

# ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

## Euthanasia

Human life (both from a Christian spiritual point of view and from a biological point of view) is a gift of God. Because it comes from God, its absolute master is God. Human life is an unrepeatable reality, so that it should be defended and protected at any age its owner may be. Having been created by God, human life is intrinsic good and always worth respecting and defending in plenary manner, even though it may exist with deficiencies due to some known or unknown causes. Having been beings created from a biological point of view, by the will of God, we go in and get out of history. This is a right of the human person, but the person is not exhausted between her coming in and going out of history.

In the course of time, man had a variable attitude to his own life. The attitude of society towards the life of its members was variable too. In ancient Sparta, for example, the handicapped children were let die, a thing approved even by philosopher Platon (Republica III, 906). In fact, Greek philosophy was favourable to suicide or suppress those who became a burden for other people. After conquering Greece, the Romans took over their customs, as well as those concerning the way of leaving this world. Therefore, in the Roman Empire the babies born with malformations were let die. This custom continued till the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when – influenced by Christianity – emperor Valens would forbid it. It is also known that in ancient Rome suicide was considered an honourable death. Christianity, with its view concerning life and its sense on one hand, and the origin of sufferance and its meaning (allowed by God) on the other hand, brought radical changes in regard to the respect for human life. Life in body is the life of the person, and nobody can dispose of the person's life right of his own will; the person, even in sufferance has an inestimable value. When it is not the immediate or later consequence of some sins, sufferance is a reality allowed by God, given the fact that "suffering produces perseverance; perseverance character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:3-4). This is why God commanded: "You shall not kill" (Exodus 20:13). The person is not exhausted in his biological life, neither is he/she fulfilled exclusively in his/her earthly condition, while life in the biological sense of the word is the basic condition for preparing the human person for the Kingdom of God.

Christianity rejects any action or omission by which one's life would be done away with, and any way by which somebody would try to commit suicide. But the general human society evolves without always taking into account the Christian values promoted by the Church. This accounts for the fact that besides the Christian point of view concerning the respect for life and for its owner, some other attitudes towards human life existed and developed, so that a true culture of death appeared.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century Thomas Morus (1478 - 1535) spoke about the practice to kill the sick in his imaginary island (Utopia) which he thought (in the book of the same name) it was an act of "wisdom, religious and holy". Later on, another Englishman, Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626) created the term of euthanasia, meaning a way of dying easier, the good death. If initially "good death" meant death accepted right on one's own will, due to high moral life or due to the physician's efforts to allay pain and raise the psychic tonus of the sick, later on, the term changed its sense, meaning killing somebody out of mercy or doing away with one's life painlessly, a fact painful and useless for certain types of society or ending a life meaninglessly because of the terrible pain.

Having lost the transcendent sense of the human being, modern man is no longer able to recognise the inviolable value of his own life, even proposing to rid of life as if it were a simple object. That is what a group of 300 scholars did in 1974, among whom three laureates of the Nobel prize (Jacques Monet, L. Pauling and G. Thanson) who signed the famous "manifest concerning enthanasia" (in the American magazine "The Humanist") by which they asked for the legalisation of euthanasia because "it is immoral to tolerate, accept or impose sufferance". Having been publicized extensively, this document created a trend of opinion concerning the attitude that man and society should have towards the sick in terminal phase. Three points of view have been formed in this sense so far, namely:

1) Vitalism; according to it biological life must be maintained by all means. But seeming to defend the holiness of life, this trend, father John Breck would say, "is, in fact a form of biological idolatry which puts the abstract value of the physical existence higher than the personal needs and the final destiny of the patient" (Sacred Gift of Life, Patmos, Cluj, 2001, p. 257). Not believing in the immortality of the soul, in the existence of the person beyond the physical structure of the human too, the vitalists simply "hang on" the temporary

physical structure of the human, trying to make it eternal as given in the historical circumstances.

2) The second point of view affirms that the patients in agony must be let choose the time and way how to die “in dignity”. But the expression “death with dignity” may suggest homicide and suicide. “Death with dignity” must not lead to the decision concerning the time, way and possibly the instrument by which he/she can commit suicide, but to the end (ordered by God) “with no pain, not challenged and in peace” for which you don’t need to kill the patient or suggest him suicide, but to allay his sufferance. Thus, the patient must be given the freedom to choose to decide the treatment in the terminal phase, to be shown solidarity and compassion by those around (family, friends, medical staff), to be administrated the adequate medication to allay the physical and psychic sufferance (which could be unbearable and even “dehumanising”), so that the patient should die with maxim of conscience and minim of pain.

