

ASSISTED SUICIDE IS ETHICAL: CHRIST'S EXAMPLE

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ABSTRACT

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For thousands of years, people have confronted death with fear, arising from an inherent sense of self-preservation, yet many people take their own lives for what they consider just reasons. Some fear pain, isolation, indignity, helplessness, and loss of autonomy. In modern times, physician-prescribed lethal medications are available to dying patients. Death from these drugs is sought for a “good death” or euthanasia (Greek for a peaceful, pain free death— ideally while asleep) and a release from suffering.

This dissertation will address the beliefs of Christians concerning the morality of physician assisted suicide (PAS). I will present a theory of its acceptability through a different interpretation (mine) of Christian scripture as compared to several modern and ancient philosophers regarding Christ's crucifixion and death.

In “Ethics in the Bible,” found in *The Spiritual Life*, the biblical scholar, Jacob Gericke wrote, “The Bible contains . . . ethical assumptions about nature (of reality, existence, life, knowledge, truth, beliefs, good, and evil) . . . [and] of the ancient people who wrote about it. He implies past interpretations of biblical words may not be as we currently interpret them and therefore not valuable guides.” These differences can be seen in the multiple-named editions of modern-day Bibles. Readers of these editions concede that their differing interpretations play an acceptable contemporary role in modern Christology.

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GLOSSARY

Assisted Suicide. The provision by one person (first party) to another person (second party) a lethal substance that will be administered by the second party for the purpose of causing the second party's death. Where legal, the first party is a physician.

Autonomy. In ethics this refers to the capacity or competence of an individual to make informed, independent choices about their life choices without undue external influence. It is a fundamental principle in medical ethical frameworks, emphasizing self-agency, self-determination, and authentic decision-making. Autonomy underpins respect for individual rights and self-determination in matters such as informed consent and in allowing certain medical and non-medical practices. Moral autonomy is often associated with Kant and involves the ability for individuals to act according to their own values and principles.

Christology. The study of Christ, both Jesus as a person with human and divine natures and their relationships and the works of Christ. Christology covers Jesus' earthly birth (incarnation), life, death, resurrection, and ascension. However, it is also related to His eternal existence prior to His earthly life, humanity, deity, and Old Testament Christological prophecies.

Euthanasia. The intentional ending of life to eliminate pain and suffering. To have a "good" death. This includes voluntary, non-voluntary, and involuntary death. Voluntary euthanasia is when a person wishes to have their life ended. Non-voluntary euthanasia occurs when a patient's consent is unavailable and is legal in some countries under certain limited conditions, in both active and passive forms. Involuntary euthanasia is done without asking for consent or against a patient's will. This is illegal and is considered

murder. Indirect Voluntary Euthanasia can occur when a patient intentionally curtails medical treatment. Indirect Involuntary Euthanasia occurs when a patient cannot or forgets to perform a necessary function on their own. Indirect euthanasia occurs when a treatment goes counter to the desired treatment “double effect,” i.e., a pain reliever such as morphine causes respiratory cessation and death.

Killing. An act to kill and deprive one of life. It may be overt or covert, intentional or unintentional, legal or illegal, acceptable in combat or when done as an execution by authorities.

Murder. A premeditated, unlawful, and unjustified killing of one human being by another.

Suicide. The taking of one’s own life. To self-kill by any one of numerous ways.

Suicide by Cop. Party A kills or threatens Party B. Police arrive and confront Party A who then threatens police (usually in the open with a weapon) as if inviting police to shoot Party A, which then happens. It is as if Party A wanted to die but would not directly commit suicide but rely on police to kill Party A.

INTRODUCTION

Drew University, Baylor University, Columbia University, Drexel University, Penn State University, and many other universities have Medical Humanities Programs supporting the development of intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual capacities of students, ministers, nurses, physicians that fosters greater self-awareness, empathy, compassion, and wisdom regarding patients and all human beings.

Medical humanities studies equip caregivers, and others, to refine their moral values and rewards from life and the practice of medicine while acknowledging the biases and limitations of science. As part of a scholarly field, the medical humanities are interdisciplinary and include disciplines such as: ethics, film, philosophy, dance, personal narratives, visual arts, religious and spiritual thought, and literature which includes holy books such as the Bible.

