



# Church Teaching on End of Life Issues

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# OVERVIEW

- OPERATIVE MORAL PRINCIPLES
- ORDINARY/EXTRAORDINARY CARE
- HYDRATION & NUTRITION
- VENTILATION
- EUTHANASIA

# OPERATIVE MORAL PRINCIPLES

## ✓ **Dignity of the Human Person**

Principle of the Right to Life

Principle of Double Effect

Principle of Autonomy

Value of Suffering

# HUMAN DIGNITY

The recognition that human beings are worthy of a particular level of esteem or respect simply because they are human beings.



*dbtechno.com,  
co.wayne.ny.us, rd.com,  
onenewsnow.com,  
silverts.com*

# HUMAN DIGNITY

## Arises from *Imago Dei*

“The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God (*Imago Dei*)”

CCC 1700

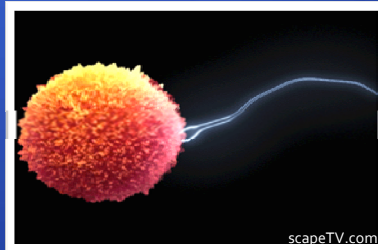


# HUMAN DIGNITY Also...

- "...lies in man's call to communion with God"  
(*Guadium et Spes* 10)
- Was underscored when God sent His Son to human nature
- Is substantiated due to the eternal destiny man will share with God at human death
- Is inviolable

# HUMAN DIGNITY IS INVIOABLE at the beginning of life...

"A human being has "a unique dignity  
and an independent value, from the  
moment of conception..."



# HUMAN DIGNITY IS INVIOABLE at the end of life...

....and in every stage of development, whatever his or her physical condition. In particular, the disabled person (whether the disability be the result of a congenital handicap, chronic illness or accident, or from mental or physical deficiency, and whatever the severity of the disability) is a fully human subject, with the corresponding innate, sacred and inviolable rights." *Document for the Holy See for the Int'l Year of Disabled Persons (March 4, 1981)*



# OPERATIVE MORAL PRINCIPLES

✓ **Dignity of the Human Person**

✓ **Principle of the Right to Life**

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# PRINCIPLE OF THE RIGHT TO LIFE

- The first and most fundamental right of every human person
- A condition of any other human right, and therefore it must be protected above all other rights
- Must not be valued more in some than others, whether founded on race, sex, color, religion, age, intellect, or health

*("Declaration on Procured Abortion", Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Section 11, 1974)*

# PRINCIPLE OF THE RIGHT TO LIFE

**Declaration on Procured Abortion, Section 11,  
Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1974**

*"The first right of the human person is his life. He has other goods and some are more precious, but this one is fundamental – the condition of all the others. Hence it must be protected above all others. It does not belong to society, nor does it belong to public authority in any form to recognize this right for some and not for others..."*

# PRINCIPLE OF THE RIGHT TO LIFE

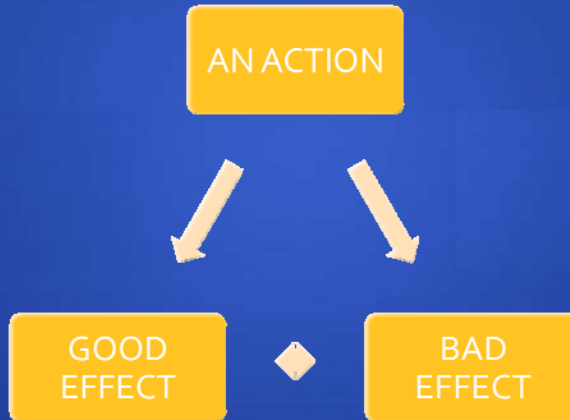
Declaration on Procured Abortion, Section 12,  
Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1974

*"Any discrimination based on the various stages of life is no more justified than any other discrimination. The right to life remains complete in an old person, even one greatly weakened; it is not lost by one who is incurably sick. The right to life is no less to be respected in the small infant just born than in the mature person."* (emphasis added)

# OPERATIVE MORAL PRINCIPLES

- ✓ **Dignity of the Human Person**
- ✓ **Principle of the Right to Life**
- ✓ **Principle of Double Effect**
- Principle of Autonomy
- Value of Suffering

# PRINCIPLE OF DOUBLE EFFECT



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## REQUIREMENTS:

1. The action itself is good or indifferent.
2. The intention of the person undertaking the action must be directed towards the good effect.
3. The good effect cannot be obtained through the bad effect. (sequence)
4. The good effect must be proportionally equal to or greater than the bad effect.

# PRINCIPLE OF DOUBLE EFFECT: A REAL SITUATION

## SITUATION:

A dying woman is in severe pain. Her family and she are extremely distraught. The normal dosage of pain relievers is insufficient to control her suffering. The physician knows that in order to control the pain, the *minimum effective dose* of morphine will also hasten her impending death, due to the morphine's action of decreasing respiratory function.



