

Center For America Reclaimed

Quarterly Newsletter

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To serve and to magnify God is the greatest of all endeavors. We seek to do that by applying God's wisdom and truth to all areas of life. This quarter, we will be addressing the issue of Oregon's Physician Assisted Suicide law currently before the U.S. Supreme Court.

A Biblical Perspective on Physician Assisted Suicide Laws

by Doug Anderson

On October 5, 2005, the United States Supreme Court heard oral arguments on the State of Oregon's effort to defend its law that allows physicians of patients diagnosed with a terminal illness to prescribe a lethal dose of drugs so the patient can end his life (*Gonzales v. Oregon*). The issue before the Court is narrowly drawn: whether a physician assisting patients to kill themselves constitutes a "legitimate medical purpose" under the federal Controlled Substances Act. As such, the key issue before the Supreme Court is not the overall constitutional legitimacy of the law, but whether the federal or state government is the proper authority to control and enforce this procedure. While the Court will look at the case in the context of "federalism" (federal vs state authority), as other states consider similar laws, citizens must look at the issue in terms of overall legitimacy.

Oregon's Physician Assisted Suicide law is based on citizen ballot initiatives passed in 1994 and again in 1997. The law is the only one of its kind in the nation and proponents assert that it provides the terminally ill with a "peaceful and humane death." In order for the law to be invoked, two doctors must certify that patients wanting to end their lives are (1) mentally competent to make the decision and (2) have been diagnosed, by an attending physician, with a terminal illness that will lead to death within six months. Once that certification is made, the attending physician writes a prescription for a lethal dose of drugs that the patient then administers. Since the law took effect, more than 200 people have used it to prematurely end their lives. To examine this issue from a Biblical perspective, we should ask ourselves three questions, each of which is examined below.

Is the law based on a proper focus? If a problem is framed by a wrong focus, the solution that is provided for that problem will invariably be wrong. Such is the case with Oregon's law. The purpose of the law is aimed at allowing "terminally ill" patients to end the physical suffering and mental anguish of their condition immediately rather than waiting until death occurs naturally. The focus is solely on the physical and mental aspects of the patient's life and assumes a person's body can be disposed of however and whenever a person wishes. This reflects a secular humanist

worldview that believes the physical and mental realms are all there is, and that God, the Creator of that person's life, is irrelevant to the discussion. It ignores the reality that life consists of more than a physical body and that death consists of more than a physical death. The law is predicated on the presumption that God does not exist or, if He does, He has no power, authority and relevance to the issue. It is intrinsically based on false premises; that "I am my own," that the timing and means of my death is personal to me, and that I have a "right to die" that no one can take from me. A Biblical view teaches just the opposite. Contrary to the false premises of secular humanists, our bodies are not our own to dispose of anyway or whenever we please. There is no "right to die." As our Creator, God has ownership rights to our bodies. As our Redeemer, through Jesus Christ, God claims redemption rights. In the words of 1 Corinthians 6:20, "*You are not your own; you were bought with a price.*" It is God, not man, who has legitimate authority over our bodies. Any focus that encourages patients to believe they alone have the right to kill themselves is sorely misguided.

Moreover, this focus ignores the spiritual consequences of a person committing suicide. This nation has long had laws criminalizing an attempt to commit suicide based on the Biblical premise, our laws were founded on, that to do so is a violation of God's domain. There is a spiritual death that leads to an eternal destination that is real. Any state contemplating similar laws does its citizens a grave disservice by ignoring or minimizing the serious and eternal spiritual consequences of its laws.

This law also has a wrong focus on another level. It perverts the very nature of the medical practice and the role of a physician in society. Historically, by virtue of the Hippocratic Oath and its very nature, the practice of medicine was always designed to seek physical healing and cures. Determining the right mix of poisons to kill someone does not constitute a medical "prescription" just because it is carried out by a person with a medical license and it is so deemed by the state. A deceptive use of semantics does not change the fact that offering distraught patients the means to kill themselves runs counter to the inherent nature of medical practice. As such, it is a perversion of the term for the Oregon authorities to describe this process as a legitimate "medical procedure."

What is the proper authority to take human life? A secular humanist worldview does not recognize any authority outside of man. Since such a worldview asserts that human life was created by pre-existing physical matter through a long series of random mistakes, or "mutations", there is then no God to be accountable to. Man and government have the authority to do what they want, subject to the whims of existing laws, and unconfined by any timeless and objective criteria. It is interesting to note that, without God's absolute standards to restrain them, secular humanists tend to support the taking of innocent human life such as in the cases of abortion, euthanasia or assisted suicide, where persons are either completely helpless, in emotionally or physically weak states, or in states of hopelessness or depression. However, a Biblical view points to God, not man, as the proper authority over when human

life can be intentionally and prematurely taken.

According to scripture, God has delegated to man the authority to intentionally take human life in three situations. First, God authorizes the killing of humans in war under limited conditions, primarily defense of a nation against wrongful attack. Second, God authorizes killing in defense of self or others as indicated in Exodus 22:2 and Luke 22:36. Lastly, God delegates authority to human government to take human life in limited conditions through capital punishment in accordance with Genesis 9:6 and other passages. Notice that each of these limited situations involves the killing of “non-innocent” human life; either people who are attacking another, or have otherwise unlawfully taken the life of another. This is why a Christian can and should oppose abortion: the taking of innocent life for which God has not delegated His authority, while supporting capital punishment, the taking of non-innocent life for which God has delegated His authority.

God has never given His authority to mankind to commit suicide, or to the state to authorize it. There is no “right” to die granted by God and government has no authority to grant such a right. Deuteronomy 30:19-20 makes the choice clear: *“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: that thou mayest love the Lord thy God. . .”* God alone determines the boundaries of life. Neither man nor the state has such authority. Sanctioning any means for persons to take their own lives makes the

state an accomplice in causing not only the terminal patient’s physical death but, more critically, the patient’s spiritual death as well.