These studies help us to examine and explore such values as autonomy, beneficence, dignity, and maleficence in ourselves and in others' actions. We develop and evaluate moral discernment in society and in ourselves. We learn about compassion and empathy alongside the ideals of caring and sympathy. Are we allowing others to be autonomous and assure justice is being delivered?¹

These moral and ethical principles come from various sources, but religions such as the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim monotheistic faiths have contributed to these principles as each religion deals with an unfathomable subject—an eternally divine entity—God. Some of humanity (but not all) attributes human characteristics to their God in trying to understand an indescribable divinity. Believers allege divinely inspired men

¹ T. Beauchamp, J. Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 7th Edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

wrote books (Torah, New Testament, Koran) about their god, so human beings may better understand the wishes / demands of their deity. As will be discussed later, this is why Christians believe God created a human male (Jesus the son of God) who was not only divine but human and relatable to human beings on a physical basis. It is this humanity that is sacrificed by Jesus as atonement for humanity's sins and a death that provided escape from the pain associated with that atonement to God the Father.

Literal grammatical historical hermeneutic methodologies offer a way to gauge a biblical writer's intent from which to explore potential theological implications and spiritual applications to modern Christians. Paul P. Enns writes, "Exegesis lies at the foundation of biblical theology. Biblical exegesis calls for an analysis of texts according to the literal grammatical historical methodology."² Enns describes the literal grammatical historical process as:

1. The passage should be studied according to the rules of grammar; exegesis demands an examination of the nouns, verbs, prepositions, etc., for a "proper" understanding of the passage.
2. What were the political, social, and particularly the cultural circumstances surrounding it?

I will use Enns' thoughts as a guide in selecting biblical passages to support my thesis of Jesus' assisted suicide being acceptable and why it can be seen as such for Christians who suffer pain and afflictions near the end of life. While I give great reverence to Scripture, I feel they are open to varying interpretations and hence useful to

² Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, (Chicago, Moody Press, 1989) 21

my argument favoring assisted suicide.

In each of the following chapters, I will provide expert's guidance both pro and con by noted historical, ethical, moral, and religious leaders and how their writings helped in my interpretation of the acceptability of assisted suicide for terminal Christian patients as did Jesus at the time of his death thus framing the act as being (in my opinion) moral (individual values) and ethical (community values), knowing these may overlap. I find nothing in Scripture that speaks counter to Jesus' and humanity's ability to escape from terminal suffering, however, I realize Scripture can be interpreted differently, but I am offering my opinion as a different interpretation not found in other sources.

I would like to note here that the Hebrew bible and Judaic/rabbinic tradition (aka The Old Testament) never conceived of a Christian religion when the Torah scrolls were written thousands of years ago. It is only through Christian faith that these early sources are understood to be related to Christology and not as Christian sources per se.

CHAPTER ONE

BIOLOGICAL LIFE

Before discussing assisted suicide, we should understand, on a biological basis, what is meant by “life?” What is lost when we die?

Intracellular electrical energy arises when a man’s spermatozoa penetrates a woman’s egg. “The events leading to the formation of the fertilization membrane of the egg are accompanied by a change of the electric charge across the cell’s membrane, referred to as the fertilization potential . . .”³ This can be seen as a fluorescent flash around the mammalian egg. The brighter the flash, the greater the chance of the egg becoming a viable embryo.⁴ This energy initiates electro-chemical changes that start the growth process of early mammals and most nonmammalian beings. Without this natural intra-egg electrical activity, life does not happen—no offspring occurs.⁵

³ Alberto, Monroy, "Fertilization". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed May 17, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/contributor/Alberto-Monroy/2038>; “As soon as the very first cell forms in an embryo, special ion channels, known as gap junctions begin to form, opening portals of electrically charged communication as the body takes shape.” SALLY ADEE, *We Are Electric: Inside the 200-Year Hunt for Our Body's Bioelectric Code, and What the Future Holds*, (New York City, Hachette Books, 2023) 187-214

