

## EUTHANASIA

# Assisted suicide: Pegoraro continues Paglia's line at the PAV

LIFE AND BIOETHICS

09\_07\_2025



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In an interview published in the Italian newspaper La Repubblica on 6 July, the new president of the Pontifical Academy for Life (PAV), Monsignor Renzo Pegoraro, expressed the Academy's position on the issue of assisted suicide. The interview took

place a few days before the start of the debate in Parliament, after the Italian Constitutional Court had opened up this possibility, setting certain limits and calling for legislative action.

Pegoraro was appointed by Pope Leo XIV to head the PAV on 27 May, following the departure of his controversial predecessor, Monsignor Vincenzo Paglia, with whom he had collaborated as chancellor. Many observers saw this move as a “turning point” desired by Leo XIV in the running of the Academy; others noted that Paglia's “resignation” was due to his age and that, in any case, Pegoraro had participated in the Academy's previous and controversial policy. The new president's interview may be indicative of the path that the PAV intends to take in the ‘post-Paglia’ era. On assisted suicide, the Church's doctrine is absolutely clear, as Nuova Bussola has sought to recall in some recent articles. Human life is not available for moral reasons, and because it is always a gift from God, and those who deny this unavailability reject both man and God, or rather reject man because they reject God.

The Church's idea is always uniformly moral and based on faith. The Church's task is to proclaim these truths, explain their human and divine reasons, encourage behaviour that helps people in difficulty, including religious help in moments of acute difficulty in life, and urge politicians not to pass laws that contradict this principle, even if this takes the form of the “lesser evil” or closeness to particular cases. There must be closeness to individual people in pain, as well as prevention and care for pain, and this certainly requires a personal and not a generic approach, but this cannot take place in contrast to the universal principle – universal because it is real – of the unavailability of human life, nor as exceptions to it for various reasons. In the interview, Monsignor Pegoraro does not always follow this path, but ends up accepting some questionable assumptions and proposing some paths without subjecting either to critical examination in the light of the Christian truth that the Church preserves and proposes.

Among the assumptions, we would point out the “conditional decriminalisation” imposed by the Constitutional Court ruling that is prompting Italian Parliament to legislate. Those criteria, which Pegoraro now accepts, were not and are not in accordance with natural and evangelical morality, and the Church is not bound to follow the rulings of political institutions in all cases, since the truth it proclaims is superior to any earthly power. Among the paths proposed by Pegoraro, the (usual) dialogue could not be missing. He condemns assisted suicide, which, according to him, “is always a defeat for the sick person, for the family, for medicine itself and for society”. “It is also true,” he continues, ‘that in certain situations the mystery of the mind and heart of the

person remains, sometimes impenetrable and indecipherable. But that the only solution envisaged is to commit suicide and ask for help to commit suicide is still a defeat for everyone'. The condemnation is not expressly stated, no absolutely negative ethical principle is enunciated, it remains somewhat hidden behind the motivation of "defeat for everyone", but it is there.

But then there is also the proposal for dialogue, which further clouds the already unclear picture. Pegoraro says that we are in a "pluralistic and partly secularised society" and faced with a "situation that is difficult to define and resolve", so "it will be necessary to promote dialogue, find mediation, to understand clearly what forms of protection to guarantee to sick people (...) and offer good palliative care that allows them to be accompanied in the final stage of life". The reference here is to Law 38/2010 on palliative care and Law 219/2017 on informed consent, without mentioning that these too presented ethical problems.

Appropriately, the interviewer, Iacopo Scaramuzzi, recalls that *Il piccolo lessico di fine vita* (The Little Lexicon of the End of Life), published by PAV in 2024, spoke in precisely these terms: 'Contributing to finding an acceptable point of mediation between different positions'. This text was widely contested (including by Bussola) because it legitimised advance treatment directives (Dat) and considered conduct linked to assisted suicide to be legitimate. It was attributed to Paglia's line, but now it is being taken up again by the new president Pegoraro. If a bill is morally unacceptable because it violates the principle of the unavailability of human life, calling for dialogue on the eve of a parliamentary debate means being open to any unjust outcome. Dialogue is possible in search of common ground for certain practical applications if one agrees with the validity of the principle that guides them.

Dialogue without this premise means assigning a truthful meaning to dialogue: we will accept as true and good everything that dialogue produces. At this point, any behaviour in Parliament by Catholic MPs will be acceptable and even good, because it is dialogue. But who says that in a pluralistic and secularised society, only a stale little dialogue can be proposed and not the truth, to be defended in a dialogue without concessions? Is the Church allowing sociology to dictate its line? If dialogue is not apologetic of the truth, it becomes chatter. On the eve of the parliamentary debate, no bill, including that of the majority (see here), satisfies the principle. Relying on dialogue means accepting an unjust law even before dialogue begins. A defeat that is both announced and desired. As for Paglia's line, it seems to be continuing even without Paglia.