

Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

Those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible. Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable. CCC 2276-2279.

“None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s” (Rom. 14:7-8). Dying to the Lord means experiencing one’s death as the supreme act of obedience to the Father (cf. Phil. 2:8), being ready to meet death at the ‘hour’ willed and chosen by him (cf. Jn. 13:1), which can only mean when one’s earthly pilgrimage is completed. Living to the Lord also means recognizing that suffering, while still an evil and trial in itself, can always become a source of good. It becomes such if it is experienced for love and with love through sharing, by God’s gracious gift and one’s own personal and free choice, in the suffering of Christ Crucified.” *Evangelium Vitae* n. 67.



These are a direct attack on the dignity of the human person, attacking the vulnerable elderly and sick. Pope John Paul II points out in *Gospel of Life* that the ideal of the Messianic age is presented as a time when “no more shall there be . . . an old man who does not fill out his days.” Is. 65:20; *Evangelium Vitae* n. 46. To this end, the “the pastoral activity of the Church must help everyone to discover and to make good use of the role of the elderly within the civil and ecclesial community, in particular within the family.” *Familiaris Consortio* n. 27.

They put the will of man before that of God, the absolute Master of whether we live or die and He in whom “we live and move and have our being.” Acts 17:28; *Evangelium Vitae* n. 47. In addition, these acts disregard the value of suffering, which is part of the human condition. *Declaration on Euthanasia* III. “Suffering, especially suffering during the last moments of life, has a special place in God’s saving plan; it is in fact a sharing in Christ’s passion.” *Declaration on Euthanasia* III. To end one’s life or the life of another is “false mercy,” a “disturbing ‘perversion’ of mercy.” *Evangelium Vitae* n. 66.

Finally, these acts deny families opportunities for grace. “Charity finds the most appropriate means for enabling the elderly, especially those who can no longer look after themselves, and the terminally ill to enjoy genuinely humane assistance and to receive an adequate response to their needs, particularly their anxiety and their loneliness,” and families are indispensable to this end. *Evangelium Vitae* n. 88.

“I confirm that euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God, since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written word of God, is transmitted by the Church’s Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.” *Evangelium Vitae* n. 65.

Church Documents:

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part III, Section 2, Chapter 2, Article 5, n.2276-79. Available at <http://old.usccb.org/catechism/text/pt3sect2chpt2art5.shtml>.

To Live Each Day with Dignity: A Statement on Physician-Assisted Suicide, US Conference of Catholic Bishops (2011). Available at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/assisted-suicide/to-live-each-day/upload/bishops-statement-physician-assisted-suicide-to-live-each-day.pdf>.

Commentary on Provision of Nutrition and Hydration to Patients in a “Vegetative State,” Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (2007). Available at <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/tdocs/anhcommentary.shtml>.

Responses to Certain Questions of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Concerning Artificial Nutrition and Hydration, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (August 2007). Available http://www.academiavita.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=377&catid=69&Itemid=219&lang=en.

Address of John Paul II to the Participants in the International Congress on “Life-Sustaining Treatments and Vegetative State: Scientific Advances and Ethical Dilemmas” (March 2004). Available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2004/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20040320_congress-fiamc_en.html.

Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, Fourth Edition, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2001). Part V: Issues in Care for the Dying. Available at <http://old.usccb.org/bishops/directives.shtml>

Respect for the Dignity of the Dying, Pontifical Academy for Life (2000). Available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_academies/acdlife/documents/rc_pa_acdlife_doc_20001209_eutanasia_en.html.

Evangelium Vitae, Gospel of Life, Pope John Paul II (1995). Available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html.

Declaration on Euthanasia, Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1980). Available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19800505_euthanasia_en.html.

Salvific Dolores, On Salvific Suffering, Apostolic Letter from Pope John Paul II on the Christian meaning of human suffering (1984). Available at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris_en.html.

Catholic Websites:

Richard M. Doerflinger and Carlos F. Gomez, M.D., Ph.D, “Killing the Pain, Not the Patient: Palliative Care v. Assisted Suicide.” Available at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/assisted-suicide/killing-the-pain.cfm>.

F. Michael Gloth, III, MD, “Physician-Assisted Suicide: The Wrong Approach to End of Life Care.” Available at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/assisted-suicide/to-live-each-day/physician-assisted-suicide-wrong-approach.cfm>.

Richard Doerflinger, "The Quality of Life: Who's to Judge?" Available at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/assisted-suicide/to-live-each-day/the-quality-of-life-who-is-to-judge.cfm>.

"Euthanasia & Physician Assisted Suicide: All Sides of the Issue," ReligiousTolerance.org. Available at <http://www.religioustolerance.org/euthanas.htm>.

"Euthanasia & Assisted Suicide," LifeSiteNews.com (2005). Available at <http://www.lifesitenews.com/ldn/2005/oct/05102603.html>.

"How to Vote Catholic: "Euthanasia & Assisted Suicide," CatholiCity.com. Available at <http://www.catholicity.com/vote/euthanasia.html>.

Other Website:

Patients Rights Council, <http://www.internationaltaskforce.org/>

Fact Sheets:

"Suicide and Assisted Suicide: The Role of Depression," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Pro-Life Secretariat (May 2011). Available at <http://old.usccb.org/prolife/issues/euthanas/roleofdepression.pdf>.

"Q & A on Nutrition and Hydration for Patients in a 'Vegetative State'", United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (September, 2007). Available at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/end-of-life/euthanasia/upload/q-a-nutrition-and-hydration-patients-vegetative-state.pdf>.

"The U.S. Supreme Court's 1997 Decisions on Assisted Suicide," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Pro-Life Secretariat (June 1998). Available at <http://old.usccb.org/prolife/issues/euthanas/supremecourtfacts.pdf>.

"Assisted Suicide: What is at Stake?," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Pro-Life Secretariat (May 1998). Available at <http://old.usccb.org/prolife/issues/euthanas/supremecourtfacts.pdf>.

Important Dates:

- 1994 Oregon passes *Death with Dignity Act*, legalizing assisted suicide. The law went into effect in 1997. Since then 401 deaths have been reported under the statute.
- 1997 In *Vacco v. Quill*, 521 U.S. 793 (1997), and *Washington v. Glucksberg*, 521 U.S. 702 (1997) the Supreme Court held that New York's and Washington's bans on assisted suicide are constitutional.
- 2008 Washingtonians vote to legalize assisted suicide under Initiative 1000.
- 2009 On 12/31/09, the Montana Supreme Court ruled that rights granted under the state's living will law, "The Rights of the Terminally Ill Act," form the basis for permitting physician "aid-in-

dying” (doctor-prescribed suicide). The Court said that doctors can use the patient’s consent as a defense if charged with assisted suicide for writing a prescription for death.

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