Does the law provide a proper solution? Clearly, the Oregon voters sought a solution based on their compassion for suffering individuals. But, as noted above, by limiting their focus to the physical realm, their compassion is misplaced. When an emotionally distraught individual indicates he or she wants to commit suicide, we typically, and rightfully so, try to talk them out of it by telling them they have a reason to live; by trying to give them the hope they are missing. We remind them of the lives of others they can positively impact despite the fact we do not know how much longer that person has left to live. They could die tomorrow in a car accident, yet we still encourage them because regardless of how long or short their life may be, there is always good that can come from the time we have left and God can be glorified in the process.

The issue is not how long we have to live, but what we do to honor God and serve others with the time God has given us to live. Perhaps that is why God never tells us how long we will live. He wants us to trust in Him, draw closer to Him and do what we can for as long as we are able. A terminal diagnosis does not change that reality. To do otherwise ignores our life’s purpose, ignores the value of demonstrating love to others, magnified when done by one with a terminal diagnosis, and ignores the value and preciousness of our life to God. Such an approach also ignores the fact that, even over a few months of life, there is much to live for. Life is not all

about self. God teaches that life is about others and those patients, if indeed they have only a few months to live, may still have much they can do to demonstrate a real example of selflessness and courage that will be remembered beyond the grave. For that sake alone, we should pour hope and love into their lives. Terminally ill patients don't need to be encouraged to get out of our way quickly, they need to be loved, encouraged, and given hope. That is true compassion.

Finally, physician assisted suicide ignores the most important element of all, the real existence and power of God. Almost everyone can think of a person who was supposed to have died from some terminal condition that did not; or who was given only a few weeks or months to live and lived for years, and was able to bless others in the process. God rules and reigns over everything, even the worst of situations. If a person is still alive, we can be assured that God has a purpose and a reason for that life. We should not undermine what He may be trying to accomplish in the spiritual life of that terminally diagnosed patient or their family and friends. Perhaps that diagnosis will allow them to hear an encouraging word of hope from another or allow them to be introduced to their Savior, Jesus Christ, for the first time.

The Biblical view teaches us that life consists of far more than just the physical and the mental elements; and life is much more than just about self. Oregon's law provides the expedient solution of death at a time when patients are emotionally distraught, weak and without hope. That is not compassion and it is not a solution based on the truth of God; it is a solution based on the

shallowness of a vain philosophy that denies God or His power. While the world offers terminally diagnosed patients no hope, God offers hope; while the world offers no healing, God offers that healing; and while the world offers no solution other than death, God offers them a chance to meet or re-commit to their Savior and Lord; a chance to change their eternal destiny before it is too late; a chance not only for life, but eternal life.

As the Supreme Court focuses on which governmental institution has authority over this issue, they will likely ignore the higher law, the "laws of nature and of nature's God" that was set forth as our nation's legal standard in the Declaration of Independence. That law would point them to the considerations set forth in this article that have been ignored by Oregon's law. The secular humanist worldview has limited the debate to the physical and mental aspects of life while artificially censoring out the most important considerations of the spiritual domain. Citizens considering similar laws in the future should not make the same mistake.

Providential History Corner

Public school lessons on the Pilgrims typically focus on the benevolence of the Indians and lack positive accounts of the Pilgrims, especially as it pertains to their faith. A great resource and first hand account of the early days of the Pilgrims in America is Cotton Mather's two volume work entitled, "*Magnalia Christi Americana*" or "The Great Works of Christ in America," first published in London in 1702 and now in reprint as of

1979. It contains numerous positive accounts of God's supernatural provision for the faithful Pilgrims. One such account describes a period of terrible drought from the middle of May to the middle of July that threatened to destroy their crops.

"In this distress they set apart a day for fasting and prayer, to deprecate the calamity that might bring them to fasting through famine; in the morning of which day there was no sign of any rain; but before the evening the sky was overcast with clouds, which went not away without such easy, gentle, and yet plentiful showers, as revived a great part of their decayed corn, for a comfortable harvest. The Indians themselves took notice of this answer given from heaven to the supplication of this devout people; and one of them said, 'Now I see that the Englishman's God is a good God; for he hath heard you, and sent you rain, and that without such tempest and thunder as we use to have with our rain; which after our Powawing for it, breaks down the corn; whereas your corn stands whole and good still; surely, your God is a good God.'" (Vol. 1, p. 57).

We encourage you to read this and other resources that remind us of the power and provision of Almighty God.

The Latest Happenings

This month, on November 12th, the Center for America Reclaimed will host

its first seminar entitled, "Principles for Reclaiming a Nation." This seminar will be videotaped so those who are unable to attend the seminar can have an opportunity to see it later.

We also hope to have our new website up and running sometime in November. As we continue to develop helpful resources for the Christian community, they will be posted on the webpage for easy access. Currently we will have copies of the quarterly newsletters as well as audio access of Doug Anderson's recent five-part teaching series on the Foundations of a Biblical Worldview.

Notice to Intercessory Prayer Warriors

We ask that you pray for the November seminar to bear much good fruit in the hearts and minds of the people who attend; pray for God's truth to take deep root and not return void. Please also pray that Dan Noel and Doug Anderson continue to have divine appointments with key individuals God wants us to work with, and pray for God's direction to be made clear to them as they make ministry decisions on next steps. May God receive glory and honor in what we do and how we do it, and may God bless each of you for your sacrifice of prayer.

Acknowledgements

Please accept our gratitude to all of you who are praying and otherwise supporting the Center for America Reclaimed. If you wish to contact us, you may reach us at the following e-mail address: americareclaimed@msn.com.