



# **A Search for Wholeness:**

## ***An Orthodox Response to Organ Donation and Retrieval***

Matushka Linda Korz, B.Sc., M.D., F.R.C.P.C.

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*All Saints of North America Orthodox Church*

*Hamilton, Ontario, Canada*

*The body cannot be purified without fasting and vigil, the soul without mercy and truth, the intellect without contemplation of God and communion with Him. These pairs constitute the principal virtues in the three aspects of the human person.*

- Saint Ilias the Presbyter, Philokalia, Vol. II<sup>1</sup>

*Thus through his creation man possesses...his passible aspect from the animals, his spiritual and noetic aspect from angels, and finally, in order to exist and live, his immaterial breath- his incorporeal and immortal soul, understood as intellect, consciousness and the power of the Holy Spirit from God.*

- Saint Nikitas Stithatos, Philokalia, Vol. I<sup>1</sup>

The first successful cadaveric kidney transplant took place in Boston in October of 1962.<sup>2</sup> Since then, on a popular level, the practice of organ donation has reached the point of virtually unquestioned value. As a result, the demand for organs both from living and cadaveric donations, has reached unprecedented levels, levels that can only be described as “consumer driven.” Naturally, whole organ donations from live individuals are limited to duplicate organs, such as kidneys, where the donor patient can survive with only one such organ. The recovery and utilization of organs from dead patients, as a result of advances in the scientific understanding of organ preservation and transplant immunology, has the tremendous potential to increase the supply for transplantation. In all major nations worldwide, health care policies have attempted to maximize legislation to first entrench, and second to extend, the efficiency and pool of potential organ donors. In Canada and the United States, the Canadian Council for Organ Donation and Transplant and the National Organ Transplant Act, respectively, have mandated the creation of organizations, sometimes termed *networks*, in every state and province to support, increase, and promote the acceptance of organ donation and transplant programs.

The apparent success of modern transplantation has been built on a secular humanistic foundation. This fundamentally distorts the understanding of the human person and the value of human life. The selection of appropriate candidates for organ donation and the process by which human organs are procured in an operating theatre have blurred, to almost imperceptibility, the distinction between life and death. This distorted foundation, viewed through the eyes of Sacred Scripture and the Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church,

forms the basis of this discussion. It is through the mind of the Holy Fathers of the Church that modern man can find the only path out of the dehumanizing seduction that fuels the organ donation industry. For the Orthodox faithful, in the words of the holy Apostle, we must “always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.” (1 Peter 3:15)

## **Nihilism and Its View of the Body**

Saint Justin Popovich describes succinctly the development of the European (and by inheritance, North American) mind. In his essay *Humanistic and Theanthropic Education*, he traces the philosophy of modern man from the Renaissance to Rousseau, to Locke and Hume to the rationalism of Decartes and Kant, to Schopenhauer and Styerner, and finally to the humanism of Nietzsche in which man “has degenerated to become a base and insignificant man”<sup>3</sup> without God and without hope, faced starkly with our mortality. Without God and without an afterlife, the search for immortality finds its end in the rational solution of having functional organs of the body still functional without the soul: nihilism has no place for the soul.

The culture of death has deeply impacted the approach to organ donations over the last few decades. Cold, calculated pragmatism – the harvesting of the organs of one individual to hopefully save the life of another – takes precedence over the reality that such a decision may well have a detrimental impact on the donor, not to mention those participating in the organ retrieval process. At the time of the imminent loss of a loved one, the senselessness of a premature death seeks a clear and immediate sense of greater purpose; organ donation provides this purpose in a simple, easy available package. Afflicted relatives are comforted by something materially good coming from the approaching death of their loved

one, something the person will do, so they can live on in others. This is a search for immortality, which has plagued mankind since death entered the world. But this kind of false immortality is based on a false and anti-Christian understanding of life, and of life after death.