⁴ Bec Crew, ‘Scientists Just Captured the Flash of Light That Sparks When a Sperm Meets an Egg,’ *Humans*, 27 April 2016, accessed March 17, 2025, <https://www.sciencealert.com/scientists-just-captured-the-actual-flash-of-light-that-sparks-when-sperm-meets-an-egg>

⁵ Dieter F. Hülser, Gerald P. Schatten, “Bioelectric_responses_at_Fertilization,” *Gamete Research* 5:363-377 (1982) accessed 7-14-23 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279386752_J_Gray, “The Electrical Conductivity of Echinoderm Eggs,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Containing Papers of a Biological Character*, Vol. 207 (1916), pp. 481-529 accessed July 13, 23 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/92029> Alessandra Gallo and Elisabetta Tosti, “Ion Currents Involved in Gamete Physiology,” *Int. J. Dev. Biol.* 59: 261-270 (2015) Dieter Husler, Gerald Shatten, “Gamete Research” 5:363-377 (1982) (PDF) *Bioelectric Responses at Fertilization*. accessed June 21, 23 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279386752_Bioelectric_responses_at_fertilization . Michael Levin, “Molecular bioelectricity in developmental biology: New tools and recent discoveries,” *Bioessays*. 2012 Mar; 34(3): 205–217. accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articlesPMC3430077/>

We are literally born of and through electricity. This “spark” of life continues throughout our body for our entire life. This is demonstrated in the heart that generates its own electrical current, which causes a recordable heartbeat on an electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG), and the brain’s electrical energy can be recorded on an electroencephalogram (EEG).

Bodily electrical forces drive our voluntary and involuntary activities.⁶ Our life force is literally electricity. When the brain and/or heart no longer creates this natural electrical force, we die. For me, bodily generated electricity equals life. This use of the word *life* has nothing to do with being a unique individual, a person, a character, etc. even though brain electricity is important in forming one’s personality. However, one’s human personality and character traits disappear at death. Note that a patient who becomes totally brain dead may have a heartbeat, but he or she is no longer considered by me to be a living *person*. Total brain death makes one legally dead and hence a corpse from whom organ harvesting can be performed.

A donated heart, at implantation, may start beating autonomously after all the vascular connections are made and blood flows through the heart, or an electrical “shock” may be needed to restart the heart, and then life continues with each heartbeat. This “shock of life” is hinted at in Michelangelo’s *The Creation of Adam* as painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Many people who view this painting think Adam is extending his left index finger toward God’s right index finger and opine that Adam will receive (or seeks) the electrical charge of life from God, which will effectuate Adam’s

⁶ “Mentalxperts, How the Brain Controls Voluntary and Involuntary Actions,” *MediaRoch*, accessed April 3, 2025, <https://mentalxperts.com/how-the-brain-controls-voluntary-and-involuntary-actions/>

life force. Some art historians see God's image juxtaposed against the background of a human brain (itself a generator of electrical forces). Michelangelo would have known about the brain since he had dissected skulls and brains. The artist even painted part of the lower brain in "God's neck" in the painting known as the *Separation of Light from Darkness*.⁷

In 600 BC, the Greeks discovered what we call static electricity by rubbing fur against amber. However, the term *electricity* came into existence only after Michelangelo's death in 1564. Nevertheless, he must have at least once experienced static electricity in his day-to-day life experiences without knowing what it was. He may have used lightning as his muse for the painting *Creation of Adam* even if he did not understand its origin nor did he add an imaginary electrical charge between Adam's and God's fingertips in the painting.

Contrary to others, I see in the *Creation of Adam* a man who has already received his life force (electricity) and his forefinger is being withdrawn from God's finger. Adam's eyes are open, which would not have happened if he had no life force. Perhaps God's energy had pulled Adam's lifeless hand and finger toward himself for electrical excitation, but we only see the aftereffects (Adam alive) in the painting.

It is the dread of the loss of the body's electrical energy that creates our understanding, and in some cases fear, of death be it "natural" or self-caused. Death can be confusing and paradoxical for human beings. Our sense of being out of control at life's end has as much to do with the approach of death as it does with an aggressive medical establishment or a family denying the wishes of those near death. When dying individuals

⁷ *Did Michelangelo Draw A Brain in God's Neck?* accessed July 26, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2010/06/21/127990450/did-michelangelo-draw-a-brain-in-gods-neck>

begin articulating their desires to end their suffering and decline, relatives often want to participate in the dialogue, adding their own opinions (often negative) about assisted suicide. A patient may argue a shortened life is better, because their life no longer contains any intrinsic goods. In this sense, death may bring benefit.

