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What Are Christian Perspectives on Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide?

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[Editor's Note: Although Catholics are also Christians, we have constructed a [separate question](#) about Catholic perspectives on euthanasia and physician assisted suicide.]

The Death with Dignity National Center (DDNC) included the following Christian perspectives in a www.deathwithdignity.org article titled "Religion and Spirituality" (accessed May 27, 2010):

"A number of religious organizations have issued statements on suicide and physician assisted suicide. Conservative faith groups tend to be most vocal in their opposition to suicide. Liberal denominations tend to be more in favor of individual choice:

Anglican: Rowan Williams, the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, has stated that although 'There is a very strong compassionate case' for physician-assisted dying, the Anglican church remains opposed to the practice.

Baptist: Assisted dying violates the sanctity of human life...

Christian Science: The Church's experience with healing indicates assisted suicide is not a genuine expression of faith and is a denial of God's presence and power...

Eastern Orthodox: Physician assisted dying is morally and theologically impermissible because of God's sovereignty and the sanctity of human life.

Episcopal: Some Episcopalians believe it is morally wrong to take human life with medication to relieve suffering caused by incurable illness. Others approve of assisted dying in rare cases.

Evangelicals: While the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) opposes physician-assisted dying, the NEA 'believes that in cases where patients are terminally ill, death appears imminent and treatment offers no medical hope for a cure, it is morally appropriate to request the withdrawal of life-support systems, allowing natural death to occur. In such cases, every effort should be made to keep the patient free of pain and suffering, with emotional and spiritual support being provided until the patient dies'...

Jehovah's Witness: Physician assisted dying violates the sanctity of life and Christian conscience...

Methodist: Methodists generally accept the individual's freedom of conscience to determine the means and timing of death. Some regional conferences have endorsed the legalization of physician assisted dying...

Mormon: Euthanasia is condemned. Anyone who takes part in euthanasia, including 'assisted suicide', is regarded as having violated the commandments of God. However the Church recognizes that when a person is in the final stages of terminal illness there may be difficult decisions to be taken. The Church states that 'When dying becomes inevitable, death should be looked upon as a blessing and a purposeful part of an eternal existence. Members should not feel obligated to extend mortal life by means that are unreasonable'...

Presbyterian Church in America: The 1988 PCA position paper on 'heroic measures' states that 'Euthanasia, or 'mercy-killing' of a patient by a physician or by anyone else, including the patient himself (suicide) is murder. To withhold or to withdraw medical treatment, as is being discussed here, does not constitute euthanasia and should not be placed into the same category with it.' However, the PCA is devoting further study and discussion to the specific issue of physician-assisted dying and likely issue an official position paper some time in 2006...

Unitarian Universalist: The right to self-determination includes the choice of hastened dying. Unitarians support immunity from prosecution for those who, with proper safeguards, honor the requests of terminally ill patients. ["Unitarian Universalist Association: The Right to Die With Dignity, 1988 General Resolution"]

United Church of Christ: The Church affirms individual freedom and responsibility. It has not asserted that hastened dying is the Christian position, but the right to choose is a legitimate Christian decision.

Mainline and Liberal Christian denominations: Pro-choice statements have been made by the United Church of Christ, and the Methodist Church on the US West coast. The 'Episcopalian (Anglican) Unitarian, Methodist, Presbyterian and Quaker movements are amongst the most liberal, allowing at least individual decision making in cases of active euthanasia.'"

Oct. 13, 2009 - [Death with Dignity National Center \(DDNC\)](#) ★



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The BBC wrote in an Aug. 3, 2009 online article titled "Religion & Ethics - Christianity: Euthanasia - the Christian View" on www.bbc.co.uk:

"Christians are mostly against euthanasia. The arguments are usually based on the beliefs that life is given by God, and that human beings are made in God's image. Some churches also emphasise the importance of not interfering with the natural process of death...

Christians believe that the intrinsic dignity and value of human lives means that the value of each human life is identical. They don't think that human dignity and value are measured by mobility, intelligence, or any achievements in life.

Valuing human beings as equal just because they are human beings has clear implications for thinking about euthanasia:

- patients in a persistent vegetative state, although seriously damaged, remain living human beings, and so their intrinsic value remains the same as anyone else's
- so it would be wrong to treat their lives as worthless and to conclude that they 'would be better off dead'
- patients who are old or sick, and who are near the end of earthly life have the same value as any other human being
- people who have mental or physical handicaps have the same value as any other human being...

Some features of Christianity suggest that there are some obligations that go against the general view that euthanasia is a bad thing:

- Christianity requires us to respect every human being
- If we respect a person we should respect their decisions about the end of their life
- We should accept their rational decisions to refuse burdensome and futile treatment
- Perhaps we should accept their rational decision to refuse excessively burdensome treatment even it may provide several weeks more of life."

Aug. 3, 2009 - BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) ★★

Faith Facts, a Bible-based ministry website, wrote the following in a www.faithfacts.org article titled "Euthanasia - How Do Christians Respond?" (accessed Oct. 13, 2009):

"The Christian perspective on the subject of 'assisted suicide' is simple. We believe in the sanctity of life from the moment of conception until natural death. There are over 60 passages of scripture in the Bible that relate to the sanctity of life, beginning with 'Thou Shalt Not Kill.' Ultimately, we believe that God is the giver and taker of life and that His will in such matters takes precedence over man's will."

Oct. 13, 2009 - Faith Facts ★

The Christian Medical and Dental Associations (CMDA) wrote in a www.cmda.org article titled "Euthanasia Ethics Statement" (accessed Oct. 13, 2009):

"We, as Christian physicians and dentists, believe that human life is a gift from God and is sacred because it bears His image.

The role of the physician is to affirm human life, relieve suffering, and give compassionate, competent care as long as the patient lives. The physician as well as the patient will be held accountable by God, the giver and taker of life.

We oppose active intervention with the intent to produce death for the relief of suffering, economic considerations or convenience of patient, family, or society.

We do not oppose withdrawal or failure to institute artificial means of life support in patients who are clearly and irreversibly deteriorating, in whom death appears imminent beyond reasonable hope of recovery.

The physician's decisions regarding the life and death of a human being should be made with careful consideration of the wishes and beliefs of the patient or his/her advocates (including the family, the church, and the community). The Christian physician, above all, should be obedient to biblical teaching and sensitive to the counsel of the Christian community. We recognize the right and responsibility of all physicians to refuse to participate in modes of care that violate their moral beliefs or conscience.

While rejecting euthanasia, we encourage the development and use of alternatives to relieve suffering, provide human companionship, and give opportunity for spiritual support and counseling."

Oct. 13, 2009 - Christian Medical and Dental Associations (CMDA) ★

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