Key words

Christianity, bioethics, organ transplantation, donation, the human body, human dignity.

Аннотация

В статье рассматривается отношение христианства к проблеме трансплантации органов и тканей человека. Анализируются богословские, антропологические и этические основания христианского учения о теле, душе и человеческом достоинстве. Особое внимание уделяется позициям различных христианских конфессий — православия, католицизма и протестантизма в отношении донорства и трансплантации. Показано, что в современном христианском богословии трансплантация в целом допускается и рассматривается как акт любви и жертвенности при условии соблюдения нравственных норм, добровольного согласия и уважения к личности человека.

Ключевые слова

христианство, биоэтика, трансплантация органов, донорство, человеческое тело, достоинство личности.

Introduction

The development of modern medicine, particularly in the field of transplantation, has raised a number of complex ethical questions for religious and philosophical thought. Transplantation of human organs and tissues, on the one hand, is an effective way to save life and improve its quality, but on the other, it touches on fundamental concepts of the body, soul, death, and the limits of medical intervention.

Christianity, as one of the world's religions with a developed moral and ethical system, could not remain aloof from the discussion of these issues. The purpose of this article is to examine Christianity's position on the issue of human organ and tissue transplantation, identify the main theological arguments for and against, and demonstrate the evolution of Christian views in the context of modern bioethics.

Main Part. In Christian anthropology, man is understood as a unity of body and soul. According to biblical teaching, the body is not merely a "temporary shell," but is an integral part of the human personality. The Apostle Paul calls the body "the temple of the Holy Spirit" [1], emphasizing its sacred value.

At the same time, Christianity affirms the principle of love for one's neighbor and sacrifice as the highest moral norm. The commandment of love ("love your neighbor as yourself")

is a key argument in favor of the permissibility of medical interventions aimed at saving the life of another person[2].

Thus, even at the anthropological level, a tension arises between respect for the integrity of the body and the call to self-sacrifice for one's neighbor, which determines the complexity of Christianity's attitude toward transplantation. *Historical evolution of views.* In early Christianity, medical interventions were viewed with caution, but there was no outright prohibition on medical treatment or surgery. Christian thinkers such as Basil the Great and John Chrysostom recognized the value of the medical arts as a gift from God [3].

Organ transplantation as a medical practice only became possible in the 20th century, so classical theological texts contain no direct guidance on this issue. This necessitated the development of new bioethical approaches within the framework of Christian teaching, based on common principles—the value of life, love, freedom, and responsibility.

If we examine the position of the Roman Catholic Church, it is easy to see that it was one of the first to formulate an official position on the issue of transplantation. Encyclicals and papal speeches emphasize that organ donation can be considered an act of Christian love and self-sacrifice [4].

Pope John Paul II noted that transplantation is permissible under strict adherence to the following conditions:

- voluntary and informed consent of the donor;
- no commercialization of the human body;
- accurate establishment of the fact of the donor's death (especially in the case of posthumous donation);
- respect for the dignity of the human person.

Thus, Catholic ethics supports transplantation as a morally justifiable practice, provided bioethical norms are observed.

The Russian Orthodox Church and other local Orthodox churches have also developed official positions on bioethical issues. The "Fundamentals of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church" [1] states that organ transplantation is permissible as a means of saving life, but should in no way violate human freedom and dignity.

The Orthodox Church has developed a balanced and comprehensive approach to organ transplantation. It is based on the biblical understanding of the human person, the dignity of the body, and the commandment to love one's neighbor. It is important to note that transplantation can be morally justified if it is performed to save the life or significantly improve the health of another person. Moreover, organ donation is viewed as a form of Christian self-sacrifice and mercy, close to the Gospel ideal of "laying down one's life for one's friends" [5]. Regarding respect for the integrity of the individual, it can be added that in Orthodoxy, the human body is not "material," but rather a part of the divinely created individual. Именно поэтому недопустимо относиться к человеку как к «складу органов». Orthodox theology emphasizes that organ harvesting without the donor's consent is unacceptable; organ trafficking is morally unacceptable, and particular care must be taken in determining brain death.[6] Any medical intervention must preserve the dignity and freedom of both the donor and recipient. To preserve the dignity of both donor and recipient, it is essential to understand and adhere to the conditions for the permissibility of organ harvesting. Orthodox documents (in particular, the "Fundamentals of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church," 2000) emphasize several mandatory conditions:

Voluntary and informed consent of the donor. Coercion, pressure from relatives, or financial gain are considered grave sins.

- Commercialization is prohibited. Organ trafficking is considered a violation of human dignity.
- Strict definition of death in posthumous donation. The Church is wary of the concept of "brain death," fearing premature organ harvesting. Medical criteria must be impeccable and exclude a utilitarian approach.
- Priority of the donor's life in living transplantation. Disproportionate harm to the donor for the benefit of another is prohibited.

Orthodoxy considers the following unacceptable:

- organ harvesting without the consent of the person or their family;
- euthanasia for the purpose of obtaining organs;
- experiments in which a person is transformed into a biotechnology object;

The spiritual dimension of this issue includes the postulates that an organ transplant does not change a person's personality, soul, or spiritual identity. Concerns about "character transfer" or "another soul" are not theologically substantiated. However, psychological and spiritual support for the recipient is important, so that they perceive the gift as a responsibility to God and others.

In pastoral practice, priests typically recommend:

- considering the issue of donation in advance as a personal moral choice;
- providing informed consent, without pressure;
- accompanying the transplantation with prayer, sacraments, and spiritual support for the donor's family and the patient.

The Orthodox understanding can be expressed in this formula:

Transplantation is permissible if it is an act of love and does not violate the God-given dignity of the human being. It is rejected where a person is turned into a means, freedom and voluntariness are violated, where commercialism and exploitation arise, where the boundaries between life and death are blurred.[7]

Thus, the Christian attitude toward transplantation can be characterized as ethically balanced and oriented toward a harmonious combination of medical progress and spiritual and moral values.

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