



Euthanasia – The General Christian View

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.

Life is a gift from God

All life is God-given and birth and death are part of the life processes which God has created, so we should respect them. Therefore no human being has the authority to take the life of any innocent person, even if that person wants to die.

Human beings are valuable because they are made in God's image

Human life possesses an intrinsic dignity and value because it is created by God in his own image for the distinctive destiny of sharing in God's own life.

Saying that God created humankind in his own image doesn't mean that people actually look like God, but that people have a unique capacity for rational existence that enables them to see what is good and to want what is good. As people develop these abilities they live a life that is as close as possible to God's life of love. This is a good thing, and life should be preserved so that people can go on doing this.

To propose euthanasia for an individual is to judge that the current life of that individual is not worthwhile and such a judgement is incompatible with recognising the worth and dignity of the person to be killed, therefore arguments based on the quality of life are completely irrelevant. Nor should anyone ask for euthanasia for themselves because no-one has the right to value anyone, even themselves, as worthless.

The process of dying is spiritually important and should not be disrupted

Many churches believe that the period just before death is a profoundly spiritual time. They think it is wrong to interfere with the process of dying, as this would interrupt the process of the spirit moving towards God.

All human lives are equally valuable

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.

Exceptions and omissions

Some Christians do not accept the general view that euthanasia is a bad thing. They would argue that Christianity requires us to respect every human being and 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.

End of life care

The Christian faith leads those who follow it to some clear-cut views about the way terminally ill patients should be treated:

- The community should care for people who are dying, and for those who are close to them.
- The community should provide the best possible palliative care.
- The community should face death and dying with honesty and support.
- The community should recognise that when people suffer death on Earth they entrust their future to the risen Christ.
- Religious people, both lay and professional, should help the terminally ill to prepare for death.
- They should be open to their hopes and fears.
- They should be open to discussion.