

---

# Catholic Analysis

Writings on Catholic issues

## Dignity in Life and Death

January 23, 2009 in [Life](#), [church](#), [euthanasia](#), [faith](#), [holy](#), [poor](#)

Tags: [Life](#), [faith](#), [dignity](#), [doctrine](#), [euthanasia](#), [Debate](#), [Terri](#), [Schiavo](#), [bioethics](#)

### Debate Continues Over Euthanasia

By Father John Flynn, L.C.

ROME, SEPT. 24, 2007 (Zenit.org).- The issue of euthanasia came to the forefront of news again recently, with the publication of a note Sept. 14 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The statement, written in reply to questions sent to the Vatican by U. S. bishops, stipulated that providing nutrition and liquids to people who are in what is often termed the vegetative state is, with rare exceptions, morally obligatory.

After the fierce debate over the 2005 Terri Schiavo case in Florida, news came from Arizona a few months ago about a man who unexpectedly woke up from a coma. Jesse Ramirez suffered brain injuries in a May 30 car crash, reported the Arizona Republic newspaper June 27.

On June 8 his wife, Rebecca, had asked his doctors to remove the tubes providing him with food and water. Jesse's parents objected and obtained a court order to reconnect the tubes. Subsequently, Jesse suddenly woke up from his coma.

Earlier this year another case was reported, from Denver, Colorado. Christa Lilly had been in coma since the mid-'80s in the wake of a heart attack and stroke. In the past, Lilly had woken up for brief periods, but until this year the last time was on Nov. 4, 2000, reported the Denver Post newspaper March 8.

According to the article, a neurologist from the University of Colorado Hospital, James Kelly, thinks that Lilly might have been in a "minimally conscious state" during these years, as opposed to a persistent vegetative state.

### Killing machines

Euthanasia came up for debate in Germany recently, after the announcement by Roger Kusch, ex-justice minister in Hamburg, that he has designed a machine to help people commit suicide.

According to a report in the Sept. 9 edition of the Italian newspaper Il Corriere della Sera, a simple push of a button injects a lethal solution into the terminally ill patient. German federal law prohibits helping someone commit suicide, but does not make illegal the actual act of suicide by the person involved. So with his machine Kusch hopes to avoid any legal difficulties in helping people die.

News of the invention drew immediate criticism, both from politicians and Archbishop Werner Thissen of Hamburg. Kusch is a candidate in Hamburg's October elections.

Meanwhile, in Switzerland, protests by residents in a Zurich suburb have forced the assisted-suicide group Dignitas out of its premises, according to a July 13 report on the Web site of the German magazine Spiegel Online.

Since 1998, around 700 people have come to the Dignitas center to put an end to their lives. According to the article, the largest group of clients is from Germany, with Britain in second place.

Earlier, in June, the Swiss Senate called on the government to draft a law aimed at improving controls of organizations offering assisted suicide. The National Commission on Biomedical Ethics, a government advisory panel, has also recommended increased state supervision of organizations such as Dignitas.

July also saw a court in the Swiss city of Basel sentence Peter Baumann to three years in prison for having helped three people with psychological problems commit suicide, the agency Swissinfo reported July 6.

Baumann, a retired psychologist, helped the people die between January 2001 and January 2003. According to the court, Baumann acted out of egoistic motives, hoping to obtain public recognition of his methods. The judges, however, defined his conduct as “inhuman,” and criticized his behavior as negligent.

#### Care, not death

During his trip to Austria, Benedict XVI raised the issue of euthanasia in his Sept. 7 speech to members of government and the diplomatic corps. Saying that the issue was of “great concern” to him, the Pope added that he feared tacit or explicit pressures on the elderly and ill to put an end to their lives.

“The proper response to end-of-life suffering is loving care and accompaniment on the journey toward death — especially with the help of palliative care — and not ‘actively assisted death,’” the Pontiff stated. He also called for reforms in the social welfare and health systems in order to assist people who are terminally ill.

