



## **Euthanasia in case of non-terminal psychic suffering**

**The Belgian Medical Society Sint Luke expresses its great concern about the decision of the Belgian 'group' of the Brothers of Charity to provide euthanasia in case of suffering in non-terminal situations. It is of opinion that the justification of this decision is insufficient both from a personalistic as well as a christian perspective. Euthanasia the non-terminal psychic suffering is not in the interest of the patient, nor in the interest of society, and harms the christian witness of the congregation in our secular culture.**

The '[vision text](#)' of March of this year about this subject defends 'relational care ethics on a personalistic basis' by which 'a value never can be seen as an absolute value that has unconditional priority over other values' but 'as a fundamental value that can be weighed against other values in a personalistic vision of man'. This includes the fundamental value of the 'worthiness of life for its protection'. According to the Belgian Brothers of Charity, this value can be weighed against the value of the patients autonomy. This means that all values, the worthiness of life for its protection included, are relative.

Very different values are being put on the same level in this way, in order to weigh them against each other. The value of the autonomy of the patient, however, can never be put on the same level as the dignity of life, while in the case of euthanasia it is exactly the autonomy of the patient that is being eliminated: administering death, even if explicitly requested by the 'autonomous' patient, destroys his or her autonomy once and for all. The argumentation behind euthanasia on the basis of an autonomous decision of the patients will is therefore self refuting, and this is not limited to the psychic suffering.

Furthermore, experts have sufficiently proven that there are no objective grounds for euthanasia in the case of psychic suffering in a non-terminal stage of life. Many of them hold that euthanasia has to be forbidden in those cases, especially because psychic suffering is in many cases not without hope. Also, one can raise serious questions about the ability of the psychic sufferer to decide in an 'autonomous way' about the end of his or her life. This opens widely the door for practices where *de facto* the people surrounding the patient (medical staff, family, ...) is going to decide about the life of the psychic sufferer. In this way, euthanasia can too easily become a 'practical' solution for a 'problem' in society and in the family.

Finally, the Belgian 'group' of the Brothers of Charity nowhere refers to God or to the Scriptures. The personalism that they adhere to is 'relational', but within a vision on mankind where there is no place for (the relationship with) God, to whose image and likeness also the psychically-suffering person - according to the Christian tradition to which the Belgian Brothers of Love also claim to adhere - was created. According to this tradition, every human being is equipped with an immortal soul and hopes, and *can* find his eternal destiny in God. The possible consequences for the patient, from 'the perspective of eternity' or God, are completely lacking in the Belgian 'vision text'. However, from this religious perspective, there are reasons to worry about active life termination or euthanasia.

The Belgian Medical Association Sint Luke can only regret the decision. This is not in the interest of the patient, nor of society, which is now even more and apparently 'in a christian way' legitimized to 'get rid of' this vulnerable group of people, based on the subjective judgment of mentally ill patients. This decision is therefore also not in the interest of the Christian testimony in the society of this so well respected congregation, which has done so much good, and still does, for the psychic sufferers, and whose general superior, from Rome, persists in giving such a different and sounding example.

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the trilingual trimestrial magazine of the Belgian Medical Association Saint Luke.

*Provisional translation from Dutch into English by the author.*

## Links

- [Belgian Catholic psychiatric hospitals 'adjust' their view of euthanasia](#) - MercatorNet
- [Brother Rene Stockman is devastated by news that Catholic psychiatric hospitals will offer euthanasia](#) - MercatorNet