Letter about Euthanasia

Last Wednesday (31/07/96) letters were mailed on behalf of the Men’s Fellowship to all the Queensland Federal parliamentarians. The text of the letter appears below:

We believe that the issue of euthanasia in the Northern Territory is a serious issue, and one that is likely to have profound effects on people’s attitudes to human life. Since it may become the subject of a conscience vote on a private member’s bill at Canberra, we ask you to consider the following case against euthanasia.

We are church-members, but are well aware that some arguments against euthanasia rest on reason and good common sense, and we acknowledge that we have no special claim to these. Other arguments, which to us are even more decisive, we add in the second part; and these are arguments for which Christians claim divine authority.

A. Arguments against Euthanasia on the Basis of Sound Common Sense.

1. The “quality of life” argument is a fallacy. Human life does not have to be perfect in every respect to be worth living.

2. Rarely is any human being without connections to other people. As a mother who aborts her baby considers her own quality of life and violates the quality of life for her defenceless baby, so a person who commits suicide, or asks others to assist his or her dying, ought to respect the wishes of close friends and relatives.

3. The government has the duty to protect not only the property, but also the lives, of its citizens, including those citizens who are weak. This duty must include providing adequate means of life-support for those who are terminally ill.

4. The government should insist that there must be no exceptions to the duty of doctors and other medical staff to maintain the lives of their patients as far as lies in their power. They should also refuse to yield to any pressure for mercy killing.

5. Once the first steps are taken towards the cheapening of human life through voluntary euthanasia, there are no barriers to further steps to cheapen it further by involuntary euthanasia. For example, when financial resources are scarce, lives that are most costly to preserve, and the lives of those who no longer contribute to the economy will more easily be regarded as expendable. If public opinion is encouraged to approve euthanasia by legalising it, medical staff will more easily be led to end lives themselves in undetectable ways, which will include the removal of appropriate medication from patients who do not wish to die.

6. Once the principle is established that citizens’ lives may be ended with others’ help, all people who are incurably sick or physically defective are in principle put at risk.

7. People who are not well often find it hard to assess their condition objectively. People who want to die one day may want to keep living the next.

8. Doctors do not always diagnose correctly.

9. In our society, where courts are careful not to punish offenders when there is reasonable doubt about a person’s guilt, and where capital punishment is now rare, people who must by law be presumed to be innocent of crime should not be candidates for death, even under the euphemism of “mercy killing.”

10. The ability of doctors to lessen severe pain has never been greater than in our modern times. Though it is sometimes difficult to say when measures to prolong life are extraordinary, heroic, and pointless, ordinary measures developed by medical technology to prolong life should never be withheld.

B. Arguments That Are Based on the Bible, and that for Christians Ought to Be Absolutely Decisive.

1. Though it is not the church’s task to agitate specific political measures, yet, in cases where God’s commandments are being flagrantly flouted, as they are in abortion and euthanasia, it is the Church’s duty to remind legislators: “God, the giver of human life, has commanded, ‘You shall not murder’ (Ex 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17; Romans 13:9). Suicide is self-murder, and assisting suicide is complicity in murder. If you ignore this, you cannot escape a guilty conscience before God, the judge. He will punish murderers and those who have complicity in murder. Faith in Jesus the Saviour cannot co-exist with wilful and deliberate sin.”

2. God Himself has distinguished human life from animal life by creating human beings in His own image. “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. ‘ So God created man in His own image,’ in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Gn 1:26-27 NKJV).
God also distinguished human life from animal life by endowing human life with spirit. Each human person bears the stamp of God’s original design. God pointed to the original image of Himself in human beings when He threatened His retribution on those who are guilty of taking human life. “Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man” (Gn 9:6, NKJV).

3. God alone knows whether disease or injury is incurable. Since our times are in God’s hands (Ps 31:15; Acts 17:26), it is God’s prerogative alone to decide when an individual should move to the existence that continues beyond temporal death.

4. Christians have the special duty; for Jesus’ sake, to encourage, support, and suffer with, those who are weak or defenceless (Prv 31:8). Therefore, even if there is legislation in favour of euthanasia, Christian people are bound to continue their determined opposition to it.