Some Christian families may argue negative biblical teachings in this regard. However, the word suicide or assisted suicide is never mentioned in the Bible. It is from the 1660s BCE to 400 BCE that certain biblical and historical stories regarding murder and/or suicide will be examined.

Monsignor Robert Sokolowski, Catholic philosopher, Catholic University of America has written this about the Bible—a source of inspiration for many Christians.

How are we to read the Bible? Whether we read it privately, with others, or for others, how are we to own scripture? A theological question arises today in the reading of scripture because of what we might call an embarrassment of riches; there is so much historical and philological information, so many parallels in other literary traditions, and so many distinctions to be made in the body of the text itself, between original and modified formulations, between authentic words and attributed speeches, between passages coming from different hands and reflecting different theologies, that the sense of the Bible as one book becomes questioned in a way it was never questioned before. Furthermore, it is often said that we no longer live in the world the Bible talks about, that the world defined by the Bible, and taken for granted by it, is not congruent with ours.⁸

What interpretations of scripture have influenced ancient and modern thoughts about death by suicide? This will be explored further in this paper, but despite death being described as natural, it is not. While it may be inevitable, it is not natural. Causality comes into play. Something interferes with the body's natural and usual processes. There

⁸ Monsignor Robert Sokolowski (philosopher and Roman Catholic priest) argued that philosophy makes progress through distinctions. Distinctions set things apart, and valid distinctions have their cogency by virtue of some genuine and significant difference that they highlight. Robert Sokolowski, "God's Word and Human Speech," A.Y. Wells (editor) *Phenomenologies of Scripture* (New York, Fordham University Press, 2017)

is nothing normal or natural about death due to addiction, genetic diseases, infections, cancers, or fatal accidents. Something causes these states of being. These may arise from known, or yet unknown, interactions of humanity with environments (some of which are known to be toxic), inattention, flaws in man-made objects, genetic “mistakes,” and self-created loss of control.

In the following chapter, I will explore further the concept of suicide and its morality, using Christs’ death as an example of assisted suicide.

CHAPTER TWO

SUICIDE: RELIGIOUS QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TAKING OF ONE'S LIFE

In this chapter, I will explore biblical passages and the writings of various scholars including one of the Catholic's well know early bishops, Saint Augustine and theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas, and others concerning the taking of one's life. However, I do not believe they wrote anything about assisted suicide as we know it today.

Saint Paul, a convert in the early Christian era, and one of Christ's apostles, seemed to wrestle with thoughts of suicide. We read in, Philippians 1:21-26 (New King James Bible):

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

Biblical commentator Lightfoot has written, "The grammar in Philippians reflects a conflict of feelings in the apostle's mind. He is tossed to and fro between the desire to labor for Christ in life and the desire to be united with Christ in death."⁹ Paul's internal struggle concerns the possibility of suicide as a "good" or a desirable which would reunite him with Christ without mentioning suicide as a sin against the Sixth Commandment.

⁹ J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (London: MacMillan, 1891) 92

We read in Saint Paul's Second Corinthians 5:6-8 (New King James Bible):

So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

The latter sentence appears to express not a preference but a *desire* of Paul. David Freeman writes, “. . . It is not the case that Paul rejected suicide *per se* but only that it was not the appropriate time for such an act.”¹⁰ The fervent nature of Paul's writings has led scholars to debate whether he intended a suicidal act.¹¹ While he did not commit suicide, he did not condemn the act in any of his writings.

Saint Aurelius Augustine (354-430 AD)

Saint Augustine was perhaps the greatest Christian philosopher of antiquity and one who had the longest lasting influence on Christianity. His authority on theological matters was universally accepted in the Latin Middle Ages and Western Christian traditions. It was virtually uncontested until the nineteenth century when he was known as the first medieval philosopher.

