



Pastoral Letter

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Human beings need humanity not Euthanasia

In the midst of our Covid 19 woes, we are looking for anything that breathes hope and new life into our fearful world.

Yet, in the midst of this long winter, comes an unwanted visitor that can only fuel hopelessness: possible legislation on euthanasia. This is a real possibility in both the ACT and NSW.

Proponents usually use saccharine titles and ideologies to blunt the ethical dagger of euthanasia, such as *Voluntary Assisted Dying*. However, make no mistake about it. Euthanasia is government-sanctioned suicide. It is medical homicide.

CONFUSION REGARDING SUFFERING, DYING AND DEATH

Euthanasia legislation may simply be the issue that draws focus in Australia at present. Perhaps the real issue is our communal discomfort in discussing issues pertaining to suffering, dying and death. There is so much confusion here.

For example, confusion and contradictions exist when we are appalled at the high suicide rate in our community, yet euthanasia legislation encourages vulnerable people to contemplate suicide under certain conditions.

Contradictions also exist when we are increasingly ready to acknowledge publically Aboriginal country and culture, yet our First Australians are scandalously still one of the most vulnerable groups in our communities. Legislating euthanasia will make them even more vulnerable.

Some have witnessed or heard of friends and family members dying badly. This is always a failure of

our duty to care. The media are keen to display such heart-felt cases.

Alarming and without rigorous scrutiny, however, increasing numbers look to euthanasia as a way to circumvent this tragedy.

DANGERS OF EUTHANASIA

Upon deeper reflection, we must admit that flirting with the possibility of euthanasia is a bridge too far to cross. It opens up horrendous possibilities that are not worthy of our common humanity. Let us consider the following:

... It imperils the **foundation of law** where intentional killing is always prohibited.

... It imposes upon **the medical profession** a law that is totally contrary to its ethos. Namely, under certain circumstances, they can intentionally kill. This is directed to the most medically vulnerable in our society.

Palliative care is the real medical solution to the terminally ill. Regrettably, it is never given sufficient serious discussion or adequate funding in our society to illustrate that it is a dignified medical response to the terminally ill.

... **The political world** is encouraged to pander to slogans such as the "right to die." They are poisoned in their reasoning when they allow the popular and unreflected "new morality" of "It is my choice" to reign triumphantly. There is a hush about the responsibilities and duties attached to human rights that act as a purifier and refiner of mob ideologies.

Regarding rational argumentation, the developed world is entranced with a faulty understanding of the human person that sees the usefulness of a person as their defining feature. When I am persuaded to feel useless in my family or society, then the option of intentionally ending it seems “the way to go.”

Yet, perversely, no longer then do I feel that I have a “right to die.” I feel I have a “duty to die”. I end my life in hopelessness, even if loving family and friends are nearby.

Reigning triumphant, ultimately, are human rights and responsibilities based on the dignity of the human person.

For example, recently I heard of a daughter washing her father, heavily affected with dementia. The father no longer recognised his daughter. He looked at her for a moment and said: “I can see you have much love in your eyes.” This wonderful daughter understood that her father had a dignity beyond compare. She was offering him loving care and tenderness. This is real human dignity showcased.

ACT AND NSW LEGISLATION ON EUTHANASIA

At present, NSW are considering introducing euthanasia legislation.

The ACT Legislative Assembly cannot legislate on euthanasia. There were recently some lonely voices even suggesting absurdly that somehow Canberrans are having their human rights denied by not allowing euthanasia. Confusion surrounds the melding together of Territory rights and euthanasia legislation.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Palliative care is dying well. It offers appropriate care. It is based on real compassion. It respects human dignity, and our humble response to our Creator God, the giver of all life. It concerns not simply the sick person but includes their family. It offers expert care not only for the physical but also the emotional, psychological and spiritual dimensions.

Recently, I had the great joy of blessing the extension of the much-loved Clare Holland House. It is under the management of the Catholic Little Company of Mary Healthcare (Calvary Hospital). It is a palliative care hospice of the highest medical standard. Here those terminally ill receive excellent palliative care. More so, they are offered compassionate reassurance that their family, friends and expert medical staff

are “walking together” with them in hope. After all, compassion literally means, “to suffer with.”

Such care is a kind of Emmaus moment in their vulnerable lives. I have witnessed this personally so often over the years of living out the priesthood.

CATHOLIC TEACHING ON EUTHANASIA

Human life, made in the image and likeness of God, has a dignity beyond compare. Life is a precious gift from God in both its origin and end. The Risen Jesus came that we “may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). We are to treasure life and never intend to harm ourselves or others.

Following from this foundation, the Catholic teaching on euthanasia is wise and clear. It needs repeating in our culture so confused on this major moral issue of death and dying.

On the one hand, we must never directly intend to cause death, either as an act or as an omission. Hence, our total opposition to all forms of euthanasia. Our Catholic hospitals, nursing homes and hospices will not participate in any way to co-operate in such activities.

Ordinary care of the dying must always be offered.

On the other hand, “discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome can be legitimate; it is the refusal of “over-zealous” treatment.” (CCC 2278)

A fuller description of the Catholic teaching on euthanasia can be accessed via the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2276-2279, 2324.

COMMUNITY ACTION

May I encourage all to become active in monitoring the progress of this national debate. It has now become a regional debate in NSW and ACT. Please become informed on all matters pertaining to it, and be ready to contact your local elected representatives expressing your opinions on euthanasia.

Let us pray earnestly to our living God for wisdom and hope in a culture so confused on death and end of life issues.

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