## **Mutilation of the Body**

*Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is in you, which ye have of God?”* (1 Corinthians 6:19)

Orthodox Christians recognize that the body is not simply a shell, but the actual temple of the Holy Spirit, and hopefully the home of a *nous* (the eye of the soul) awakened to God. Western philosophies that deny the Incarnation – the reality that God took on human flesh – inevitably fall into a strange kind of dualism, suggesting that the spirit is good, while the body is bad, or at least, expendable. The focus of the Orthodox Christian life points in the opposite direction, towards holiness or, more explicitly, *wholeness*. This is not some sort of “spiritual” thing, but the sanctification of the whole person, *body and soul*. This is one reason Orthodox Christians do not condone cremation, which is an assault on one essential part of the holiness of the person, in contrast to the cold practicality of a materialistic worldview, there is hardly a reason to not to cremate.

## **The Body: Sanctified by God**

God’s love for mankind was evident from the beginning. Everything that has being was created from non-being by God’s Will. “He commanded, and they were created.” (Psalms 148:5) This was true except for Man. In the creation history recorded by Moses the God -Seer, the creation of mankind was unique, described in much more detail, and outlines his preeminence and

glory in the world. Moses gives intimate details of the providential creation of Adam, that God first took counsel with Himself, and then proceeded with His *hands* to fashion only his body from the sensible world, while his soul was given to him by the Creator's own breath.

*“And God Said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of god created he him; male and female created them.... And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul.”* (Genesis 1:26-2:7)

In the spiritual collection *The Philokalia*, Saint Diadochus of Photiki tells us, “We share in the image of God by virtue of the intellectual activity of our soul; for the body is, as it were, the soul's dwelling-place. Now as a result of Adam's fall, not only were the lineaments of the form imprinted on the soul befouled, but our body also became subject to corruption.”<sup>1</sup> We understand that the body was created, and having lost the likeness of God, (not His *image*) it is afflicted by sin and death. Scripture reminds us that our current condition is not in fact natural, but rather that through the first Adam and “the hatred of the devil, death entered his world.” (Wisdom 2:24) Our souls *and our bodies* are not now, nor have ever been, beyond hope of restoration. The censuring of all the faithful during any Orthodox service bears witness to the sacredness of the physical body along with the soul, as icons of the Creator awaiting final redemption. The second Adam – Jesus Christ – has destroyed death and has reconciled us to God, the Father, transforming our corrupt bodies in the age to come, to incorruption that is free from the effects of sin, illness and death. “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We

shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed... and the dead will be raised incorruptible.... For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” (1 Corinthians 15: 51-53)

## Evidence from the Saints

Holy Tradition reminds us again and again that redemption was God's plan from the beginning. The Scriptures tell us, “God created man for incorruption and made him to be an image of His own eternity.” (Wisdom 2:24) Through the holy relics of the saints, the world is given dramatic illustrations of this original state. In the Old Testament it is written: “As they came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men, and they cast the man into the sepulcher of Elisha, and when the man let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet.” (4 Kings 13:21) In the ancient west, the relics of saints like Edward the Martyr (reposed 979), remained incorrupt-free for centuries from decomposition, even though they were unembalmed in keeping with the standard Christian practice in most times and places up to the last century, and manifested miraculous examples of God's grace. The body of this Holy King of England, from the beginning of his untimely and treacherous death, was known to give sight to the blind, and heal the lame.<sup>5</sup>

Modern examples of the sanctified bodies of incorrupt saints are numerous. Saint Alexander of Svir (reposed 1533), whose relics survived the Soviet era, can still be venerated, incorrupt, at the monastery of Svir in the Transfiguration church in Russia.<sup>6</sup> The incorrupt relics of Saint John Maximovich of San Francisco (1966) can still be visited in the local cathedral in that city. Pilgrims flock to the relics of the Serbian Saint Basil (reposed 1631) in the monastery at Ostrog, and are witnesses to similar outpourings of grace. Numerous other examples could be given. (It is important to

delineate that for Orthodox Christians, mere incorruption of the bodily remains of an individual, although may be accepted as a Divine sign, neither vouchsafe the sanctity of the person nor implies that all Saints must be incorrupt.)<sup>7</sup> It is the ongoing revelation from the Holy Spirit of miraculous signs such as myrrh streaming from bones and other remains, and healings, attributed to the intercessory prayers of the saint that indicate favour in the sight of God. In the case of all the aforementioned saints, healing and other miracles have occurred and continue to occur.

