

WHO ENDS LIFE?

We each face darkness in life, for sin and its attending sicknesses of mind and body blight our lives. Tragically, some opt out by suicide (killing themselves), while others campaign for euthanasia (the right to ask a professional to end our suffering [from Greek, meaning “good death”]). Yet, no amount of pain scrubs from our hearts God’s law. Its prohibition against murder includes suicide and euthanasia, which explains why neither is readily accepted or without stigma.

THE CONDITIONING OF OUR THINKING

Since we have been created free agents, suicide will always be with us. Euthanasia, though, comes and goes throughout history. In pre-Christian times, Greek and Roman physicians were known to offer life-ending drugs to patients contrary to the Hippocratic Oath formulated in the fifth century B.C., but the Judeo-Christian worldview, rooted in God’s law, opposed and decreased the practice.

Ironically, the theologian Thomas Aquinas (1226–75) opened the door to the recovery of euthanasia. His Rule of Double Effect taught that to prevent harm, another may be justified. Much later, Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) depicted the “Tragic hero” character type who abandons one ethical value to pursue another of higher value.

Only in 1872 did the modern debate take off when a non-physician, Samuel Williams, spoke to the Birmingham Speculative Club in the U.K. arguing for the “mercy-killing” of those with untreatable illnesses. The subsequent debate among American and British physicians led, in 1915, to Dr. Harry Haiselden in Chicago recommending that the newborn, with parental consent, be left to die without treatment. Thereafter, euthanasia increased during the Great Depression but it decreased sharply after World War II in light of the influence of Eugenics on Hitler’s death camps.

Alas, memories fade. Thus, there were endeavors in the West in the 1960s and ’70s to legalize euthanasia. Once they failed, lobbyists softened their terminology preferring to talk instead of “assisted suicide,” thus shifting the focus

from the role of the professional to the individual’s choice. Today, the verbiage has softened further to “assisted dying” so evading the stigma of suicide.

THE KILLING OF OUR BODIES

Presently, the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill is before the British Parliament, so titled that it obscures from the public the proactive killing of men and women. Although 20 percent of the populace believes the bill includes hospice care and over 50 percent life-prolonging treatment, it has in view not to palliative care to improve quality of life, or involuntary euthanasia (the necessary increase of morphine), but the consensual killing of patients.

Curiously, it is but 21 years since Dr. Harold Shipman (1946–2004) hung himself in his U.K. cell having killed an estimated 250 patients. Some believe he sought to remove those he deemed a burden to the healthcare system, and others that the power of life and death got to him.

Meanwhile, in America, Dr. Jack Kevorkian (1928–2011) gained notoriety by illegally claiming the right to assist in the suicides of more than 100 patients, in some cases against the patient’s will. He thus exposed the morphing of traditional science into an overreaching scientism.

No one, though, has done more to promote the issue internationally than Swiss lawyer, Ludwig Minelli, the founder of the *Dignitas* house near Zurich. Switzerland, legalized assisted suicide in 1942, yet *Dignitas* remains the only entity offering it to foreigners. Minelli has thus encouraged a “suicide tourism” for what he labels “the last human right”—a “good death.” To date, Americans, Germans, and Britons have taken most advantage of it.

As of November 2024, six European countries have legalized assisted suicide: Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Spain, and Austria. Elsewhere, Canada, most of Australia, New Zealand, and ten U.S. states, plus Washington D.C. accept various forms of euthanasia or assisted suicide. Thus, the question looms large, who ends life, God or man?

(Image above: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/379498706070377606/>)





WHO OWNS LIFE?

It is no surprise that since, in the prevailing culture of death, the West claims the right to kill healthy unborn babies (in some jurisdictions up to birth), there is a growing clamor for the legal right to kill the dying (as a start).

WHAT HAS DRIVEN THE CULTURE OF DEATH?

