

Dear Bishop Harrower,

I have read with interest your comments as reported in Tasmanian press regarding the McKim Bill on Dying with Dignity and your “Opinion” in the Anglican Church League.

Your “Opinion” makes a number of incorrect assumptions.

Firstly, the heading could more accurately read - Should a person who has a terminal or hopeless illness, suffering pain that cannot be relieved, have the choice of legal voluntary euthanasia, if that is their wish?

I am sure the proposed legislation does not suggest that euthanasia “is the best way to care” for people with a terminal illness.

However, for the approximately 5 out of every 100 people dying, where even the best palliative care is not effective, having the choice of an assisted death can be extremely important to the individual who is dying. What treatment do you suggest for this 5%?

What options and treatment do you suggest for a person dying from Motor Neurone Disease, where there is no treatment and the prognosis is death by choking?

Palliative care for years has made use of the acceptance of the “double effect” and more recently of the extension of this into “terminal sedation”. The frequency of this is undocumented. What is the moral difference between terminal sedation, with death by starvation, and a quicker death using a higher dose of the same drug?

Ten years experience in Oregon USA with Assisted Dying has shown that only a third of people who obtain the prescription for an assisted death actually use it, but, contrary to what is implied in your Opinion, having access to the drug provides great peace of mind to the sufferer, and enables a more complete, full and loving life until their death. Reports indicate no evidence of abuse to the elderly or incapacitated.

Christians throughout the centuries have made a mockery of “only God has the right to take life”. The Crusades, the Inquisition, the extermination of the Cathars, the killing of each other by Protestants and Catholics in Ireland, are just a few examples.

Most of the perceived problems with the burden of care can be dealt with using an Advance Directive and preferably also including a Living Will.

I suggest that you read some books such as “A Good Death” by Dr Rodney Syme, and “Angels of Death”, by Professor Roger Magnusson, which present the need for the compassionate availability of voluntary euthanasia from a different perspective.

Yours sincerely

Ian Wood

Co-ordinator: Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Euthanasia — 1/6/2009