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SHORT COMMUNICATION

Sacred Transits: Exploring Death Through Religious Mosaic

Tránsitos Sagrados: Explorando la Muerte a Través del Mosaico Religioso

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ABSTRACT

Death is a reality in the lives of all human beings, and although nobody wants to talk about it, it is a part of the life cycle that we will all go through at some point. It is also a reality that, as health professionals, nursing plays a fundamental role since it is part of this painful scenario that we cannot ignore daily. After analyzing the concepts of death in Catholicism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Judaism and Evangelism, we can say that death is, for these religions, the separation of body and soul, which will be united again at the moment of resurrection; for this reason, the body is honoured and prayed for the purification of the souls. The deceased and the grieving family members have faith that at the moment of resurrection, they will be with God and meet again and share an eternal life. Knowledge of the concept of death in different religions provides nursing with a tool to understand, for example, the palliative care patient and his family, a grandmother who gives us a holy card of Jesus to place on her granddaughter's bedside table, the parents of a critically ill newborn who ask permission for the congregation to say a prayer on behalf of their child, as well as the parents of another non-viable newborn who ask permission for the priest to anoint him with holy water. These are situations that remind us that nurses should not only master the technique but also understand people as a whole being, and for this, they should understand the religious beliefs that guide their behaviour, such as not accepting blood donations, refusing to donate organs or not allowing the autopsy or cremation of a family member.

Keywords: Death; Religious Mosaic; Cultural Practices.

RESUMEN

La muerte es una realidad en la vida de todos los seres humanos y, aunque nadie quiera hablar de ella, forma parte del ciclo vital por el que todos pasaremos en algún momento. También es una realidad que, como profesionales de la salud, la enfermería juega un papel fundamental ya que forma parte de este doloroso escenario que no podemos ignorar a diario. Tras analizar los conceptos de muerte en el catolicismo, los testigos de Jehová, el judaísmo y el evangelismo, podemos decir que la muerte es, para estas religiones, la separación del cuerpo y el alma, que volverán a unirse en el momento de la resurrección; por ello, se honra el cuerpo y se reza por la purificación de las almas. El difunto y los familiares en duelo tienen fe en que, en el momento de la resurrección, estarán con Dios y se reencontrarán y compartirán una vida eterna. El conocimiento del concepto de la muerte en las diferentes religiones proporciona a la enfermería una herramienta para comprender, por ejemplo, al paciente de cuidados paliativos y a su familia, a una abuela que nos da una estampa de Jesús para que la coloquemos en la mesilla de noche de su nieta, a los padres de un recién nacido en estado crítico que piden permiso para que la congregación rece una oración en nombre de su hijo, así como a los padres de otro recién nacido no viable que piden permiso para que el sacerdote lo unja con agua bendita. Son situaciones que nos recuerdan que los enfermeros no sólo deben dominar la técnica, sino también entender a las personas como un ser integral, y para ello deben comprender las creencias religiosas que guían su comportamiento, como no aceptar donaciones de sangre, negarse a donar órganos o no permitir la autopsia o incineración de un familiar.

Palabras clave: Muerte; Mosaico Religioso; Prácticas Culturales.

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INTRODUCTION

Death is a reality in the lives of all human beings, and although nobody wants to talk about it, it is a part of the life cycle that we will all go through at some point. It is also a reality that, as health professionals, nursing plays a fundamental role since it is part of this painful scenario that we cannot ignore daily.[1]

On the other hand, it can also be said that death is an unknown experience. No one can tell us what it is like; what we can say is that the concept of death is related to the beliefs we have about it, and that, like any belief,[2] will affect how people will go through the process of life to death or how they will face the mourning.[3]

Likewise, it will not have the same meaning for an atheist as for someone who professes a religion, and in turn, it will not have the same meaning among religious people.[4] So, how do different religions conceptualize death?

In this essay, we first expose the concepts of death of Catholicism and Evangelicalism, since according to the Second National Survey on Religious Beliefs and Attitudes in Argentina[5] reveal that the same is the most predominant. Secondly, we expose the concept of death for the Jewish religion since, although they are a minority in our country, other data reveal that our country occupies the third place with the highest concentration of this community, specifically in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. Last but not least, the concept of death of Jehovah's Witnesses, who, although they are also a minority, their beliefs are the most controversial when it comes to receiving the necessary treatment or care.[6] For this reason, the purpose of this essay is to present the concept of death in different religions with the objective that nurses can have a holistic, multicultural view and, based on empathy, understand the decisions and actions of religious people in the face of death or bereavement, which will be helpful to provide individualized care that respects their religious conceptions because they are part of their being.[7]

DEVELOPMENT

Religions are doctrines made up of a set of principles, beliefs and practices on existential, moral and spiritual issues.[8] From a humanized perspective, as nurses, we must contemplate religion as an integral part of the culture of the human being, especially when he/she is about to go through the painful process of death because here, the spirituality of both the patient and the nurse becomes fundamental for the provision of care.[9]