# DOUBLE EFFECT APPLIED

1. Is the action good or indifferent?      **YES**    **NO**  
    **Yes, administration of pain-relieving drugs is good.**

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1. Is the action good or indifferent?      YES      NO

Yes, administration of pain-relieving drugs is good.

2. Is the intent directed towards the good effect?      YES      NO

Yes, pain relief is the intent, not hastening death.

# DOUBLE EFFECT APPLIED

1. Is the action good or indifferent? YES  
NO

Yes, administration of pain-relieving drugs is good.

2. Is the intent directed towards the good effect? YES  
NO

Yes, pain relief is the intent, not hastening death.

3. Does the good effect precede the bad? YES  
NO

Yes, pain relief would precede hastened death.

# DOUBLE EFFECT APPLIED

1. Is the action good or indifferent?      YES    NO  
    Yes, administration of pain-relieving drugs is good.
2. Is the intent directed towards      YES    NO  
    the good effect?  
    Yes, pain relief is the intent, not hastening death.
3. Does the good effect precede the bad?      YES    NO  
    Yes, pain relief would precede hastened death.
4. Is the good effect proportional to the bad?      YES    NO  
    Yes, relief of extreme pain is proportional to  
    hastened death in a dying patient.

## CONCLUSION:

YES, under the Principle of Double Effect, it is morally licit to administer pain-relieving drugs to a dying patient for the purpose of relieving suffering, even if it is likely that death may be hastened.



# OPERATIVE MORAL PRINCIPLES

- ✓ **Dignity of the Human Person**
- ✓ **Principle of the Right to Life**
- ✓ **Principle of Double Effect**
- ✓ **Principle of Autonomy**  
**(Euthanasia in brief)**  
**Value of Suffering**

# PRINCIPLE OF AUTONOMY

The moral principle which holds that one should be free from coercion in deciding to act, and that others are obligated to protect confidentiality, respect privacy, and tell the truth.

- Based on being fully informed of treatment
- Has a central place in prevailing contemporary society (Oregon, Washington, & Montana allow legalized physician-assisted suicide)

# PRINCIPLE OF AUTONOMY...

NOT AN ABSOLUTE AND FOUNDATIONAL  
MORAL PRINCIPLE....

...but a 'middle principle' that requires every individual to respect every other individual's self-determination *to an appropriate extent* within the context of community and faith.

Within Catholic moral tradition, it is limited by other moral principles.

## An autonomous decision for Euthanasia does not ever 'trump' the other, higher Catholic moral principles.

- Catholic facilities, Catholic health care workers, and Catholics in general, may NEVER participate in any fashion, in a patient's autonomous decision to end their life.
- Catholics have a moral obligation to dissuade a family member or person from such a course of action.



# OPERATIVE MORAL PRINCIPLES

- ✓ **Dignity of the Human Person**
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# SUFFERING

- A fact of human life
- Experienced in numerous ways
- Strikes the innocent as well as the guilty
- Raises the inevitable question, "WHY?"
- Can lead to anguish, self-absorption, despair, and sometimes revolt against God (CCC 1501)
- It is a mystery yet our Catholic faith teaches us certain things about it

# CHURCH'S VIEW OF SUFFERING

- A Consequence of Original Sin (CCC 1521)
- The Church understands the immensity of suffering's effect on man: *"Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations, and his finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death."* (CCC 1500)
- Recognizes that illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. (CCC, 1501)
- **BUT.....**

# CHURCH'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE VALUE OF SUFFERING



Salvador Dalí's "Christ of St. John of the Cross"

- Can make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. (CCC 1501)
- Very often may provoke a search for God and a return to Him. (CCC, 1501)
- Can build character in and display the virtue of the one who suffers. (*Salvifici Doloris*, 11)
- May "unleash love" in those who care for the suffering person (*Salvifici Doloris*, 29)
- The Church follows Christ's example of the "Divine Healer" by assisting the suffering through its health facilities, orphanages, etc.
- AND...

# SUFFERING: A SHARING IN CHRIST'S REDEMPTION

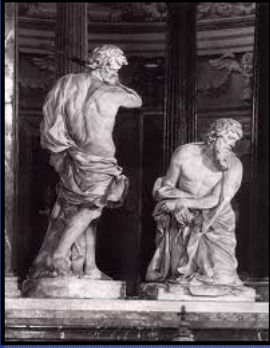
## SUFFERING IS REDEMPTIVE

AKA: "*Offer it up*"

- Has a special place in God's saving plan, especially near death
- Gives suffering a 'usefulness'
- Can make pain spiritually productive in a way that vocal prayers cannot
- Some Christians moderate use of painkillers toward this end.