What does this mean, as far as the sanctity of the body is concerned? *In The Soul After Death* by Father Seraphim Rose, Saint John of Damascus speaks about the connection between the holiness of the soul and the sanctity of the body:

*“Now, if the soul had engaged alone in the contest for virtue, then it would also be crowned alone; and if it alone had indulged in pleasures, then it alone could be justly punished. However, since the soul followed neither virtue nor vice without the body, it will be just for them to receive their recompense together.”*<sup>8</sup>

## **The Eternal Value of the Individual**

The Church Fathers see every person as a creature of God, with a unique and eternal nature of soul, with value as an eternal human *being* not a human *doing* - a mere collection of actions and experiences, like some atheistic philosophers suggest (For a discussion of this, see also *Letter for Sanctity of Life Sunday*, Metropolitan Herman, *Orthodox Church in America, January 2007*, [www.oca.org](http://www.oca.org)). Christ chastised the Sadducees, reminding them that the soul continues to live after death: “You are mistaken, not knowing Scriptures nor the power of God...God is not the God

of the dead but of the living.” (Matthew 22:29-32) After the personal judgment, each soul awaits in Hades or Paradise the Final Judgment at the end of time. The Orthodox Church offers their remembrance in tangible ways such as prayer for the dead individual, particularly in the Memorial Prayer service (in Slavonic, *Panichidas* or in the Greek, *Parastos*), the observance of Thomas Sunday (the first Sunday after the feast of the Lord’s Resurrection), and the observance of Soul Saturdays, dedicated to prayers for the dead.

These are not idle activities to comfort the bereaved: like the Orthodox funeral service, their entire focus is on the preparation of the soul for the day it is reunited with the body, and stands before the judgment of God. The traditional colour for the Orthodox funeral is bright (white), not dark (black), as it is in contemporary non-Orthodox funerals. The colour marks the proclamation of our hope in the resurrection *of the body*, just as we accept the bodily resurrection of Christ. Anything else would simply not be Christian. The main purpose of the Orthodox funeral is for the welfare of the soul of the dead person, not to address the sentiments of the family. (For example, there is traditionally no eulogy, and the priest faces the open casket bearing the body of the deceased loved one.) Family and friends pay their respects to the departed person by offering a touch or – more traditionally – a last kiss, affirming by this act that the body is forever the person they loved. The effects of non-Orthodox views have permeated so deeply, even among Orthodox, that at many funerals, even Orthodox Christians hesitate to kiss or touch the body of the person they loved, somehow ceasing to believe in the integrity of the whole person.

The comfort of the family comes from their participation and prayerful work on behalf of the soul of their loved one – a sharp contrast to the saccharine sense of paralysis that often afflicts the sterilized modern funeral. As stated by Father Seraphim Rose,

“every one of us who desires to manifest his love for the dead and give them real help, can do this best of all through prayer for them, and in particular by commemorating them at the Liturgy....The funeral need not be performed elaborately, but most definitely it should be complete, without abbreviations; think at this time not of yourself and your convenience but of the deceased, with whom you are parting forever.”<sup>8</sup>

## When Does Death Occur?

Some will argue that the greatest gift one can offer is to give ones life for another. Surely the Church teaches that, doesn't it? The Lord Himself tells us, “*Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*” (John 15:13) But does this apply to the state of organ retrieval at the present time? Does the harvesting of organs from one individual at the point of death **as it currently occurs in North American hospitals**, constitute a sacrifice to save life, or a sin that takes a life?