3) The third point of view sustains that at a certain moment of the death process, the cessation of the treatment (removal or stopping of the life sustaining systems) can be accepted from a moral point of view, allowing the patient to have a natural death. It is the passive euthanasia with which the Church cannot agree. Either active or passive, euthanasia is homicide, as results, in fact, from the definition we find in the Statement on Human Rights, according to which “euthanasia is an action of omission which due to its nature or intention, causes death in order to rid of any pain”. Euthanasia is also situated at the level of the intentions and methods used. In this sense, the Italian journalist Marcozzi would sustain that euthanasia means doing away painlessly or “for pity” with the life of the one who suffers or thinks he could unbearably suffer in the future. (Cf. Elio Sgreccia and Victor Tambone, Manual of Bioethics, published by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese, Bucharest 2001, p. 284).

In the specialised literature, euthanasia was classified according to two criteria:

1. According to the way and means of doing it,
2. According to the agreement of the patient.

Taking into account the first aspect, the concepts of: active euthanasia, when done by the physician (when he administrates a lethal substance), and passive euthanasia when done through omission or non-action for saving the life of the patient. The concept of passive euthanasia is full of traps. Created by the

supporters of euthanasia, this concept can use the public opinion with the idea that nothing can be done to improve the clinic state of the patient so that the impossible acceptance of the vitalist point of view (especially in cases of cerebral death) would be the same thing as euthanasia. Thus, even admittance of the active euthanasia could be possible. This is why the concept of passive euthanasia is false, it is a trap.

From the point of view of the patient's accord, euthanasia can be:

- Volunteer, when in his right mind, the patient decides to be killed
- Non-volunteer: a) in case the patient cannot take decision because of accident or disease; b) in case of no administration of food to a multi-malformed new born child; c) in case the patient is in deep coma. (Pay attention! Deep coma is not cerebral death).
- Involuntary, in case of death sentence.

No matter its type, euthanasia is the expression of a secularised mentality which claims that man has the right to dispose of his own life or of another one's life. Euthanasia is the expression of the hedonist and utilitarian ethics which do not see the meaning of sufferance.

Christianity does not exclude sufferance. This is a reality which Christ, our Saviour, has not denied, suppressed, but assumed. To be Christian means to participate in the life of Christ, to make His light your light, His life your life. Thus, while following Christ through your sufferance, you participate in a way in the sufferance and passions of Christ. Christ, our Saviour has not assumed sufferance uselessly. Therefore, there is no useless sufferance. In its absurd character (and paradoxically) it has a meaning for the patient and for those around, a meaning that we cannot always decipher. But this meaning exists. The same as Christ's sufferance had a meaning, namely His Resurrection, so our sufferance has its own meaning: it is an experience really redeeming when reported to Christ.

Either active or passive, euthanasia is an act against God. Man can attempt neither to his own life nor to that of a fellow being of his because, at last, that means an attempt against the sovereignty of God.

The physician (and neither anybody else) has no the right to take the life of a person. The one who cannot give a right to somebody, neither can he take it away from him; therefore, the one who cannot give life to one person, neither can he take it away from him/her. Having been the instrument and intercessor by which God works, the physician (while valuing his vocation and meaning)

ought to allay sufferance, but he has no right to speed up the natural process of death with intention.

In case the biological end of a person is imminent, we have no right to speed up this end through euthanasia. The love for the fellow being does not consist in doing away with one's life to rid him of pain, but help him support the pain till he surrenders to God, a moment that must be the result of a natural process, and as much as possible in full conscience and consciousness.

Our duty and especially the purpose of the physicians is to be in the service of life till its end; or man is living even when he is in the terminal phase of his physical life.

In the case of the incurable diseases, the Church recommends using all meanings needed for allaying pain caused by disease: first of all those of spiritual nature, namely the administration of the Holy Sacraments, spiritual counselling, prayer and moral support, and secondly, of medical nature, through the administration of the normal treatments, providing the necessary hygiene and the palliative treatments.

Euthanasia cannot be justified either medically or economically. The physician who practices it has infringed his meaning and commits a serious sin sentenced by God and detested by the Church. In order to avoid such a sin correct information is needed on its seriousness and on the sense of life.

Physical death is a reality any being created passes through. When this one occurs, with or without sufferance, it must be seen as a solemn moment of our passage into the Kingdom of God "where there is no pain, sorrow, or sigh".

*Πηγή: <https://patriarhia.ro/euthanasia-6022.html>*