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Euthanasia

By JOHN H. C. FRITZ

The word *euthanasia* (*eu*, well; *thanatos*, death) was formerly used merely to speak of an easy, painless death. It is now being used in the sense of an intentional cutting short of life in the case of disease, or illness, that may be pronounced incurable and is at the same time very painful — mercy killing. There is little literature on this subject. Consulting a number of encyclopedias, I found that some of them do not consider the subject of sufficient importance and interest to be spoken of at all; even one of the recent encyclopedias does not mention it. And those which mention it tell us that religion, law, and medical ethics condemn self-destruction in every form. To 99.9 per cent of the people the word *euthanasia*, and what it stands for, is an unknown term. Why, then, speak of it at all? Because, according to the daily press (for instance, according to the *New York Times* of September 28), fifty-four prominent Protestant clergymen of this country signed a statement which reads as follows: "A proposal has been put forward to legalize voluntary euthanasia, i. e., painless death for persons desiring it, who are suffering from incurable, fatal, and painful disease. A bill has been drafted to give effect to this, and the proposal is receiving encouragement and support from many thinking people. Such a proposal raises important issues on ethical, legal, and medical grounds. As regards the ethical issue, after giving the matter careful consideration, we wish to state that, in our opinion, voluntary euthanasia, under the circumstances above, should not be regarded as contrary to the teachings of Christ or to the principles of Christianity."

1

Can euthanasia, mercy killing, even "voluntary euthanasia," that is, painless death, for persons desiring it, be endorsed? We much hesitate even to put this question at all. Every Christian who knows the Commandment which reads: "Thou shalt not kill," and certainly every minister of the Gospel, deserving of that name, knows the answer to that question. Yet the endorsement by fifty-four prominent Protestant clergymen of "voluntary euthanasia," under the circumstances mentioned, had certain implications of which we should

not lose sight. It is most alarming to hear Protestant clergymen say that in their opinion, "after giving the matter careful consideration," "voluntary euthanasia, under the circumstances mentioned," is by them "not to be regarded as contrary to the teachings of Christ or to the principles of Christianity."

To many people it may seem to be specious reasoning that a person afflicted with a so-called incurable disease should, if he so desires, be permitted to use means to bring about for him a painless and a speedy death. The argument briefly runs thus: He must die anyway, perhaps soon at that, and in the meantime is suffering much pain—why not die now? If the principle involved in the argumentation is correct, why should a person, under the circumstances mentioned, not commit suicide—that is, after all, what he is doing—by hanging, taking poison, or in whatever way he may choose? And, furthermore, if the principle involved in the argumentation is correct, why should a person that is afflicted with an ailment which is of a lingering nature and renders him useless in this world and a burden to others not be prevailed upon to accept painless voluntary death at once? And, again, why should not a child that is born as an idiot, the cripple who can no longer earn his own living, the incurably insane who fill our asylums, and the aged who are no longer wanted in this world and are burdensome to others, all of whom might be looked upon as useless in this world and a burden to society—why should not all these be painlessly disposed of? If a man is at all permitted to take life, why not justify infanticide, before or after birth, for which specious reasons may also be advanced? And what about the patients in advanced stages of cancer and tuberculosis? All those who during their entire life are a burden to society, and even the aged who are no longer wanted, would have to live in fear that some "benevolent" relative or friend will try to persuade them or will see to it that they make a painless, speedy exit out of this world. Of course, the clergymen who signed that statement would say: "So far we do not desire to go." But have they not given encouragement to others to go to such limits?

And when is a person afflicted with an incurable disease or ailment? Who shall pronounce judgment: the individual, the physician, or the State? Likely the physician. But physicians

have often erred. This they themselves readily admit. To a certain young pastor in his twenties the attending physician said one day: "My dear sir, you are a sensible man. I can tell you that you will not recover from this illness." "Very well," said the young pastor, "I am prepared to die." But the fact is that I preached the funeral sermon for the young pastor, not when he was twenty, but when he had reached the age of eighty. A father was told by the doctor that his young child had no chance of recovery. The father said: "Doctor, I thank you for your opinion." "Not my opinion," said the physician, "but my knowledge." The fact, however, is that the child with the "incurable" disease is now a young lady very much alive. "A certain woman which had an issue of blood twelve years had suffered many things of many physicians and had spent all that she had and was nothing better, but rather grew worse." No doubt in our day such a woman would have been pronounced incurable. But Jesus healed her. (Mark 5:25-34.) And the same Jesus can still do so today, and does so. Hundreds, we should say thousands, of cases could be cited where "incurables" have been cured. Legislators who are called upon to pass a bill authorizing euthanasia ought well to consider all these implications.

2

But the endorsement of voluntary euthanasia under certain circumstances by fifty-four Protestant clergymen has even more serious implications. A minister of the Gospel who knows that God is a gracious God in Christ the Savior can bring the peace of God to sin-sick souls; and knowing the purpose of God when He lets His children suffer pain and affliction, such a minister can comfort them. A minister of the Gospel knowing these things will not say to a suffering Christian: "Die, and be gone." That would be no better comfort than was given to suffering Job by his wife, who when Job was in great agony, said to him: "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die" (Job 2:9). What a religion! What poor philosophy of life! We are horrified to write about it. It is so distasteful! The Christian conscience revolts against it! And we dread to think of what next the Modernists of our day will endorse! God have mercy upon them and upon the many souls which by them are being misled.

