



National Symposium

A Call to Human Freedom and Justice in the Family and Society:
Ethical Concerns & Pastoral Approaches



Celebrating 20 years

Arrival: Friday, 21 October 2016, 4.00 pm

Departure: Sunday, 23 October 2011, 6.00 pm

Venue: St. Pius X College, Aarey Road, Goregaon East, Mumbai 400063

"Christian Understanding of Death"

A paper presented for the Panel Discussions on Concept of Death in various Religions and the Euthanasia Bill (Reflections on Sanctity of Life, the Gift of Pain/Suffering, Care, Compassion, Human Dignity) during the National Symposium organised by the Justice and Peace Commission from October 21st to 23rd 2016.

- **Dr. Pascoal Carvalho**

Euthanasia is derived from the Greek word "eu", meaning "good" and "thanatos" meaning "death," and signifies a "good" or "easy" death. Euthanasia allows one to aid and expedite the dying process for the purpose of relieving the patient's intolerable and incurable suffering. The motive is **supposed** to be merciful and intended to end suffering or emotional distress.

The Slippery Slope

Society has moved from protecting life - to allowing the vulnerable to seek the easy and painless way out – to active measures to end the lives of such human beings deemed to be a burden. We begin at the time of conception with abortions, IVF, genetic manipulations and end with those having incurable diseases or suffering great pain. **To stop this degenerative thinking we need to re-focus on the meaning of life and death.**

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church euthanasia is defined as "an act or omission which, of itself or by intention, causes the death of handicapped, sick, or dying persons—sometimes with an attempt to justify the act as a means of eliminating suffering."

Euthanasia is a form of murder and thus is prohibited by the Fifth Commandment which says "Thou shalt not kill". It is a grave offense against the dignity of the human person and also against God, the Author of human life. While motives and circumstances can mitigate one's culpability, they do not change the nature of this murderous act, which must be forbidden (Catechism, no. 2277).

Catholic meaning of suffering and Death

Death is a reality that none of us can escape. As death approaches, we suddenly begin to ponder on the meaning of life, of suffering and of what is to come next. A terminal illness gives us time for introspection and reflection and brings to the forefront questions regarding our faith that we did not dare address before. How we approach and accept this reality is of utmost importance to the individual, the family and to the community.

Pope St. John Paul II reiterated the Church's teaching:

"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, 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" (EV, no. 65).

Pope St. John Paul II's Apostolic Letter from 1984, *Salvifici Doloris* ("redemptive suffering") gives deep insight into suffering and our relationship with God.

For Catholics, suffering is a process of purification and Death can be the final moment of fulfilment.

The Apostle Paul says: "In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church". Pope St. John Paul II says "These words have as it were the value of a final discovery, which is accompanied by joy. For this reason Saint Paul writes: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake". The joy comes from the discovery of the meaning of the salvific meaning of suffering."

Suffering finds its true meaning in Jesus Christ. Christ, by his own suffering, gives it a redemptive aspect. Thus as man suffers he is called to share, like Christ, in the redemption of man.

Mary, the Mother of Christ, shared in the redemptive suffering beginning with prophecy of Simeon right up to the Crucifixion. Suffering requires courage and fortitude, placing hope in Christ and His victory over the world through His suffering, teaching us to unite ourselves to Christ.

The Cross of Christ throws salvific light, in a most penetrating way, on man's life and in particular on his suffering. For through faith the Cross reaches man together with the Resurrection: the mystery of the Passion is contained in the Paschal Mystery. The witnesses of Christ's Passion are at the same time witnesses of his Resurrection. Paul writes: "That I may know him (Christ) and the power of his Resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (*Salvifici Doloris*)

The possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" is offered to all men. He calls his disciples to "take up their cross and follow him", (Mt.16:24). Thus to share in the sufferings of Christ is, at the same time, to suffer for the Kingdom of God. Christ has led us into this Kingdom through his suffering. And also through suffering those surrounded by the mystery of Christ's Redemption become mature enough to enter this Kingdom.

Points to ponder

Suffering is now no longer an experience of uselessness and burden to others. Suffering provides an opportunity for grace and an opportunity for others to show love. For us, earthly life is not an end but created as a beginning for eternity.

God is the author of Life and the One who guides our destiny. The just man is depicted not as seeking deliverance from the burdens of old age, but as putting his trust in God's loving providence like Abraham, our father in faith. The Bible does not teach a mere fatalism or resignation, but elicits faith in God and trust in His mercy and promises.

Suffering is a process of purification. Struggle purifies you from all attachments. A person gets a time to purify and detach himself/herself from the material wants. You cannot interfere with a person's moment of illumination. There is suffering for sure, but acceptance brings about a calmness knowing that we are participating with Christ in the redemption of man and will be at the right hand of God for eternity. The time of suffering, is the moment of deciding for God.

God is the sole custodian for our life. We cannot, in any form or by law, try to subvert this intimate relationship between man and God, by deceiving man someone that life is meaningless and has an end on earth. How then would man be any different from an animal?

Before death there is only one life. Here we need to make a definite decision for or against God in this life. We feel abandonment, yet our faith and acceptance of the Will of God is the highest point of spirituality. Death is the highest point of purification and a definitive decision for God. Saints went through this. Even Christ on the cross cried out to God "Why have you forsaken me?".

Redemptive suffering is the Christian belief that human suffering, when accepted and offered up in union with the Passion of Jesus, can remit the just punishment for one's sins or for the sins of another, or for the other physical or spiritual needs of oneself or another.

Suffering is supernatural because God has bound it up with salvation, and human because it is endured by all men. Through human suffering, men find their identity in themselves and in Christ.

Magisterium of the Catholic Church on Euthanasia.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65), taught: "The varieties of crime are numerous: all offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, and wilful suicide . . . are criminal: they poison civilization, and they debase the perpetrators more than the victims and militate against the honour of the Creator (Gaudium et Spes, no. 27).

Reflections:

Jesus told His disciples not to fear for their lives; eternal life is infinitely more valuable than one's earthly life: Don't be afraid of those who want to kill you. They can only kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (NLT, Matthew 10:28-29) In his Letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul looked forward to the time he could leave this earthly life behind and be with Christ:

Pope St. John Paul II explains that following of Christ "is not only the imitation of his virtues, it is not only living like Christ in this world, as far as possible, according to his word; but it is a journey that has a goal. **And the goal is the right hand of the Father.** We must have the courage, the joy, the great hope that there is eternal life, that it is the true life and that from this true life comes the light that also enlightens this world."

Conclusions:

The position of the Catholic Church is not to keep the person alive at all costs...neither is it to terminate life just because there is pain and suffering.

Rather, it is ...

1. Acceptance of the reality of pain and suffering - NO TO EUTHANASIA.
2. Doing all in our power to heal the person suffering - YES TO PROPORTIONAL TREATMENT.
3. Accepting that when the time comes and death is near, we will as finite beings accept our limitations and surrender the person to God – ONE IS PERMITTED TO SAY NO TO AGGRESSIVE TREATMENT, WHEN DEATH IS IMMINENT
4. Accompanying the dying person with our love and with medication that will prevent excruciating suffering – YES TO PALLIATIVE CARE

No one has the right to come between this unique relationship of God and man.

END