First, there is *rationalism*. Prior to the late-eighteenth-century Enlightenment, it was generally believed that our lives are gifts from God. He determines when, where, and for how long we live. The *philosophes*, however, spread the idea that man, being autonomous of God, guides his life not by God's law but by the power of his reasoning. Thus, end-of-life questions are resolved not by what God has said of them, but by *our* right to determine *our* lives.

Second, there is *romanticism*. Into the nineteenth century, the *philosophes'* emphasis on the mind was superseded by the romantic stress on feelings. The romantic victory over the rationalists required the maintenance of the rationalist belief that we are independent of God. Whereas the rationalists accepted from God only what suited their thinking, the romanticists accepted but what accorded with their emotions. Today, the rationalist argues that, "It is my life and I will do with it what I want."; the romanticist that, "It is my suffering and I will end it as I like."

Third, there is *scientism*. Historically, Christians have highly valued science as the study of God's creation. From the first positing of the theory of evolution, however, they detected the back-door attempt to popularize atheism, thereby freeing man from any and all accountability to his Maker. On this reckoning, we die, and that is it. Thus, end-of-life questions focus on but this side of the veil.

Furthermore, whereas Christianity distinguishes God's creation of humans in his image from that of animals after their kind, evolution knows no such distinction. Thus, suicide and assisted suicide, although regrettable, are not only a legitimate personal choice but are of no more significance than putting down a dog. That is the theory anyway, yet we may ask why, if evolution is as factual as it is made out to be, we debate the euthanizing of family and friends but not of beloved pets or stray dogs? The more radical proponents of euthanasia are at one and the same time more callous and more consistent. Most, though, know in their consciences that there is more to euthanizing a human than an animal.

Fourth, there is *Postmodernism*. The denial of objective truth in favor of the subjective creation of "my truth" has facilitated the repackaging of grim realities. The killing of babies in the womb is now sold as the woman's reproductive rights (although the mantra "My body, my choice" is

deemed only to apply to the mother's and not the child's). Likewise, the termination of the elderly is sold as compassion or dignity, even though assisted suicide is wide open to the ulterior motives of the providers.

WHAT WILL RESTORE THE CULTURE OF LIFE?

First, there is *the fear of God*. This, Holy Scripture teaches us, is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). Such fear refers not to a slavish fear of God, for God sent his Son to free us from such fear (John 8:32), but to a reverence for God, owning that he is our Maker. He numbers our days (Psalm 139:16), orders our steps, and calls us to put our trust in him for life and for death.



Second, there is *the power of God*. In creating us, he has placed within us such a zest for life that, normatively, we desire to live long full lives, avoiding dangers and excesses that reduce

their quality or span. *Dignitas* is a proof of this. Currently possessing nearly 12,000 members, between the founding of *Dignitas* in 1998 and the end of 2023, "just" 3916 assisted suicides occurred. (www.express.co.uk/news/world/580164/)

Third, there is *the wisdom of God*. Since his foolishness outstrips man's wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:25), how much more so does his wisdom. It behooves us, then, to entrust to God and not to ourselves our end-of-life loss of ability, pain, or dignity. God, the author of life, has his purposes in all of life, from our first to last breath and in joy and pain. Assisted suicide, truncates these purposes, contradicts the doctor's Hippocratic Oath, is liable to mistaken judgments (as in the report, *Dignitas* put to death a healthy woman in 2005), and tends toward looser criteria. Canada, legalizing assisted suicide in 2016, was up by 2023 to nearly 20 percent of such deaths, no longer just for those foreseeable, but, as from 2021, for chronic debilitating conditions, with likely expansion to the mentally ill.

Fourth, there is *the kindness of God*. Man distastes the idea that God can and likely does use end-of-life debilities, pains, and indignities to draw sinful men and women to himself. After all, pain is typically more spiritually productive than joy. Yet, amid our dying, pondering our regrets and the future, God is well able to work in us repentance toward him and faith in Jesus Christ. After all. "*it is appointed for man to die once, . . . after that comes the judgment*" (Hebrews 9:27). Eternity will reveal, then, God's kindness to many on their death beds, and how assisted suicide, marketed as compassionate, cut short the opportunity of the dying to receive eternal life.





