

Order of the Most Holy Mary Theotokos “The Old Catholic Marianists”

Statement Regarding Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

Reason for this Statement

The Order of the Most Holy Theotokos has consistently affirmed that all human life is a gift from God and is therefore sacred. This principle applies to life from the moment of conception to the moment of death. Modern society is increasingly faced with questions regarding individual autonomy in relation to both how people choose to live and how they choose to die. We of the Old Catholic Marianists believe that God’s written Word teaches principles which provide clear guidance in making decisions about life and death. We maintain that the continuum of life, from conception to the moment of death, should be lived in obedience to God’s Holy Word.

Definition of Terms

1. Euthanasia literally means “good death”, derived from the Greek “eu” (good) and “thanatos” (death). Euthanasia is generally considered in two distinct forms:

a. Active Euthanasia is generally defined as the intentional bringing about of an easy and painless death to a person suffering from an incurable or painful disease. Active euthanasia is the direct and intentional killing of one human being by another as a deliberate act of commission.

b. Passive Euthanasia is generally defined as the cessation or withholding of the employment of extraordinary measures which would artificially prolong physical life when there is believed to be irrefutable evidence that life without such measures cannot long continue. Passive euthanasia may be considered an act of omission by refusing to sustain life through technology or by other means.

2. Assisted Suicide is generally defined as the intentional intervention by any individual with the intent to produce the death of another individual; in

this context, often considered for the purpose of relieving pain and suffering.

3. Physician Assisted Suicide is generally defined as a physician offering assistance with the intended purpose of either hastening death or terminating a person's life through the actions involved in one or both of the following roles:

a. Providing information about how to commit suicide in an effective manner;

b. Providing the means necessary for an effective suicide; which may include writing a prescription for a lethal amount of medication, providing moral support for an individual's decision to commit suicide, supervising the actual suicide, and helping the individual carry out the necessary physical actions to effectively complete the suicide.

Biblical and Theological Considerations

1. Man as the Image of God: Man was created in the image of God, and was given dominion over the earth as the representative of God's sovereign rule over all creation (Genesis 1:26-28). As the image of God, man has the design and capacity for unique fellowship with the Triune God and with his fellow man (John 17:20-24; 2 Corinthians 13:14). Man bears the responsibility as God's image to reflect His holy nature (1 Peter 1:15, 16). Man as God's image deserves to be respected, valued, and loved; and so God commands, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18, Mark 12:28-34). Anyone who willfully injures or destroys God's image without His explicit sanction demonstrates a lack of love and reverence for God Himself.

2. The Image of God and the Intentional Destruction of Human Life: The fact that God still values sinful man as the bearer of His image is revealed in His abhorrence of the murder of Abel by Cain (Genesis 4:9-11), and in His statement to Noah following the great flood: "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man" (Genesis 9:6). The Sixth Commandment states, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). Scripture sanctions the destruction of human life only under the following circumstances: when the governmental authority acts to resist and punish evil (Genesis 9:6; Romans 13:1-5), or when it is unintentional or accidental (as may occur in self-defense or to protect

the lives of others: see Numbers 35:9-12; Deuteronomy 19:1-6; Joshua 20:1-6; Luke 22:38). There are no other Bible based sanctions for permitting the intentional destruction of human life.

3. The Body as the Temple of the Holy Spirit: The Apostle Paul wrote the following about Christians in First Corinthians: Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20; cf. Romans 8:9-11). This passage teaches that our bodies are God's temple and possession, and we are therefore responsible to Him to be good stewards of our bodies. This truth refutes the popular concept held by many that they have an autonomous right to do as they wish with their own bodies: such thinking is a rejection of God's declared purposes for our bodies as revealed in Scripture; and, as such, is an expression of sinful rebellion against our Creator.

4. Suffering and Death for the Christian: Death was the consequence for man's sin (Romans 6:23); but the Good News is that, "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ have given believers ultimate victory over death (1 Corinthians 15). Because of the wonderful glimpse of resurrection life in Revelation chapters 21 and 22, it is only natural that Christians will at times long for the release which death will bring from the sorrows and suffering of this world (2 Corinthians 5:1-8; Philippians 1:19-26). Scripture, however, teaches that some suffering is a normal part of preparing believers for eternity. Suffering is part of the cross which God has ordained that Christians should bear for the sake of growth in faith and Christian character (Luke 14:27; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:3-9).

There is no spiritual benefit from needless physical suffering; to the contrary, the church is called to continue in Christ's ministry of relief to those who are suffering (Psalm 72:12-14; James 5:13-15). Christians should encourage medical intervention which relieves physical pain and suffering in order that we may maintain our ability to witness to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:13-16; 1 Corinthians 6:12). If pain is not completely eliminated, Christians should see this as an opportunity to share in the sufferings of Christ; knowing that He has promised His faithful presence with them (Psalm 23:4; John 16:33; Philippians 3:10, 11). Sharing in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings precedes sharing in the fellowship of His resurrection.

Application of Biblical Principles

1. **Life Support and Active Euthanasia:** Modern technology has placed before Christians the option of artificial life support. God has given man the intelligence to develop technologies which save physical life; and prolonging this mortal life is praiseworthy if it provides additional opportunity to glorify God in ministry (Philippians 1:19-26). If a physical condition of progressive deterioration develops from which there is no medical hope of recovery and which has not been healed through intercessory prayer, there is no theological reason to prolong life artificially using modern technology. The determination to discontinue (or not to initiate) artificial life-support should be made only after thorough medical and pastoral consultation. There is a profound difference between allowing a person to die comfortably without life-prolonging measures, and actively causing the person's death ("active euthanasia"; whether by suicide, assisted suicide, or so-called "mercy-killing" by someone else). Although the motive of wanting to end suffering may seem reasonable enough, the practice of active euthanasia is an irreversible decision made by fallible humans at a time of great vulnerability. Active euthanasia sinfully destroys the temple and image of God. Instead, Christians need to follow the precedent of Holy Scripture and historic church tradition, and leave the timing of death in the hands of God.

2. **Compassion and Hope:** Both caregivers and those suffering from a life-threatening illness may experience physical, emotional, and/or spiritual pain when faced with a prolonged dying process, especially if there is any amount of unrelieved suffering present. Artificial life support has the potential for extending such suffering; and for this reason, people should make their explicit wishes known through available legal documents (such as Living Wills and Advance Directives for Health care). Christians should encourage the use of appropriate palliative and comfort measures for those faced with incurable life-threatening conditions: people skilled in pain and symptom control can do much to relieve physical suffering in most cases (organizations such as hospice may provide invaluable help in these efforts). Christians should remember that the temporary "sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18; cf. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Conclusion

We of the Order of the Most Holy Mary Theotokos hereby:

1. Encourage all efforts to relieve unnecessary pain and suffering utilizing whatever appropriate measures are available, while always remaining obedient to God's Holy Word, and with the intent to affirm the sanctity of human life as created in the image of God;
2. Encourage our membership to make their explicit wishes known through available legal documents;
3. Oppose all efforts to condone or practice any form of Active Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide;
4. Encourage local churches and individual believers in their responsibility to support patients and their families in biblical decision-making as well as providing comfort through a ministry of presence to those facing a most difficult time in their lives.