Some of Canada’s bishops also addressed euthanasia earlier this year. In April the Ontario episcopal conference published a brochure titled “Going to the House of the Father: A Statement on the Dignity and Destiny of Human Life.”

“It seems a cruel twist of history that societies with such great medical capabilities are turning against the disabled and sick — with lethal results,” the introduction stated.

The bishops insisted that protecting life is not just a Christian or religious argument, but a basic human right. “To permit the killing of the disabled, frail, sick or suffering, even if motivated by a misplaced compassion, requires a prior judgment that such lives are not worth living,” they said. “No one forfeits the right to life because of illness or disability.”

“Unless the right to life is secure, there can be no sure foundation for any human rights,” they added.

The statement also explained that there is a difference between deliberately causing death and unduly prolonging life. We are not morally obliged, the bishops said, to prolong life if the means used are unduly burdensome or cause additional suffering and when there is little hope of recovery.

The bishops also recommended that Christians not neglect the soul and that they should draw comfort from the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection. Suffering and death for Christians, they continued, is not only a matter for medicine.

#### Disabled concerns

Another source of opposition to euthanasia comes from groups representing disabled people, as the Los Angeles Times reported Aug. 6. According to the article, one of the reasons why legislative proposals to allow medically assisted suicide have failed in California in the past few years is the hostility of the disabled’s rights movement.

A combination of legalized euthanasia and pressure to cut increasing costs in the health care system could lead to the withdrawal of treatment for the disabled. The Los Angeles Times quoted a number of disabled people, active in groups who have fought against assisted-suicide proposals.

“The conditions I have are expensive to treat, and it would be a lot cheaper for the health care system to just let my health go to the point where I would want to die,” said Los Angeles activist Laura Remson Mitchell, who suffers from multiple sclerosis, kidney disease and diabetes.

#### Legal leniency

Other concerns arise from the increasing reluctance by some courts to punish family members who help a sick relative commit suicide. The application of the law in Britain in recent years has been eroded to the point where courts are reluctant to punish those who say they help kill someone out of love, commented Robert Verkaik, law editor for the British newspaper the Independent in an article published May 8.

Among other examples, Verkaik noted a case from October 2006, when a man who helped his terminally ill wife to die was set free with just a nine-month suspended sentence.

Earlier, in March, a French court convicted a doctor for poisoning a terminally ill cancer patient, reported the Associated Press on March 15. In spite of his guilt, the tribunal in southwestern Perigueux sentenced Laurence Tramois to just a one-year suspended prison sentence for his role in the Aug. 25, 2003, death of Paulette Druais in the nearby town of Saint-Astier.

Misguided compassion seems destined to lead to the deaths of still more people as pressures to ease restrictions on assisted

suicide continue.



## [No Comments](#)

**Leave a Comment**

[trackback address](#)

\_\_\_\_\_ **name**(required)

\_\_\_\_\_ **email** (will not be published) (required)

\_\_\_\_\_ **url**

☐ Notify me of follow-up comments via email.

---



2

## • Recent Posts

- [Aborting Viable Lives](#)
- [Media Benefits and Dangers](#)
- [Tornielli's Pius Passion; Quinn's Family Offensive](#)
- [Escaping Poverty: Interview With Archbishop Silvano Tomasi](#)
- [Prostitution: Legal Work or Slavery?](#)
- [Debunking the Papal "Euthanasia"](#)
- [Regensburg Revisited \(Part 3\): Interview With Father James Schall](#)
- [Regensburg Revisited \(Part 2\): Interview With Father James Schall](#)
- [Regensburg Revisited \(Part 1\)](#)
- [When Bioethics Turned Secular](#)
- [Confession Comeback](#)
- [Catholic Schools in the Spotlight](#)
- [Cardinal Lozano Barragán on Future of Health Care](#)
- [Why Technology Needs Ethics](#)
- [Francis and Clare: In Love, But With Whom?](#)

## • Archives