WHO RECEIVES LIFE?

The debating of such end-of-life issues is not just a matter of general cultural interest, but one which soon enough shall become very personal to each of us. How we die shall, more often than not, say much about how we have lived and where we shall spend eternity, for our final choices usually reflect our philosophy of life.

The sources of today's culture of death—rationalism, romanticism, scientism, and postmodernism, to which we add materialism and hedonism (pleasure-seeking)—have largely dried the souls of the people, leaving most, according to surveys, believing that premature death is preferable to a loss of pleasure. Add to that the general ignorance of the exponential good God can bring out of our final days, and we learn that what has been sold as a good death is actually a most impoverished one.

It is to our profit, then, to expose ourselves to the Christian vision of a good death. But let's be clear: Christians are not morbid. We enjoy the lives God has given us, and, through faith in Christ, have already entered into eternal life. Yet we, too, in a fallen world experience death and want for others our hope of a good death. Thus, Christianity has built up quite a genre of literature called the *ars moriendi*. When interest in the art of dying began to fade, the Methodist leader John Wesley (1703–91) discovered Jeremy Taylor's *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying* (1650) and subsequently afforded the Methodists a reputation for their good deaths. Consider, then, three aspects of them. (www.todayonline.com/singapore/)

THE PREPARATION

First, we prepare for death because we know our sins bar us from entering into heaven. Thus, to die well we must first face the dark truth about ourselves. By nature we are hostile to God, estranged from him, and offensive to him. Without Christ as our mediator we shall receive in death the full weight of God's justice and be forever shut out from his holy presence.

Second, we prepare for death because the Devil does all in his power to preclude us from going there. Our preparation takes the form of a fight against his endeavors to lure us into sin (James 1:14), and a lament on account of the havoc he has wreaked on the world. He is, Jesus taught, as a thief who has come to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). Although now defeated at Christ's cross, we yearn to gain through death a better visual of Christ's victory.

Third, we prepare for death because for those readied by Christ it is the gateway to a life qualitatively and quantita-

tively better than this one. Scripture and experience teach us that this life, apart from God, is meaningless and fleeting. *"Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, all is vanity!"* (Ecclesiastes 1:2; 12:8). Yet, through death we enter into nearer unending fellowship with God, first in heaven as it is now, and then, when Christ returns, in heaven in its final state, on a new earth without sin, separation, or death.

THE PROCESS

Our preparation beforehand is vital, for we know not whether our dying will be sudden or prolonged. When drawn out, our preparation fortifies us in two ways.

First, *we go to our deathbeds with our salvation settled*. We rehearse to ourselves the great truths of God's Word. Christ, we rejoice, came not to condemn us but to acquit us (John 3:17–18). *"We have been justified by faith, . . . [and] have peace [reconciliation] with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Romans 5:1). We cherish the memorable testimonies in God's Word. The penitent thief dying next to Christ knew he was a lawbreaker, as do we. He knew, impaled on the cross, he could offer nothing for his salvation, and neither can we. He knew that his only hope in death was in looking to Jesus, as do we. *"Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom,"* the thief pled.

How precious was Jesus' reply, *"Today, you shall be with me in paradise"* (Luke 23:42–43).

Second, *we go to our deathbed with our suffering softened*. Our discomforts and humiliations are our last afflictions. Our Saviour, in our flesh, endured much worse for us. He atoned for our sin, also exempli-

fying how we may die well: *"for the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross"* (Hebrews 12:2). Thus, we press confidently into our last trial: *"Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever"* (Psalm 23:6).

THE PASSING

Finally, we exhale our last breath. This moment, the Bible assures us, is precious in God's sight (Psalm 116:15). Jesus unpacked this, telling his followers that although he was going away to prepare their place in heaven *he* would return to receive them to himself (John 14:3). Christ, then, sacralizes the believer's passing. In one moment, he comes, our bodies die, and we find ourselves as souls immediately at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). There and then, our *"path of life"* enters into eternal *"fullness of joy"* and *"pleasures forevermore"* (Psalm 16:11). Hitherto plagued by sin, we echo David, *"I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness"* (Psalm 17:15). How Christians thank God for this!