# BIBLICAL SUPPORT FOR REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING



*The Beheading of St. Paul*  
Alessandro Algardi (1598 – 1654)

“Now I rejoice in my sufferings  
for your sake, *and in my flesh  
and I complete what is lacking in  
Christ’s afflictions* for the sake of  
his body, that is, the Church.”

St. Paul’s Letter to the Colossians 1:24  
(emphasis added)

# NEVERTHELESS, IT'S OK TO CONTROL PAIN

## DECLARATION ON EUTHANASIA



- *“Nevertheless, it would be imprudent to impose a heroic way of acting as a general rule. On the contrary, humans and Christian prudence suggest for the majority of sick people the use of medicines capable of alleviating or suppressing pain, even though these may cause as a secondary effect, semi-consciousness and reduced lucidity.”*
- *“As for those who are not in a state to express themselves, one can reasonably presume that they wish to take these painkillers, and have them administered....” (III, 1980)*

## INTENSIVE USE OF PAINKILLERS NOT WITHOUT ITS DIFFICULTIES

- As disease progresses, increased dosages are needed to maintain efficacy
- Consciousness may be suppressed
- Respiration decreases
- Death may be hastened

## DOCTORS ASK THE POPE

*"Is the suppression of pain and consciousness by the use of narcotics permitted by religion and morality to the doctor and the patient (even at the approach of death and if one foresees that the use of narcotics will shorten life)?"*

# POPE ANSWERS THE DOCTORS

*“If no other means exist, and if, in the given circumstances, this does not prevent the carrying out of other religious and moral duties: Yes.”*

And also:

*“It is not right to deprive the dying person of consciousness without a serious reason.” (1957)*



Pope Pius XII

# OVERVIEW

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- OPERATIVE MORAL PRINCIPLES
- **ORDINARY/EXTRAORDINARY CARE**
- HYDRATION & NUTRITION
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- EUTHANASIA

## ORDINARY vs. EXTRAORDINARY CARE

Also called  
'Proportionate' and  
'Disproportionate' Means

# ORDINARY CARE

## ORDINARY (Proportionate) CARE

Any treatment that, *in the given circumstances*

Offers reasonable 'hope of benefit'

**AND**

Is not too burdensome

# “in the given circumstances”

Should take into account:

- Well-being of the *whole* person
- Burdens or risks are proportionate to, or outweigh the expected benefits
- Patient and family's personal, financial, familial, & social circumstances

# EXTRAORDINARY CARE

## EXTRAORDINARY (Disproportionate) CARE

Any treatment that, *in the given circumstances*:

- Offers no reasonable 'hope of benefit'

OR

- Is too burdensome for the patient or others

## NO DEFINITIVE LISTS of Ordinary/Extraordinary Care



## BUT 'ORDINARY CARE' IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED...

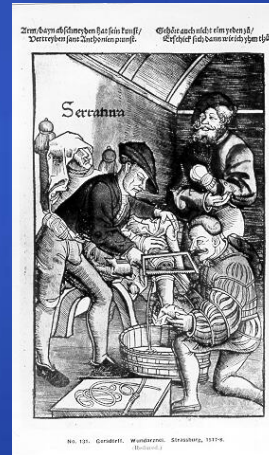
TO INCLUDE:

- bathing & basic hygiene
- turning the body to prevent bed sores
- personal grooming
- antibiotics if needed
- pain medication if needed
- comfortable temperature
- clean clothing
- nutrition and hydration\*

# DOMINGO BANEZ

## 1585 A.D.

- Spanish Dominican Theologian
- First described necessity of 'ordinary' vs. non-necessity of 'extraordinary' medical interventions
- Addressed topic of amputation in light of St. Thomas Aquinas' article on mutilation



[commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

# POPE PIUS XII

## Ordinary vs. Extraordinary Care



*"Normally one is held to use only ordinary means – according to the circumstances of persons, places, times, and culture – that is to say, means that do not involve any grave burden for oneself or another.*

*A stricter obligation would be too burdensome for most people and would render the attainment of the higher, more important good too difficult." (continued)*

## WITHDRAWAL OF EXTRAORDINARY CARE...

when they are no longer beneficial,  
useful, or are too burdensome,

IS **NOT** EUTHANASIA,

which decides that the patient does  
not have a life worth living.

# EXTRAORDINARY MEANS

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WITHHOLDING = WITHDRAWING

BOTH ARE EQUALLY MORAL

# OVERVIEW

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- OPERATIVE MORAL PRINCIPLES
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- **HYDRATION, NUTRITION**
- VENTILATION
- EUTHANASIA

# HYDRATION & NUTRITION



Terry Schiavo

# NUTRITION & HYDRATION

## WHAT DOES THE CHURCH SAY?

"I should like particularly to underline how the administration of water and food **even when provided by artificial means**, always represents a natural means of preserving life, not a medical act.