Currently, in Canada and the United States of America there are two legal definitions of death: the traditional definition of death, irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions (cardiac death) *or* cessation of the brain whether as a whole or in part (neurological determination of death, NDD or brain death).<sup>9</sup> In 1971, the historic *ad hoc* committee of the Harvard Medical School presented its report on the definition of Brain Death and described scientific and medical criteria on which to base the diagnosis. This landmark paper opened the door for legislation to sanction the removal and use of organs for transplantation from patients who did not fit the medical criteria for cardiac death, but were found to have

severe irreversible brain injuries leading to a state of prolonged coma. These patients were successfully resuscitated and kept alive by advances in circulatory medicine and mechanical ventilation.

It was expedient that a more liberal and utilitarian definition of death be ethically, morally, and, more importantly legally, accepted. “Brain death has proved to be a most important concept for the progress of organ transplantation.... In parts of the world where brain death was given legal standing and became standard practice, vital organ transplantation increased rapidly.”<sup>2</sup> During the process of brain death donations, the duration of oxygen deprivation (known in medical literature as warm ischemic time) and the extent of loss of viable cells in the body are minimized since the heart continues to perfuse and nourish the tissues while mechanical ventilation sustains breathing (recently, the more descriptive term of heart-beating donation is preferred). In North America and most parts of Europe, organ retrieval from NDD individuals is by far the leading source of all organs for transplantation.<sup>18</sup>

Over three decades later, there is still disagreement worldwide regarding the definition of brain death and, unsurprisingly, how to diagnosis it. Henry Beecher, chairman of the historic *ad hoc* committee of the Harvard Medical School to examine the definition of Brain Death stated:

*“At whatever level we choose to call death, it is an arbitrary decision. Death of the heart? The hair still grows. Death of the brain? The heart may still beat. The need is to choose an irreversible state where the brain no longer functions. It is best to choose a level where, although the brain is dead, usefulness of other organs is still present. This, we have tried to make clear in what we have called the new definition of death(...). Here we arbitrarily accept as*

*death, the destruction of one part of the body; but it is the supreme part, the brain... ”<sup>9</sup>*

How much of the brain? Current tests only look at selective parts of the brain, whether it be brain stem or higher cognitive function, and thus, by definition, these tests can not confirm the death of the whole brain.

In a recent issue of a leading Canadian medical journal the authors concluded: “the current evidence base for existing NDD (neurologic determination of death) guidelines is inadequate .... We recommend that after NDD, the patient be declared dead.”<sup>11</sup> Father John Breck, an Orthodox author on bioethics, clearly outlines the problem in regard to the state of organ donation throughout the world today:

*“Using brain-stem criteria to determine death, we are left with the gruesome fact that vital organs can only be harvested from patients who are technically still alive... Human personhood is determined not by medical diagnosis but by divine Providence.”<sup>12</sup>*

The acceptance of brain death whether legally or morally is not equal or universal among countries. In India, organ transplants are largely limited to live or cadaveric donations due to religious and cultural rejection of NDD. In Japan, heart transplants were not done until 1997 when government legislation finally permit organ donation *after* neurologic or brain death. Despite these realities, and despite the growing challenge within the scientific community to acknowledge that biological death cannot be proven with certainty in brain death, information given to families and patients about organ procurement continues to falsely represent brain death as physical death. Furthermore, in some cases, religious and cultural consent to organ retrieval after neurologic death is misrepresented and misleading. John Gillman, pastor and ethicist in California, in

his article titled Religious Prospectives on Organ Donation<sup>10</sup> attempts to outline the Christian prospective. The statement that the Greek Orthodox do not oppose organ donation was subsequently reinterpreted by the Trillium Gift of Life Network (an agency created in 2000 by the Government of Ontario, Canada) as the Greek Orthodox Churchs support organ donation. (see [www.Giftoflife.on.ca](http://www.Giftoflife.on.ca))

For Orthodox Christians, the supreme part of the body is not the brain (which is an Aristotelian notion; c.f. *De Anima*) but the *heart*. “The heart is not just a physical organ or centre of his psychic life but something indefinable yet capable of being in contact with God, the Source of all being.”<sup>13</sup> In the Book of the prophet Isaiah, we read, “make the heart of this people fat. Make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed.”(Isaiah 6:10) Later, in another passage, “these people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honour Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” (Isaiah 29:13) Christ tells us, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Matthew 6:21).

