

WHAT DOES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACH ABOUT EUTHANASIA?

Human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, therefore have intrinsic worth or value. Almost all Christian pro-life arguments spring from the fountain of personal dignity. Euthanasia would make moral sense only if it were possible to say, morally, that a person's dignity had vanished. To commit euthanasia is to act with the specific intention that somebody should be nobody.

Euthanasia fails to see the intrinsic worth or dignity of the person. The judgement that what has worth, intrinsically, somehow does not have worth, is both logically and morally wrong.

Today a key in fighting euthanasia and assisted suicide is better care for the sick and dying. The dignity of the sick cannot be erased by illness and suffering. Such procedures are not private decisions; they affect the whole society. Death with dignity, in the end, is the reality that human beings are also ***spiritual beings***.

Excerpts from the Catechism of the Catholic Church on Euthanasia:

2319 Every human life, from the moment of conception until death, is sacred because the human person has been willed for its own sake in the image and likeness of the living and holy God.

2320 The murder of a human being is gravely contrary to the dignity of the person and the holiness of the Creator.

Euthanasia

2276 Those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible.

2277 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.

Thus an act or omission which, of itself or by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator. The error of judgement into which one can fall in good faith does not change the nature of this murderous act, which must always be forbidden and excluded.

2278 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. Here one does not will to cause death; one's inability to impede it is merely accepted. The decisions should be made by the patient if he is competent and able or, if not, by those legally entitled to act for the patient, whose reasonable will and legitimate interests must always be respected.

2279 Even if death is thought imminent, the ordinary care owed to a sick person cannot be legitimately interrupted. The use of painkillers to alleviate the sufferings of the dying, even at the risk of shortening their days, can be morally in conformity with human dignity if death is not willed as either an end or a means, but only foreseen and tolerated as inevitable. Palliative care is a special form of disinterested charity. As such it should be encouraged.