

IS EUTHANASIA DESIRABLE? **Fr. Varghese Paul, S.J.**

Thanks to the report of Kerala's Law Reform Commission some people are now talking about euthanasia. Among other things the Law Reform Commission has recommended legalizing euthanasia (mercy killing) and decriminalizing suicide attempt.

The commission headed by former Supreme Court Judge V. R. Krishna Iyer says that "life is sacred, but intense pain with no relief insight is a torture which negatives the meaning of existence." The draft of the Bill permits "the terminally ill persons to put an end to their life under the supervision and advice of his close relatives and medical practitioners".

According to the daily "The Hindu" Kerala edition of the Left Democratic Front Government set up the 11 members commission to rectify flaws in the existing laws and repeal obsolete Acts. But instead of recommending reformation of obsolete laws which are at odd with present reality and culture, the commission has proposed new ethics and morality like those with more than two children are punishable. The commission has also recommended to repeal the law making attempted suicide a punishable offence.

Here we treat only the topic of euthanasia which permits legally to put an end to life of those who suffer greatly with terminal sickness and those who are disabled and useless for productive service in their family and society.

Another reason for treating euthanasia here is that there seems to be a move by the central law ministry to introduce the legislation for legalizing Euthanasia.

The supreme value of human life has been upheld at least from the time of ancient medical practitioner Hippocrates of the fifth century BC. But now the advocates of euthanasia are playing foolery with fire without realizing that a spark of fire is enough to enflame and engulf forest. Similarly playing with human life these merchants of death are destroying from the foundation the moral and ethical values of human life.

I believe that the advocates of mercy killing see with kindness those suffering great pain with incurable diseases and those disabled and elderly people even when they are without any use to their family and society. But they are not seeing people from a humane point of view. So devoid of any humaneness those advocates of mercy killing have no value for human life.

The promoters of euthanasia do not consider the deep yearning of the people to live as long a possible. No person in possession of all his/her senses wants to die. It is true that confronted with terminal illness and untold pain some people may ask for euthanasia as they may suffer deep depression along with their pain of their sickness. Such people when they get out of depression have expressed their deep desire to live their lives as long as possible for them to live.

Here let us take the case of a well-known Indian journalist R. K. Karanjias and his wife suffering from advanced pancreatic cancer. Karanjia has written about his experience with his wife's

terminal illness in an article entitled “A Fond Farewell”. I have read about it in an article by Dr. Luzito J. de Souza published in “The Examiner”, March 21, 2009.

Speaking about himself Karanjia says that as a young man he had been a founder member of the Society for the Rights to Die with Dignity together with Minoo Masani in the early 1950s and his wife was a brave lady who faced her suffering with courage and fortitude. She lived her life to the full. But “she prayed that her life be ended and pleaded with me to let her die with dignity” in her untold suffering with pancreatic cancer. Karanjia could have easily opted for euthanasia; but he did not. He says, “In these tragic circumstances, I was about to make a discovery that was perhaps the most wonderful of my life.”

Karanjia took his wife to Shanti Avedna Sadan in Bandra, Mumbai. He found that Shanti Avedna Sadan has the same objective as euthanasia, but it strives to achieve it in a non-violent way. Its motto is “where there is love, there is no pain” and its goal is “to add life of days and not days to life.”

In the evening of the first day in Shanti Avedna Sadan Karanjia’s wife told him, “For the first time I feel at peace; I shall die in peace here.” Dr. de Souza has concluded his article in The Examiner saying, “The care that she received at the institution inspired him to murmur to himself. ‘If there is God on earth, He is here, He is here, He is here.’ He must have been truly convinced to say it three times!”

Dr. de Souza himself with the experiences of treating thousands of patients with terminal cancer at Tata Memorial Hospital, Mumbai has testified his own change of heart from being a tacit support or of euthanasia to becoming a pro-lifer opposing the advocates of euthanasia. He writes, “I am convinced that euthanasia is most certainly not the answer to the problem” of suffering. According to Dr. de Souza the most powerful reason for him to be a pro-lifer is that he has found, “nobody really wants to die”. In such situation can we put an end to any life? “We are nobody to put an international end to life” says Dr. de Souza.

The advocates of euthanasia knowingly or unknowingly are devaluing human life. On the face of it they are helping to liberate terminally ill patients from the harrowing pain of their sickness. But their words and actions loudly proclaim that they don’t have much value for life. For them the value consists in economically productive life and the life free from any sufferings! With such a vision of life they may not hesitate to take the life of another human being.

A news-item which appeared in Times of India, Mumbai edition on February 25 May exemplify this vision of life. The Kolkata bylined news report says, “A Bengal government employee and his wife were held for allegedly killing his 82-year-old mother; reportedly to cut down on their expenditure. Madan Mohan Nag, 58, and his wife Maniprabha were arrested from their residence in Jamalpur village in Burdwan”.

The only remedy for sufferings from terminal sickness or for the lives which seems to be useless, unproductive or totally disabled is love, and only love, yes unconditional love. Where there is such love both the patients and the caregiver experience peace of mind and understanding even in the face of the unbearable pain or in total helplessness.

Pope Benedict XVI has said on Feb. 1, 2009 during the Angelus message that, “Love is the only thing that can ease the suffering of the terminally ill, and it is the only worthy response of those who value the life that is ending”. He also added “euthanasia is a false solution to the drama of suffering, a solution unworthy of the human person”. (contact the author: ciss@satyam.net.in)

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