The reality that the noetic heart is located within the physical heart has always been the teaching of the Orthodox Church. St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), a champion of the Orthodox understanding of the knowledge of God, writes:

*“Since our soul is a single entity possessing many powers, it utilizes as an organ the body that nature lives in conjunction with it. What organs, then, does the power of the soul that we call ‘intellect’ make use of when it is active?... For some locate it in the head, as though in a sort of acropolis; others consider that its vehicle is the*

*centremost part of the heart, that aspect of the heart that intelligence is neither within us as in a container—for it is incorporeal— nor yet outside us, for it is united to us; but it is located in the heart as in its own organ.”<sup>1</sup>*

St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite (1749-1808) on instruction for stillness in prayer writes:

*“You must free the energy (energeia) of your mind, whose organ is the brain, from all the external things of the world, through the guarding of the senses and of the imagination. Then you must bring the energy into the heart, which is the organ of the essence (ousia) of the mind. This return is customarily brought about in the case of beginners—as the Devine Wakeful Fathers teach—by turning the head down and resting the chin on the chest.”<sup>20</sup>*

Secular man, having lost the quietness and gentleness of heart, can not know God. “Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8) As a consequence, he finds incredulous the Truth of self knowledge, the essence of the soul is located within the physical heart. Thus, ignorant of the mystery of life, how can he define the mystery of death and more specifically, how can the definition of death be measured by some grotesque notion of cessation of *some* part of the brain?

It is sad but not surprising that, for the most part, the medical community does not truly understand the nature of death. Acknowledging this limitation, Zameretti *et al.* advocate the substitution of the word (and thus concept of) death with the term irreversible coma or more precisely, irreversible apnoeic coma, understood not as equivalent to death, but as describing a particular condition in which life support should be legitimately forgone and organs can be retrieved from consenting patients.<sup>9</sup> Even more

pathetic is the disregard, at best, and denial at worst that the human person is a creation of body and soul. So long as the medical community is ignorant of the soul of an individual, the medical definition of death will never be complete. Organ retrieval will remain an act of taking life, since it concentrates only on questions of physiology, ignoring the relationship between the soul and the body. Saint Paul cautions, that “those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh.” (Romans 8:5) For Orthodox Christians, death is simply an impermanent separation of body and soul which afflicts mankind until the final judgement.<sup>14</sup> Saint John of Damascus reminds us, that “truly most terrible is the mystery of death, how the soul is violently parted from the body, from the harmony, and most natural bond of kinship is cut off by the divine will.”<sup>8</sup>

## **The Slippery Slope**

*For if truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory why am I also still judged as a sinner? And why not say, “ Let us do evil that good may come?” (Rom 3:7-8)*

So far, we have dealt essentially with organ donation after brain death and heart-beating donations (HBD). More recently, there is a resurgence of interest and experimentation with retrieval of organs from patients after cardiocirculatory death. These individual have also been termed non-heart beating donors (NHBD).<sup>4</sup> What is this process and why is there such an interest and urgency among health providers and lawmakers to promote and facilitate such a strategy?

Donation after cardiocirculatory death (DCD) is not a new concept. In fact, this practice was the standard practice of organ retrieval prior to the establishment of NDD. These were the initial organs

retrieved from individuals who met the traditional criteria of physical death involving the cessation of the heart and circulation. The Maastricht classification of donation after cardiocirculatory death, published in 1995 (amended in 2003 to include category V), outlines the different groups of NHBD.<sup>16</sup>

- I *Brought in dead*
- II *Unsuccessful resuscitation*
- III *Awaiting cardiac arrest*
- IV *Cardiac arrest after brain-stem death*
- V *Cardiac arrest in a hospital inpatient*

Only categories I and II are consistent with the historic definition of death. In categories IV and V, patients in addition to being maintained on life support, have had circulatory arrest at least once but restarted again after cardiopulmonary resuscitation. In regard to transplant and organ preservation, these four categories are termed *uncontrolled* donation after cardiac death, since warm ischemic time cannot be avoided or minimized. This is in contrast to patients from category III who allow for *controlled* donation after cardiac death.

