

11-1-1978

[Book Review of] *The Gift of Life: The Social and Psychological Impact of Organ Transplantation*, edited by Robert G. Simms et al,

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## Recommended Citation

Shannon, Thomas (1978) "[Book Review of] *The Gift of Life: The Social and Psychological Impact of Organ Transplantation*, edited by Robert G. Simms et al," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 45: No. 4, Article 18.  
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol45/iss4/18>

medical ethics and then one chapter each on human experimentation and genetics. Both chapters survey the complex issues without considering the particulars; both reflect extensive research by the author.

Part three on institutional policy contains three chapters: one is on the use of the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Facilities, another deals with population control, and the last treats respect for life. While strongly reaffirming his dissent from the magisterial teaching opposing contraception and sterilization, the author offers brief reflections on the limits of dissent (pp. 154-158). He appeals to the praxis of the Church as an indicator of the legitimacy of dissent, noting that on abortion and euthanasia the praxis of the Church has not moved away from the hierarchical magisterium as it has on contraception.

This volume could never stand alone as an adequate textbook in sexual and medical ethics since it represents only one author's opinions on key issues. It manifests Father Curran's competence and convictions, of course. It uses a methodology of moral analysis which he advocates and which admits of divorce and remarriage, morally acceptable homosexual activity, and sterilization for both medical and non-medical reasons.

Moral theologians who are closer to the traditional positions of the magisterium cannot ignore opinions like those advanced in this book. But only time and the guidance of the Holy Spirit will tell if the kind of moral methodology advocated by Father Curran will be accepted within the Church. This reviewer feels doubtful about such an outcome, but it would take more than a review to explain why.

— Rev. Donald McCarthy  
Professor of Moral Theology  
Mt. St. Mary Seminary

## ***The Gift of Life: The Social and Psychological Impact of Organ Transplantation***

(Health, Medicine and Society: A Wiley-Interscience Series)

Robert G. Simms et al, Editors

Wiley, New York, 1977. No price given.

In a pre-technological age, the concept of a catastrophic illness was unthinkable. When illness occurred, people either got better or died. Now with the advent of the technological age, illness can be catastrophic not only in terms of its effects on the patient, but also in terms of its implications for the family, the family's financial reserves, and the utilization of scarce and/or expensive medical resources. By focusing on many of the phenomena surrounding kidney transplantation, the book provides a unique view of many of the multi-faceted dimensions of this one catastrophic disease of renal failure.

Primarily this book is, as its subtitle indicates, an examination of the social and psychological dimensions of organ transplantation and reception. Through interviews and questionnaires, the authors critically examine often discussed issues such as the psychological impact of kidney disease on adults and children, problems with rehabilitation, the psychological and social implications of both donat-

ing and refusing to donate an organ, the elements of decision-making that enter into becoming a donor, problems of stress that arise within a family, and the relation of these issues to the relatives of cadaver donors. This psychological and social orientation is framed by a critical awareness of the ethical, medical, and economic dimensions of organ donation and reception. Thus while the authors are quite sympathetic to the needs and concerns of the individual patient, they are also aware of the broader context in which the issue must be discussed.

The book is an excellent source for a variety of kinds of information on kidney disease and its treatment and can be used to analyze issues such as the cost and benefits, both physical and psychological, of a variety of kinds of therapies. The data presented here indicate also that most individuals have little trouble in making up their mind about becoming donors. The authors argue that this process cannot be truly described as decision-making, for individuals do not seem to weigh alternatives, risks, or benefits. Most donors seem to know spontaneously what they will do. The data also indicate that children seem to have a good grasp of the issues involved in becoming donors and that they have, from an empirical point of view, the knowledge on which to base a decision regarding organ donation. The authors further indicate that the issue of searching for a donor within a family does not seem to create too much additional stress for it. Stress was major in only about one-fourth of the families interviewed and was related to feelings of having been pressured to donate.

For someone interested in the ethical problems related to organ transplantation, the book is extremely interesting because it provides a very fine empirical context in which to raise and analyze questions and problems. While recognizing that the data reflect the experiences at one transplantation center, the legislative, economical, clinical, and psychological data nonetheless can help the ethicist learn what questions are critical, what issues are perceived as important by patients and health-care staff, and what may be important public policy issues.

Although more of a reference book, the book could well be used as a text in some bioethics or medical ethics courses. It has an index, a very helpful glossary, and an excellent bibliography which contains, in addition to the medical references, ethical and economic references.

—Thomas Shannon  
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Worcester Polytechnic Institute

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