

CHURCH

Some questions for bishops on assisted suicide

LIFE AND BIOETHICS

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Thankfully, the Italian Bishops' Conference (CEI) is not the Catholic Church in Italy. It has decided that its role in the current debate on the decriminalisation of assisted suicide in Italy is to negotiate with the government to set legislative limits on evil, which would prevent more serious abuses. Even the Pontifical Academy for Life (PAV), through its president Monsignor Renzo Pegoraro, considers opposing the principle of the legitimacy

of assisted suicide to be realistic and in accordance with the Gospel, while consenting to the practical feasibility of decriminalisation. Such reasoning is akin to that of bankruptcy administrators rather than servants of Christ Jesus — apostles chosen by vocation to proclaim the Gospel of God (cf. Rom 1:1) and established to bear fruit that remains (cf. Jn 15:16).

1. First question: do these pastors really understand how human life works, both individually and in society? Are they serious in thinking that it makes sense to condemn a principle while consenting to a law that allows this principle to be contradicted? The author hopes that this is simply disorientation caused by frequenting legal labyrinths of laws, articles, paragraphs and sentences. However, the fact remains that our pastors have lost sight of the real world. If bishops, parish priests, mayors and magistrates were to go out of their way to explain how wrong, dangerous, immoral and irresponsible it is to drive at high speed — especially after consuming alcohol and drugs — but then guarantee that offenders would not suffer any consequences, what real result would their uncompromising and heartfelt defence of the principle have? Do our pastors still believe in the consequences of original sin on human nature?

2. Secondly, are these pastors fully aware of the purpose of the sacred anointing they have received? Do they remember that preaching the Gospel in all its integrity is their serious duty? Do they remember that, instead of providing light and flavour to a dark and flavourless world, if they were to focus on discussing the relative merits of electricity bills for consumers or the risks and benefits of iodised salt in the diet of hypertensive patients, they would not be fulfilling their mission? Furthermore, would they not be facing an unhappy fate, as described by Our Lord as being thrown away and trampled underfoot by men (cf. Mt 5:13)? The chilling feeling is that many of these pastors and Christians who have become like them through 'holy obedience' believe that humility asks us to let ourselves be trampled on by others. They believe that humility asks us not to exaggerate in wanting to make the light of truth shine, so as not to risk lacking charity by blinding our brothers. They believe that humility pushes us towards a camouflage that makes us indistinguishable from the rest of the world — almost a sort of perfectly fulfilled love of concealment.

3. Third question: do these pastors know what God's commandments are? Not just what they are, but what they mean? Why did the Lord take the trouble to give his people clearly defined commandments and demand that they be observed without providing any exceptions? Has the idea that the commandments are rigid extrinsic norms not gradually and imperceptibly been assimilated, despite the promotion of

courses on the 'ten words'? Is the goodness of a pastor not found in not taking them too literally, adapting them to human misery, and adapting them according to the law of *realpolitik*, allowing exceptions on a case-by-case basis and avoiding penalties for transgressors?

The point is crucial: if the divine commandments are merely external rules, then clearly a good father would adapt them to suit the situations in which his children find themselves. However, if they are the 'instruction manual' for making our humanity function properly and preventing dramatic breakdown, as a true pastor, Cardinal Giacomo Biffi, **explained** years ago, then concessions and decriminalisation make no sense and become devastating traps with only one consequence: the evil of man. In other words, if the prohibition against taking innocent life, whether one's own or another's, is related to the temporal and eternal well-being of oneself and the entire human community, then it is clear that the mere idea of pastors supporting the decriminalisation of murder/suicide contradicts the essence of the divine commandments.

It does not take a genius to understand that legislative impunity will encourage the phenomenon to spread progressively. Human nature is a slippery slope: removing the brakes is like pressing the accelerator. The fact that the bishops are not aware of this is extremely serious. It is pointless to promote good and defend principles if there are no commensurate sanctions to protect the preciousness of what is being defended. Is there any political reason that holds water? Do the Italian bishops and the leaders of the PAV realise that this is not about decriminalising the theft of a sack of potatoes, but rather deliberately committing acts aimed at killing and suicide? In other words, are they undermining the foundations of human coexistence, mutual trust, and the meaning of life? Are they aware of the direction in which human society is heading when people become accustomed to the idea that there is no penalty for helping to take another's life, or for betraying the indispensable glue of common life, which lies in the implicit protection of the lives of those around us and ourselves? Furthermore, do they realise that, by doing so, they will contribute to the further emptying of the meaning of life, which is reduced to the principle of 'quality of life', and of death, which is reduced to the cessation of a 'non-quality' biological life?

In a world that knows only death at all levels, the Italian bishops are failing in their specific duty to condemn evil in all its cunning and insidious forms and to counter those in power with the only words that can dispel the darkness and offer salvation: 'It is not lawful for you' (Mk 6:18). Tampering with a law that promotes decriminalisation will encourage acts of death and strengthen the culture of death

fuelled by these acts and this law. This is a betrayal of the mission of a true shepherd. It is also a betrayal for a pastor to remain silent about the eternal repercussions of our choices in this life. Whoever kills or contributes to killing loses the life of grace and prepares for an eternal destiny of darkness and torment. Without any decriminalisation.