Inverse Cremation and Organ Donation Rates. Taking another Look at Bodily Disposal and Religion

Abstract:

Cremation and organ donation can both be seen as abrupt, mutilating and rapidly destroying forms of post mortem body disposal practices, the acceptance of which has been claimed by Tony Walter (1996) to have the same religious implications. Therefore, the pattern that holds for cremation rates, in relation to religion, should be expected to be identical for organ donation rates. But as this paper shows, Protestant countries in West Europe are having the highest cremation rates but the lowest organ donation rates, while Roman Catholic countries are having the lowest cremation rates but the highest organ donation rates. Due to these surprisingly inverse rates the aim of this paper is to take a new critical look at the relation between religious culture and bodily disposal in Protestant and Catholic context. This is especially relevant in relation to organ donation, because the varying rates are normally explained as a result of different legislative systems, despite the fact that the data seems to be highly indicative of the influence of the religious cultural background as this paper will point out.

Keywords: *death, cremation, organ donation, religion, protestant, catholic, presumed consent.*