Over the last decade, due to the profound discrepancy between the supply of vital organs and the demand from patients with end-organ failures, there has been a concerted and coordinated effort by the international transplant organizations to legitimize and make routine the harvesting of organs from category III individuals who have sustained a significant insult (such as a stroke or respiratory failure) and whose condition is deemed medically irreversible *and/or* terminal but do not meet the criteria for brain death.<sup>17</sup> These individuals are taken to the operating room before death, disconnected from life support (ventilators) and monitored until the heart finally stops beating, hence the description controlled). At this point, **only two to five minutes are permitted for the establishing of the absence of spontaneous recovery before the patient is**

**pronounced dead (hence cardiac death).** While the body is still warm, the actual process of removing organs is permitted, forgoing the onerous task of establishing brain death since expediency governs the “success” of organ retrieval and preservation. In some centers, prior to cardiac death, certain interventions such as medications and sternolaparotomy (incision from the neck to the abdomen) and vessel cannulation, may be permitted for the purposes of maximizing organ viability by minimizing warm ischemic time. Of course, this practice violates the dead donor rule which holds that patients must be dead before organ retrieval proceeds and that the person’s death must be neither caused nor hastened by retrieval.<sup>15</sup> (Up until 2007, the prosecution of the State of Ohio had filed homicide charges against physicians in Cleveland engaged in controlled cardiac death donations).

Furthermore, the cardiac death of patients cannot be predicted precisely. Beecher recognized this early in the field of transplant science. He wrote: “Dying is a continuous process: while death may occur at a discrete time, we are not able to pinpoint it.” The University of Wisconsin had developed a tool to identify DCD individuals who would likely have a cardiac death within two hours after removal of life support. In their experience, about ten percent of identified potential DCD donors were returned to the unit or hospital floor for palliative care.<sup>4</sup>

The ungodly vigil of death during DCD donations is being played out increasingly in operating theatres throughout North America and Europe and shows the depravity of mankind’s achievements. In the name of medical and intellectual progress, the process of organ retrieval for transplantation, seen by the world as a great “hope” for life, is, in fact, moral justification for a practice not dissimilar to carrion birds. At the very least, these beasts wait for the death of their prey and their animal subjects do not have immortal souls to reconcile with God. “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a

bad tree bear good fruit...Therefore by their fruits you will know them.” (Matthew 7:18-20) This unnatural fight against decay and time is the hallmark of the worldly man, who has long forgotten God and strives for immortality at all costs. Christ spoke truly about this generation: “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 9:36-37)

## Spiritual Consequences of Death

*But even though the devil should transform himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians. 11:14), or present thoughts which seem most good, the heart will feel a certain lack of clarity, an unrest in its thoughts and a confusion of feeling.*<sup>17</sup>

- Saint Seraphim of Sarov

The Orthodox do not subscribe to the common view that death is a normal or natural phenomenon. Man was not created to die. “The Church sees death as ultimately negative, the consequence of our ontological separation with God, the consequence of our sinful condition.”<sup>18</sup> This consequence has a very real impact on the living. At a worldly level, for the health care workers directly involved in the procurement of organs from NDD or DCD individuals, there are psychological and emotion burdens which the advocates of organ donation try to minimize by focusing on the tremendous benefits to living organ recipients. At a minimum, most health care workers experience degrees of sadness and remorse. This is hopefully only transient and outwardly, related to sentimentality. However, there is a more harmful, lasting spiritual consequence of which the secular world, with all its rationalism and carnal intellect, has no knowledge. The mystical understanding of the consequence of participating in death, decay, corruption and sin

can only be fully articulated by the Orthodox Church. It alone has preserved the science of the Fathers, which is not base on man-made ideology or theories, but is rooted in the authenticated knowledge and experience of the whole living church from the beginning of time.