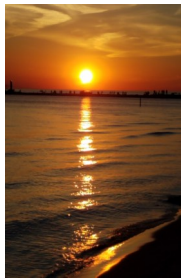


Residential Address:



WHO RETURNS TO LIFE?

The theme of assisted suicide has inevitably focused us on death. How grim that its advocates end on this note, with nothing of hope but a potion or a syringe. Not so, the Christian. Our good news for a groaning world, is not only that Christ offers a glorious future for our souls, but for our bodies as well. Note in this regard:



The resurrection of Christ. How silly the claim that no one has returned to tell us of the afterlife. Christ rose from death after three days. He did so as an assurance from heaven that his atonement for sin has been accepted by God the Father, and, to use a first-century agricultural analogy, as the firstfruits of the bodily resurrection of his people when he returns. Coinciding with the rebirth of the cosmos (Matt. 19:28; Rom. 8:18-23), the believer's resurrected body will be free of all taints of the fall of man, and shall be imperishable. We shall be without tears, pain, death, and mourning (Revelation 21:4). Our redeemed bodies shall be reunited with our already redeemed souls, which Christ shall bring with him when he returns (1 Thessalonians 4:14). Thus, we shall become psychosomatically whole, ready for eternal life on the new earth.

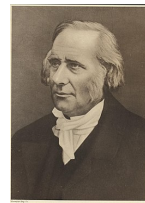
The righteousness of Christ. Scripture warns us that while the returning Christ will be ***“marveled at by all those who believe”*** (2 Thessalonians 1:10), those who, in unbelief, have dishonored God, disregarded his law, spurned his offer of forgiveness in Christ will also be raised. To them, the sight of Christ will be traumatic, for his next coming will not be to save the world, but to judge in righteousness all who have opted to remain condemned. Their bodily resurrection, then, shall be one ***“to shame and everlasting contempt”*** (Daniel 12:2; Acts 24:15; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). How, then, will you be raised? To an eternal life celebrating God's grace or to a shameful eternal death? The former we pray!



WHO WANTS LIFE?

Over 3,400 years ago, Moses, the great leader of Israel, in coming to his life's end, addressed the Hebrew people. He lamented that for all God had done for them, they were ***“a nation void of counsel”*** and that there was ***“no understanding in them.”*** He then remarked, ***“If they were wise, they would understand this; they would discern their latter end”*** (Deut. 32:28-29). The principle holds more broadly: It does not go well for nations who have God's wise counsel (on the heart, in the Scriptures, or both) but ignore it.

While we cannot single-handedly change the public discourse or manipulate the votes of national parliaments, we have a limited opportunity to pursue a new life in Christ so as to be ready ourselves to meet God. Rejecting what one Canadian doctor called in 2013 “a one-way ticket to Zurich,” we nevertheless have a one-way ticket to the day of reckoning. (Image: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>.)



The grace of God, though, is, as Scottish churchman and philanthropist Thomas Guthrie (1803–73) put it, the dawn of heaven. It is wise, then, to seek with all our hearts to be reconciled to God. If the campaign for assisted suicide teaches us anything, it is that we shall not always have the time, energies, or faculties to do so. Find, then, that time of day, that place of solace, to feel after God, to know your sins forgiven and gain a genuine hope of heaven. Track down that old dusty Bible or purchase one (e.g., New King James or English Standard Version). John's Gospel would be a good place to begin. As you open its pages ask God to show you himself, yourself, and the relevance to you of Jesus Christ. Search out a church where the Bible is taught and the good news of the gospel of Christ is proclaimed. Throughout, do not quit seeking God until he has made himself known to you. He rewards those who diligently seek him (Hebrews 11:6).

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