

**Comments on the text "Euthanasia from a Christian perspective," given by Bro. René Stockman, General Superior of the Brothers of Charity**

In further response to the text that was prepared to support the vision statement of the "the Brothers of Charity Group in Belgium " support through a Christian-inspired dimension, I wish to make the following comments. I follow the paragraphs as indicated in the text dd. 12.06.2017.

**A statement**

Custodianship will be granted to those who receive life, not to third parties. And the person who received the custodianship of his life must deal with it as best as possible, such as the Parable of the Talents reminds us. This certainly does not mean that we can return a gift that we receive and destroy it in the case of euthanasia, negate. The return or destroying of a gift is an act of ingratitude, also in human relations. If we believe that our life is a gift from God, then we can assume that God does not impose an impossible custodianship on us, that He does not give us a poisoned gift. It is therefore not up to man to unilaterally decide that his custodianship ceases.

Faced with the confrontational story presented here, we can post a lot of other stories from people who are very grateful that they did not choose euthanasia at all, even in severe psychological suffering.

**Recognition of the exceptional**

When and who will decide that something can be exceptional and can be labeled as a persistent and desperate psychic suffering. Continued suffering and hopelessness are often inherent to psychological suffering, and it asks the psychiatric care worker to deal with it. What criteria will be used to determine something as an "exception" and to concede that a medical procedure is pointless? One of the major problems with euthanasia legislation remains the arbitrary nature of the criteria used. We see that these are moving more and more. The text before us rightly emphasizes that it is no longer a matter of terminal suffering, but only hopeless suffering. This is already a major shift compared to the criteria used in the creation of legislation. Now minors can also ask for euthanasia, who is the next group?

The argument is: someone who is in a position to ask for euthanasia is capable to do it and thus possesses sufficient life wisdom. In psychiatric patients, we can ask ourselves serious questions about the ability thereabouts to make a reasonable decision.

### **Proportional view of ethics and the deontological view and ideologization**

The central point and the foundation within Christian ethics is that life is absolute, which cannot be touched. Life is a gift from God and entails an assignment. And because life is absolute, it is a state worthy of protection. Life is more than the quality that it has or does not have. Therefore, it might not be always clear when we talk about the absoluteness of the worth protect of life: it is not about the absoluteness of the worth protect, but of the absoluteness of the value of life, and from that the right to worth protection arises. The value of life as such can never be weighed into the intentions and motives one has, neither the circumstances nor the situation nor the quality that it has or does not have. Prior to the worthiness of protection, the autonomy and connectedness, is there always the value of life as such. The moral intention that is shifted forward here has its value, but it is not the total "moral theology". When it comes to life as such, the moral intention is exceeded because "life" is not an act that can be appraised to intention, consequence or situation.

When, then, from the absolute value of life is pleaded for the worth protection and autonomy, it is clear that this is a deontological view of the Catholic Church's magisterium and which elevates itself to an ideology. Worse still, consider it as an idea with an armor that protects against any argument, reason and debate. According to the text, there is no intrinsic evil anymore, but everything can be condoned by the intention and the situation.

The text refers to Levinas. He has indeed stated that only God is God, and that man cannot play for God. But man is the only one created in the image and likeness of God. So man is a reflection of God, in which God's image is present. That's why he speaks with timidity about the face of the other, in which he always recognizes the facial features of God. He expressly states that the other's face sets us up for an ethical imperative and calls us not to kill him but to respect him, more still, to love him unconditionally, as we should love God unconditionally. Levinas draws the card of humanity to respect and love the other as a human being, and certainly not to kill.

When Jesus was indeed contrary to the absolutizing of the Jewish rules, was it always to promote man and not sacrificing man to the rules. I have made a lot of effort to involve the euthanasia debate, if I see in the vision statement how many rules are designed to legitimize the decision on euthanasia morally.

### **Bible commandment: "You shall not kill"**

It's not because the Decalogue does not literally forbid something that it is allowed. There may therefore be exegetical reasons for the translation of "kill" to "murder", but this is not relevant at all. There may be exegetical reasons for the translation of "kill" to "murder", but this is not relevant at all. It is not because the commandment forbids murder that death suddenly becomes admitted and becomes Christian. The vision statement will not recognize euthanasia as an unacceptable murder, but as a Christian motivated killing. What motive plays here to legitimize this killing? The self-determination of the patient, or a trend that one does not dare to enter? For any legitimization of the dead, there are clear legal criteria. Usually it's about the defense of the nation, the people, the society, the community, just think about war, terrorism, serious crime, etc. And here the proportionality is always respected. Also in legitimate self-defense applies the proportionality principle, without this principle, killing is not legal. When we examined the act of euthanasia, a well-defined procedure was also developed whereby killing the patient is legitimate. And what is the ultimate motive other than the absolute self-determination and absolute freedom of the patient who were raised above the absolute value of life as such. With all honesty, I wonder what is the motive of the organization Brothers of Charity to legitimize euthanasia as an act of killing a fellow human being when we clearly states that it is not about absolutisation of the self-determination nor about following a current trend.

### **Choice of conscience**

We never stated that we let the patient down; but that we take the question very seriously and indeed we will do everything to be close to the patient and to look for new perspectives with him. Isn't that what good psychiatric care is?

However, if one talks about a two-way trail, the possibility of euthanasia is already included. The question remains which alternatives are offered. This is not reflected in the vision text.

It is certainly significant for our organization to incorporate all energy into the line of our tradition as congregation and thus, in line with our charisma, to become the specialists for patients with hopelessness and prolonged suffering

and not to say that all treatment options for the patient are exhausted. That's the worst thing that a patient will need to hear: "I can no longer be treated, my life is hopeless." From a Christian perspective on the resurrection neither can nor will we talk about hopeless life, but about a difficult and even very difficult life. But the perspective of resurrection always gives a ray of light and hope to the most seriously suffering. And, as a Christian-inspired organization, we must have all the energy to shine this light.

At the same time it is unheard that the vision of the absolute value of life would stand in the way of a conversation and individual coaching, thereby eliminating the opportunity for improvement whereby which could eliminate the euthanasia question. That's exactly ideology that protects like a suit of armor! Thus, rejection of euthanasia would stand in the way for the improvement of the patient? That's just nonsense.

The following paragraph seems to say that everything is allowed because no one can judge. But that's not easy. Yes, God is always present with his forgiveness, but provided there is repentance. And Augustine says that everything is allowed if there is love. The question is whether if euthanasia fits into that love.

That impotence is often present in treating a psychiatric patient no one will deny. But facing powerlessness does not mean abolishing powerlessness by removing its reason. And that happens with euthanasia.

Finally, referring will not just happen when ultimately euthanasia will be applied, but also carefully, as one wants to be careful in everything. It remains a significance to formulate that no euthanasia is performed within the walls of the organization: a sign value for the patient in the first instance, for the family, for caregivers and for the wider environment.

I also want to end with a story like you started with a story. It is the story of patients who, via the nurses, asked if they were still safe with the Brothers of Charity when the caregivers decided that they exhausted all treatment options. That is a question that should prevent us sleeping at night!

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