The Church Fathers taught that we are made to account for every thought, word and deed. In our whole life we are constantly in a struggle to draw closer to God, Who is Light and Life, or to the Evil One who is Darkness and Death. St. Nikolai Velimirovic writes, “The main thing is that you know and measure how all your deeds, words, and thoughts unavoidably create an impression on all four sides: on God and the spiritual world, on nature, on man, and on your soul. If you train yourself in this knowledge, you will attain a high level of saving vigilance.”<sup>19</sup> This vigilance refers to the watchfulness (*nepsis*) of the *nous*. The *nous* is the highest part of the soul, the part of our nature that is capable of true communion with the living God. Anything that darkens the *nous* can be compared to spiritual poison, which draws us further from God and leads eventually to spiritual death for our immortal soul. This is the meaning of Christ’s statement: “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light...(but) if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness.” (Matthew 22-23). Involvement with death, in any form, whether voluntarily or involuntarily darkens the *nous*. Priests are not permitted to be undertakers since “what communion has light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14)

The modern approach to transplant and organ donation is a tangible battle of man against the laws of nature. From the moment when a patient is diagnosed with irreversible illness the role of the physician (whether as the intensive care physician or anesthesiologist) fights a desperate battle against demise of the vital organs such as the heart,

lungs, kidneys and liver. The ensuing decay and corruption is part of the process of death, *but it is not death itself*. The idea that science and medicine can prolong indefinitely the life of the body by mechanical life support is simply false and ridiculous. Why else is there such urgency for live donor and cardiac death donations? This propaganda is offered to make organ donation more attractive, insisting that death has truly occurred but through marvelous medical progress, the organs can still be salvaged and made to function. Modern man emphasizes illness and death of the physical body (sometimes of the carnal mind). In his quest to be rational, mankind has become the most irrational and foolish of all beasts fearing the one who could kill the body but not the soul, and giving no heed to Him who, “after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!” (Luke 12:5)

## What Can Orthodox Christians Do?

*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (Matthew 7:7)*

There are several simple but essential steps Orthodox Christians must take in confronting the question of organ transplants:

1. As Orthodox faithful, we must pray that the world may see the one true great hope that is here and is to come in Christ’s Incarnation, Death and Resurrection, and that Orthodox faithful would be granted the faith to live according to God’s command, striving to be vessels of holiness and purity in preserving the integrity of the human body. As the Apostle Paul writes: “I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep,

lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.”  
(1Thessalonians 4:13)

2. Learn more about the Orthodox faith through reading the Sacred Scriptures and texts on the Sacred Tradition and the lives of the Saints. Speak to your spiritual father or mother, confessor, or priest, regarding the issues brought up in the article, to ask for their direction before giving consent to organ donation for yourself or, by proxy, for any loved one, bringing to mind the litany offered at every Orthodox service: “A Christian ending to our life, painless, blameless, peaceful and a good defence before the dread judgment seat of Christ, let us ask of the Lord. Grant this, O Lord.”

3. If you are in the difficult position, as an employee or administrator, whereby involvement in some part of the process or promotion of organ retrieval is required, at least speak about it to an Orthodox spiritual guide. Pray that in God’s Mercy, He will grant deliverance from such a duty. Ideally, Orthodox Christians should refrain from participation in any way. In addition, offer fervent prayer, and attend the Orthodox funeral services and memorial prayers for the departed.

4. Be a witness to others – especially to Orthodox brothers and sisters who are unfamiliar with the realities of organ donation – to inform them about this issue in a firm and loving way with “meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” (1 Peter. 3:15-17)

## References

<sup>1</sup>*The Philokalia: Compiled by St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth, Volume 1-4.* translated by Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, Faber and Faber, London, 1979.

<sup>2</sup>Nadey S. Hakim and Vassilios E. Papalois, *History of Organ and Cell Transplantation.* Imperial College Press, London, 2003.

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