3

Let us abide by the Word of God, and we shall never go wrong. God's Commandment is clear. The Lord says: "Thou shalt not kill." Man's life is given him by God. Says Job: "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet Thou dost destroy me. Remember, I beseech Thee, that Thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt Thou bring me into dust again? Hast Thou not poured me out as milk and curdled me like cheese? Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh and hast fenced me with bones and sinews. Thou hast granted me life and favor, and Thy visitation hath preserved my spirit" (Job 10:8-12.) The Psalmist says: "Thou hast possessed my reins; Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvelous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from Thee when I was made in secret and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." (Ps. 139:13-16.) In his address to the Athenians Paul said: "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). When Job lost his possessions, and even his children were taken from him, he said: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away" (Job 1:21). And then we read: "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly" (Job 1:22). What God has given He alone has a right to take again. What right has a man to shorten the time of grace which God has given him? In fact, by taking his own life, as a person does who deliberately cuts it short, man becomes a murderer; "and," says the Lord, "ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:15).

4

Nor does the Christian by wrong means seek to escape the sorrows, tribulations, and trials which still come to him in this life. These very things God uses to try, to exercise, to purify, and thus to strengthen the Christian faith. Such sorrows and trials may be of a physical nature, such as sickness

and pain, loss of property, loss of loved ones, etc., or more of a spiritual nature, as doubts and misgivings concerning one's faith, or hatred, opposition, and persecution which one must endure because he is a Christian. Whatever these sorrows and trials may be, a Christian ought not seek to escape them by running away from them, by fleeing out of the world, but he should rather flee to his Savior, who has overcome sin, the world, death, and the devil and by whose power we Christians can courageously face the sorrows and trials of life and come out victoriously from underneath them, making them serve God's own purpose. The Christian has the promise that all things work together for good to them that love God (Rom. 8:28). In the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews we read: "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (v. 6). "Thou shalt also consider in thine heart that as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord, Thy God, chasteneth thee" (Deut. 8:5). "He that spareth his rod hateth his son; but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Prov. 13:24). The Christian still having within him the old Adam and living in a sinful world needs the corrective chastening of the rod. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:11). In the same chapter from the Letter to the Hebrews the Christian is told how he can bear up under the sorrows and trials of this life, to wit, "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." (Vv. 2-3.) Writing to the Christians at Rome, Paul said: "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us." (Rom. 5:1-5.) When Lazarus' sisters sent word

saying that their brother was sick, Jesus said: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby" (John 11:4). And though Jesus had permitted sickness to enter into the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus, yet we read: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (v. 5). To the Christians at Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, who had endured much on account of their faith, Paul said, "We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Concerning the hardships and persecutions which His disciples would have to endure in this world, Jesus said: "These things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them" (John 16:4). Lest he should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to Paul a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him. Paul besought the Lord thrice that this thing might depart from him, but the Lord said: "My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." And Paul cheerfully submitted, saying: "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (2 Cor. 12:7-9.) "The diamond," says Spurgeon, "has much cutting, but its value is increased thereby." The believer needs such visitations of God. See also Job 5:17; Ps. 119:67; 1 Pet. 1:3-7; 2 Cor. 4:16-18.

The patient endurance of affliction on the part of a Christian is also to be an example and encouragement unto others. The power of the Christian's faith is shown when the Christian can say with Job: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15). Furthermore, suffering and affliction gives unto fellow Christians an opportunity to serve, so that on the Day of Judgment they may hear the Savior say: "I was sick, and ye visited Me. . . . Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." (Matt. 25:36, 40.) What sinful arrogance, therefore, would it be on the part of the Christian to try to escape pain and suffering by saying to the Lord: "I want no more of your chastening discipline. I shall put a stop to it by cutting off my days here upon earth!" Perish the thought!

In the case of the ungodly, too, God has a good purpose in mind by letting sorrow and pain come to them. If they

despise the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth them to repentance (Rom. 2:4), then God inflicts upon them His *corrective* punishment (Lev. 26:14 ff.), for to these same people the Lord says: "If they shall confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against Me, and that also they have walked contrary unto Me and that I also have walked contrary unto them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; *if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled*, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity, *then will I remember My covenant with Jacob and also My covenant with Isaac; and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land*" (Lev. 26:40-42).

In this connection we may well be reminded that those who have brought corruption into the Church have always been the spiritual leaders who had forsaken the truth of God's Word or who had never known it: in the days of Christ, the chief priests and the Pharisees and the scribes; in the days of Luther, the Pope and his Roman Catholic priesthood; in the days of later Germany, the rationalists and the higher critics; in our days, the Modernists. False teachings enter the pew by means of the pulpit. As the days go on, we can better understand and appreciate Walther's dictum: "Gott bewahre uns ein frommes Ministerium" (may God preserve unto us a pious ministry). Or as Luther said: "Es ist kein teurer Schatz noch edler Ding auf Erden und in diesem Leben denn ein rechter, treuer Pfarrherr oder Prediger" (there is no greater treasure, nor anything more excellent upon this earth and in this life, than a true, faithful pastor or preacher). In the introduction to one of his sermons Whitefield has these words: "As God can send a nation or people no greater blessing than to give them faithful, sincere, and upright ministers, so the greatest curse that God can possibly send upon a people in this world is to give them over to blind, unregenerate, carnal, lukewarm, and unskillful guides. And yet, in all ages, we find that there have been many wolves in sheep's clothing, many that daubed with untempered mortar, that prophesied smoother things than God did allow. As it was formerly, so it is now; there are many that corrupt the Word of God and deal deceitfully with it."

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