



PHYSICIAN – ASSISTED SUICIDE

State laws in Washington and Oregon have changed state prohibitions against homicide and assisted suicide to allow doctors to provide lethal drug overdoses or injections to terminally ill patients.

Supporters of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide argue that people in the last stages of terminal illness should have the right to choose when they will die and to do so on their own terms. But killing, no matter what its motives, is never a private matter; it always impacts other people and has much wider implications. As Catholics, we believe that all life is precious, and God, as life’s Author, has sovereignty over it. Even for persons without religious faith, however, the logic behind medical homicide and suicide should be deeply troubling.

Legal assisted suicide poses a special threat to the vulnerable. The people most at risk from this kind of destructive public policy are the elderly, the disabled, those without adequate health care and people with little or no support system – in other words, people who pose a cost burden to their family and the state.

Christian tradition holds that as stewards and not “owners” of our lives, we must never directly intend to cause our own death or the death of any innocent person. The deliberate choice to end one’s own life is always gravely wrong. Assisted suicide is a subversion of authentic mercy. It is especially tragic when done by doctors whose moral duties require them never to harm but always to respect human life.

For the dying and those who care for them, the end of life can be a profoundly important time of emotional healing, soul-searching, forgiveness and reconciliation. For Christians and other religious believers, dying is not an evil to be avoided at all costs. It is a step in a journey that continues in the next life with God. But even those without faith can recognize the intrinsic value of human life. They can see that suffering persons need solidarity and support more than a loaded syringe and an easy exit; they need their dignity affirmed by being loved and encouraged to hope, not attacked by allowing their hopelessness to reach its limit in self-killing; they need relief from pain and discomfort, not relief from life.

As citizens we need to build the common good and advance the dignity of every human life. We call on Catholics and all people of good will to resist proposals that seek to legalize euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide. We urge Colorado’s families to discuss the care of terminally ill loved ones in light of sound moral principles. And we ask our state’s lawmakers and healthcare professionals to provide the resources to comfort and assist the terminally ill – without killing them.