For Catholicism, death is the end of earthly life, the separation of body and soul; Ecclesiastes 12:7 "and the dust returns to the earth as it was before, and the spirit returns to God who gave it".[10] It maintains that the soul is immortal and that after death, it goes through a particular judgment and then a final judgment in which, depending on the way the person acted in life, it will be sent to heaven, hell or purgatory, where will be purified in order to enter into communion with God, For this reason, one of the practices that are performed is prayer, to help the deceased to get forgiveness for their sins, likewise the soul is waiting for the resurrection that is, the soul is reunited with the body in an immortal state, no longer being subject to disease or death.[11] Thessalonians 4: 14 "Do we not believe that Jesus died and rose again? So shall God also raise with Jesus those who have died in union with him". Another practice is the anointing of the sick, a sacrament of accompaniment in the face of pain, sickness and death.[12]

On the other hand, for evangelists, also known as Protestants, the resurrection is also part of their creed.[1,13] Therefore, life does not end at death. They quote the apostle Paul in Philippians 1:21, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain". Just as Catholics say goodbye to the body by accompanying their relatives in acts or funeral cults, the soul does not need intercessions after death because they do not believe in purgatory but in life and eternal damnation.[14] It is also for this last reason that it is widespread in their practices in front of the sick of imminent deaths to take them to perform the prayer of faith, to be convinced about their eternity that somehow this would bring them some peace of mind for the earthly life they are leaving. In addition, they perform the anointing with oil and prayer for the sick person.[15]

Another religion that also believes in the resurrection is Judaism, and just as for Catholicism, death is the separation of the body and the soul; for this reason, as soon as the person dies, a ritual begins to help them pass from the earthly to the spiritual world, their body is covered because to exhibit it is dishonourable, the deceased is never left alone and the people who accompany him, called "guardians" should not drink water or eat food because it is considered a mockery, also mirrors and ornaments are covered because they represent "luxury" or "vanity" and flowers are not placed because they symbolize "life".[15,16] If the person receiving the news is a close relative of the deceased, part of the clothing over the heart area is torn off.[17]

Before the burial, the body must be washed, representing purification. A white linen tunic is placed, and the body is placed inside the coffin without any jewellery because it will be judged by its actions and not by its possessions; neither should it lack any organ nor will it be cremated.[18]

He undergoes three periods of mourning: the Shiva period lasts for 7 days, the family only leaves the house on Saturdays to go to the synagogue, and the Jewish community contains them in the house; later, for 30 days, the family returns to their daily activities, but they cannot cut their hair or wear make-up.[19] Finally, there is the period of Avelut, which is followed by the children of the deceased, who, for 12 months counting from the first day of the burial, must not participate in celebrations and have to recite the prayer of the Kaddish every day which says: "in the world that will be renewed and where he will bring the dead back to life and rise to eternal life and rebuild the city of Jerusalem and complete his temple here".[20]

Finally, Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe that the soul goes to heaven, hell or purgatory (Ecclesiastes 9:5): "For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing at all and receive no more reward, for all memory of them has fallen into oblivion" therefore, there is no afterlife but there is resurrection, Dan for sure there will be a destruction of the world through an Armageddon or God's fight against the wicked and satan.[21] Then, only the dead chosen by God will be resurrected; all those who are alive at that time and do not belong to Jehovah's Witnesses will not be saved. Therefore, they will die. Then, the earth will become a paradise (Psalms 37, 38). "Before this earth can be a paradise, the wicked people must disappear".[16,22]

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CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the concepts of death in Catholicism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Judaism and Evangelism, we can say that death is, for these religions, the separation of body and soul, which will be united again at the moment of resurrection; for this reason, the body is honoured and prayed for the purification of the souls.[23]

The deceased and the grieving family members have faith that at the moment of resurrection, they will be with God and meet again and share an eternal life.[24]

Knowledge of the concept of death in different religions provides nursing with a tool to understand, for example, the palliative care patient and his family, a grandmother who gives us a holy card of Jesus to place on her granddaughter's bedside table, the parents of a critically ill newborn who ask permission for the congregation to say a prayer on behalf of their child, as well as the parents of another non-viable newborn who ask permission for the priest to anoint him with holy water.[25]

These are situations that remind us that nurses should not only master the technique but also understand people as a whole being, and for this, they should understand the religious beliefs that guide their behaviour, such as not accepting blood donations, refusing to donate organs or not allowing the autopsy or cremation of a family member.

It should also be reiterated that knowledge of the concept of death in different religions allows the nurse to be a culturally competent professional who not only focuses on the biological dimension but also takes into account the cultural and spiritual dimensions of the person.

Through the following activities: active listening, facilitating religious practice, facilitating mourning, we can provide support and comfort, even if these beliefs are opposed to ours because at the end of the day, we are all beings with fear of death and no one are prepared to die, and that is why we need an anchor and that anchor is the faith that if we are not with our loved ones, we will be in a better place until we are reunited.

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