

The Sanctity of Life and Euthanasia.

Opposing views on Euthanasia.

The topic of euthanasia is once again in the spotlight with strong views on both sides of the argument. There is no doubt that in the process of dying some go through intense suffering and indignity and we all hope that when the time comes for us to leave this world that our death will be bearable and, hopefully, pain-free. The issue, however, in this article is to determine whether legally assisted dying should become law or whether the present legislation should remain.

According to those who promote euthanasia, human beings should be free to make decisions about their own lives, which includes the time and manner of their death, especially if they are facing a terminal illness from which there is no chance of recovery. Euthanasia lets someone have agency over fate by leaving this world on their own terms. Euthanasia also enables a person to die with dignity, granting the opportunity for a peaceful, merciful death for a terminally ill, mentally competent adult. Family and friends are spared the traumatic grief of seeing their loved one suffer a long-drawn-out death. For the patient, it alleviates unnecessary suffering, frees them from what may be painful treatment, and allows them to die with dignity.

In opposition to these views, those against euthanasia would argue that euthanasia weakens society's respect for the sanctity of life. Voluntary euthanasia is the start of the slippery slope that leads to involuntary euthanasia and the killing of people who are thought to be undesirable in society. All human beings are to be valued, irrespective of age, sex, race, religion, social status, or their potential for achievement, and euthanasia leaves open various dangerous loopholes for exploitation, leading to the disposability of human existence.

It is also, they would argue, against the Hippocratic oath. To ask doctors, nurses, or any other health professional to carry out euthanasia or assist in suicide would be a violation of fundamental medical ethics, it also damages trust between patient and doctor.

The charitable organisation 'Dignity in Dying' is currently organising a petition (again) promoting the right to be assisted in dying and the hundreds of comments on the website verify the strong feelings for legalised euthanasia, mainly from those who have experienced the sad event of

watching their loved ones suffer the prolonged suffering and indignity of inevitable death.

There are, surprisingly, different opinions on euthanasia in religious circles. Recently, William Carey former Archbishop of Canterbury came out in favour of euthanasia.

A personal perspective.

Speaking on a personal level I would be totally against euthanasia. For the rest of this article, I would like to give the reasons why from my wife's own experience and also from a biblical perspective.

My wife has suffered from multiple sclerosis for the past twenty-five years and over that time her condition has grown gradually worse. Presently, she has to rely on me for ninety-five percent of her needs. Many nights she cries herself to sleep. Her cognitive problems, lack of mobility, and many other symptoms of the disease cause her to scream with frustrations at times, and despite all the challenges to both her and me we are determined to take each day at a time and trust in God to help us through each day. MS is not life-threatening, in most cases, it just destroys the nervous system that controls functions of the body. In my wife's case, bladder function, bowel movement, mobility, and lesions on the brain leading to cognitive problems. My wife's mother lived to the ripe old age of 97. My wife is 77 so if she lives the same length of time as her mother, she has another twenty years of having to rely on other people to exist. I am confident that she will continue to face the challenges of each day with God's help, my care, and the help of devoted carers when I am gone.

What worries me is the present trend in our society on how life is becoming more and more undervalued. This is seen in legalised abortion, the liberalisation of the justice system, and the high death rate in violent crime, especially among young people. Society is also seeing a breakdown in health facilities and social services due to the economic pressures. How long will it be before old and sick vulnerable people will be looked upon as a drain on national resources, especially those who require special care and financial needs? Will my wife in years to come become too much of a burden on society?

It is worth repeating here one of the reasons for opposing euthanasia mentioned above. 'In opposition to these views, those against euthanasia would argue that euthanasia weakens society's respect for the sanctity of

life. Voluntary euthanasia is the start of the slippery slope that leads to involuntary euthanasia and the killing of people who are thought to be undesirable in society.'

Euthanasia in the Light of the Holy Scriptures.

Despite the arguments from secularists and misguided religious leaders the Bible never approves of the self-termination of our lives in whatever circumstances. On the contrary, life is a gift from God to be used for his glory including the end-of-life suffering and the way we die. For those who have not yet found the purpose of why we are here and exist on this planet God often allows suffering, trial, and tribulation so that we would seek him. Dying without Christ as our eternal refuge and Saviour will bring a far worse outcome than any suffering in this life.

The apostle Peter in his second epistle, chapter 3 and verse 9 reminds us of God's patience with all humanity when he says that *'the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.'*

The lethal injection to the unrepentant and unsaved patient condemns him or her to everlasting damnation with absolutely no chance of reversing that decision. The apostle Paul writing to Timothy in his first epistle, chapter 2 and verse 4 says that God *'desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.'*

The gospel (good news) is summed up in one verse in the gospel of John when it says: *'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.'* To perish in this case indicates divine condemnation, complete and everlasting so that one is banished from the God of love and will dwell forever in the presence of a God of wrath. It is the antonym of having everlasting life. Those who request to die without making provision to meet their Maker do so at their peril.

According to the letter to the Hebrews *'It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgement.'* Hebrews 9:27. Death is an appointment with God to face his justice and not ours. This includes those who administer the lethal injection. They too will have to give an account of their actions before the Judge of all the earth.

It is the height of folly to spurn the love that God offers in Christ. Even on our death bed, the Saviour may be called upon, not only to save us for all eternity

but also to be with us as we face the difficult process of dying. Dying with Christ as your Saviour is the only true dignified way to die. The good news of the gospel brings real and certain hope of that cancer-ridden body being renewed and raised from the dead at the glorious resurrection when Christ returns. Jesus Christ came, *'To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet in the way of peace.'* Luke 1:79.

Life is very precious and even to the terminally ill God desires that the suffering patient will use those dying moments to cry out to a merciful, compassionate, and all-forgiving God which is the only real answer to the end of all pain and suffering.

'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' Revelation 21:4.

Senile dementia.

I read a very sad article from a lady in a local paper describing a relative suffering from Alzheimer's. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia. She described how her near relative was totally bedridden spending day in, and day out just staring at the television. She also went on to say she would do anything to help her pass into the next life and end her suffering.

In most cases of dementia, the prospect of crying to God in repentance and faith is beyond their capabilities and the door is closed to death bed repentance. The prospect of developing dementia, by the way, for the over 80's is one in six. It is worth adding that Christians are not exempt from suffering from dementia. The difference between Christians suffering from dementia, and I have seen a few in my lifetime, is that their profession of faith and consequential following of Christ before the onset of dementia will never be abrogated. The teachings of the apostle Paul are very clear on this point, *'For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities and powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8: 38, 39.*

So, for those whose minds can no longer respond to the challenge of the gospel, the opportunity to obtain saving faith has passed them by. That is why the Holy Scriptures have given such a vivid and clear warning in the book of Ecclesiastes and chapter 12 to *'Remember now your Creator in the*

days of your youth, before the difficult days come.' Solomon goes on to list the afflictions of old age which would surely include dementia. All the more reason to seek Christ while there is still the opportunity to do so.

'And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.'
Jeremiah 29:13.

'Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.' Isaiah 55:7.

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