



Growing Humanity – December 2014

It is impossible to approach the Christmas period without acknowledging the meaning that many Australians find from their religious beliefs.

Religion is a deeply personal issue, but in our contemporary world is often politicised. It is therefore a difficult subject to approach without the fear of causing offence. I am stepping onto this precipice because I believe like organ donation, death and other difficult topics, it is important to talk about the role of religion in our lives. I believe it is necessary to openly discuss these issues using accurate information. This helps to alleviate the fear that gaps in our understanding allow to grow if filled with assumptions and misinformation. Open and tolerant discussion about religion is particularly important in the context of organ donation. This is because most families make organ donation decisions in the context of their loved ones death, when religious beliefs become particularly pertinent. Suffering caused by grief remains a terrible part of the human condition. When grief is preventable and caused by human failings, such as in the recent events in Sydney and Pakistan our beliefs are challenged. It is not uncommon for religion to be blamed for this suffering, or claimed as an excuse for barbaric actions. However, in truth, it is the individuals who perform the atrocities who are responsible. Ideas of peace, hope and joy which relate to the Christian message of Christmas, may seem particularly difficult to accept in the context of the suffering we are personally familiar with, and are exposed to through the media. Interestingly, all the major

religions are underpinned by similar views regarding the importance of peace and care for the needs of others. In the same way, all the major religions view organ donation as an important selfless gift for humanity. A powerful representation of the common religious theme regarding organ donation comes from Pope John Paul II (1991) "Love, communion, solidarity and absolute respect for the dignity of the human person constitute the only legitimate context of organ transplantation. It is important not to ignore the moral and spiritual values which come into play when individuals, while observing the ethical norms which guarantee the dignity of the human person and bring it to perfection, freely and consciously decide to give a part of themselves, a part of their own body, in order to save the life of another human being" (3.)

In the recent Sydney hostage tragedy, the social media revealed an amazing outpouring of compassion, tolerance and humanity. It flowed from the simple gesture of one woman who offered to support a fellow passenger, a young Muslim woman wearing her religious attire, to travel safely by offering to "ride with you". The thousands of social media responses in support of this stance demonstrated the remarkable care and respect for other views that is shared between many Australians, regardless of their religion. I suggest that the family

decision to agree to their loved ones organ donation is seen in a similar way within our community. Further, if given the opportunity, I believe most people would show the same outpouring of care and respect to the donors and families of donors for their gift of humanity. Christmas, which falls around the same time as the Jewish celebration of Hanukkah is a wonderful time to reflect that we are all 'in this together' and despite our differences share a common suffering and need for compassion, humanity and to 'ride together'.

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