



Euthanasia / Dying Well

Catholic teaching on the meaning of death, the importance of dying well and palliative care with reference to Catholic teaching on assisted suicide and euthanasia.

Contrasting views on the quality and sanctity of life and the right to die

Key Sources of Authority

“Euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God, since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person.” Evangelium Vitae 65

“We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed...where, O death, is your victory?” 1 Corinthians 15

Key Beliefs	
Catholic teaching on the meaning of death and dying well	Catholics believe that death is not the end and is ‘life changed not ended’. At the end of life they should prepare for death through prayer, acts of love and the Sacraments in the hope that they die in a state of grace, reconciled with God and at peace with others. Catholics encourage palliative care so that the dying can receive pain relief and maintain their dignity and quality of life. God decides when life ends so Euthanasia is not acceptable to Catholics.
Catholic teaching on Euthanasia	The Roman Catholic Church does not accept that human beings have a right to die as life is sacred, humans are Imago Dei and life is given and ended by God. Suffering has a purpose in which Catholics share in Jesus’ suffering. However the Church regards it as morally acceptable to refuse extraordinary and aggressive medical means to preserve life.
Other religious teaching on Euthanasia	Some Christians accept Euthanasia as they argue that Christianity requires them to respect every human being and their decisions. They also state that it is more loving to allow those who are suffering to die. In Judaism saving of life (pikuach nefesh) is an important mitzvah. Jewish law forbids active euthanasia and regards it as murder but it is permissible to switch off life support if it is impeding the natural process of death.
Arguments ‘for’ Euthanasia	Quality of life is more important than sanctity of life. Jesus told us to love our neighbour which may involve helping them to die. The Bible says ‘I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord’ (Phil 4:4). Humans have free will and autonomy and so should be able to decide whether to live or die. We put animals down when they suffer.
Arguments ‘against’ Euthanasia	The 4th Commandment says ‘do not kill’. Jesus healed the sick, he did not kill them. Palliative care can reduce suffering Euthanasia may lead to a ‘slippery slope’ where the sick and handicapped are encouraged to die.

Exam Practice

Describe Catholic teaching about the importance of dying well. (5)

‘Euthanasia is never acceptable’. Discuss this statement showing that you have considered more than one point of view (you must refer to religion and belief in your answer). (15)

Key Connections

Compare Catholic and other Christian beliefs about Euthanasia

Compare Christian and Jewish beliefs about Euthanasia

Compare religious and non-religious beliefs about Quality of Life v Sanctity of Life