**Its use, furthermore, should be considered, in principle, ordinary and proportionate, and as such morally obligatory**, insofar as and until it is seen to have attained its proper finality, which in the present case consists in providing nourishment to the patient and alleviation of his suffering."

-Pope John Paul II  
Papal Allocution, 2004

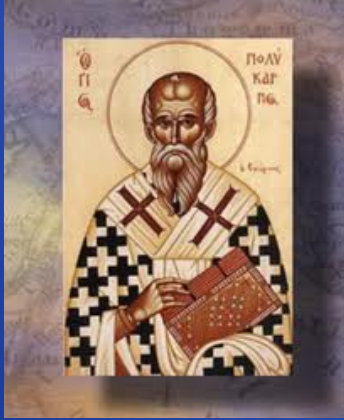


## MAY WE **NEVER** DISCONTINUE FOOD AND WATER?

NO... The Church does NOT claim that food and water (artificial or natural) must be given in all circumstances whatsoever.

But it should not be withheld as a means to hasten or cause death.

## THE CHURCH FATHERS ALSO WEIGHED IN EARLY ON



“Feed the man  
dying of hunger,  
because if you have  
not fed him, you  
have killed him.”

From the Church Fathers,  
quoted in *Guadium et Spes*, 69

# OVERVIEW

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- ORDINARY/EXTRAORDINARY CARE
- HYDRATION, NUTRITION
- **VENTILATION**
- EUTHANASIA

# ARTIFICIAL VENTILATION

A ventilator is a mechanical device which pumps oxygen in and carbon dioxide out of a patient's lungs.

It is used when a patient is too ill to breathe for themselves, perhaps after major surgery or an accident, or near death.



[medspecialties.com](http://medspecialties.com)

## WITHDRAWAL OF EXTRAORDINARY MEANS...

Is **NOT** euthanasia,  
since the intent is not to kill,  
but rather to relieve the patient of a  
burdensome treatment, or one  
having little benefit.

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# EUTHANASIA: also known as "ASSISTED SUICIDE" & "MERCY KILLING"

DEFINITION: "An action or omission which of itself and by intention causes death, with the purpose of eliminating all suffering."

- Pope John Paul II, in "The Gospel of Life," 1995



[alexschadenberg.blogspot.com](http://alexschadenberg.blogspot.com)

# THE CATECHISM ON EUTHANASIA

*“Thus an act or omission which, of itself or by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the Living God, his Creator....*

*The error of judgment unto which one can fall in good faith does not change the nature of this murderous act, which must always be forbidden and excluded.” (2277)*

## THE CATECHISM ON EUTHANASIA (cont.)

*"Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable." (2276)*



# “DECLARATION ON EUTHANASIA”

*“It is necessary to state firmly...that nothing and no one can in anyway permit the killing of an innocent human being, whether a fetus or an embryo, an infant or an adult, an old person, or one suffering from an incurable disease, or a person who is dying.”*

*Furthermore, no one is permitted to ask for this act of killing, either for himself or herself or for another person entrusted to his or her care, nor can he or she consent to it, either explicitly or implicitly...*

*For it is a question of the violation of the divine law, and offense against the dignity of the human person, a crime against life, and an attack on humanity.”*

- “Declaration on Euthanasia,” II, CDF, 1980

# EUTHANASIA: A FALSE MERCY

Euthanasia and assisted suicide are a “false mercy” which is in actuality a perversion of true mercy because it seeks to kill the person whose suffering cannot be borne by another.

“True Mercy” is a compassionate seeking to share another’s ordeal through companionship, sympathy, hopefulness, and support in a difficult time.



# PLEAS FOR DEATH

"The pleas of gravely ill people who sometimes ask for death are not to be understood as implying a true desire for euthanasia; in fact it is almost always a case of an anguished plea for help and love."



"What a sick person needs, besides medical care, is love, the human and supernatural warmth with which the sick person can and ought to be surrounded by all those close to him or her, parents and children, doctors and nurses."

"Declaration on Euthanasia," II, CDF, 1980

# NATIONAL CATHOLIC BIOETHICS CENTER (NCBC)

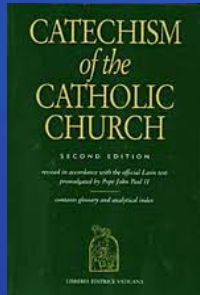


OFFERS 24/7 EMERGENCY CONSULTATION SERVICES

215-877-2660

Or non-emergency inquiries at [www.ncbcenter.org](http://www.ncbcenter.org)

# OTHER REFERENCE SOURCES



CATECHISM OF THE  
CATHOLIC CHURCH



US CONFERENCE OF  
CATHOLIC BISHOPS  
[www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)