Augustine was not formally canonized, because the official canonization process was not instituted until the 12th century. However, he was declared a saint by his local Christian community shortly after he died.

Aurelius Augustinus (Augustine) was born in Roman Africa (modern Souk Ahras in Algeria). His mother, Monica, was a devout Christian who is said to have influenced her son's religious development.

¹⁰ Cray, N. Clayton. 2003. 'To Die is Gain' (Philippians 1:19–26): Does Paul Contemplate Suicide? *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 122: 517–31.

¹¹ David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol.6 (New York: Double Day, 1992), 22

At age eighteen, Aurelius took a mistress and had a son, Adeodatus, who was later baptized at the same time as Aurelius' father in Milan.

In AD 383, Aurelius moved to Milan to become professor of rhetoric and sent his mistress away so he could prepare for his new religious life. There, Bishop Ambrose taught him the allegorical method of Scriptural exegesis and introduced him to Neoplatonically inclined Christians who familiarized him with Christianity, which he found to be philosophically informed and intellectually more satisfying than his then Manicheism from which he was in the process of leaving. A resultant period of uncertainty and doubt (depicted in his *Confessiones* as a crisis in the medical sense) ended in the summer of AD 386 when he converted to ascetic Christianity. In AD 391, he was ordained as a priest. Later, he succeeded in becoming the local bishop.

In the early years of the church, Christians may have, in some cases, been opposed to the taking of one's life. The objection to suicide would not have always been associated with the act but the intention behind the act. Specifically, Christians were called not only to "live in the Lord" but also "to die in the Lord." Consequently, only those who appeared to commit suicide for selfish, "unfounded" reasons would have been denounced as Christians. Later, those (martyrs) committing suicide who did not die for God were anathematized. Nevertheless, what is striking is the condemnation of suicide that came about only in response to suicide excesses. Over two millennia of Christian history, suicide provoked almost no theological discussion in churches apart from a few remarks by church fathers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries after the beginning of the "sanctity of life" movement which was mainly focused on abortions.

Saint Augustine spoke out against suicide. So did Thomas Aquinas but much later. Apparently, their complete and total condemnation eventually carried the day and shaped many Christians' perceptions of suicide to the present day, but their protestations were not a profession about life's sanctity as Lecky (1838 – 1903 AD), and Irish historian, once claimed.¹²

Augustine, however, did not call for punishment against attempted or unsuccessful suicidal attempts, nor did he morally or spiritually discredit every possible act of suicide. Even if he was skeptical about the excesses of suicide in his time, he allowed that suicide might be appropriate in some cases, even commanded by God.¹³ Augustine, it appears, was simply trying to moderate a zeal for death, rather than a more encompassing principle about the sanctity of human life.

He was convinced a true philosopher is a lover of God, because true wisdom is identical with God, a point on which he agreed with both Paul (1 Corinthians 1:24) and Plato (*De civitate dei* 8.8). Augustine promoted the Neoplatonic idea that knowledge of our true self entails knowledge of our divine origin and would enable us to return to it though later he decided that was possible only through God and the Incarnation.¹⁴ Here

¹² William E. H. Lecky: A historian in the latter half of the nineteenth century. He coined the term “euthanasia” and was the first person to invoke the phrase “sanctity of human life.” In *The History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne*, Lecky insisted that the whole idea of life's sanctity was the fruit of Christian church doctrine and belief.

¹³ Scott MacDonald, “Being and Goodness,” *Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (second edition), editor, David Vincent Meconi, SJ and Eleonore Stump, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014), 17-3.

¹⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, Chapters 7,8,10, Penguin Books, New York, 1961, accessed March 14, 2024, <https://archive.org/details/saintaugustineco0000unse/page/n3/mode/2up>

one could argue with the concept of a “true” philosopher being a lover of God. No doubt there are recognized philosophers who could be atheist or agnostic.

Augustine thought that by turning inwards and upwards from bodies to soul (i.e., from knowledge of objects to self-knowledge) and from the sensible to the intelligible, we would be able to transcend ourselves and get in touch with the supreme being that is God and Truth.¹⁵

Augustine argues in *City of God* that suicide violates divine law (Exodus 20:13) against killing [murder] and is counter to the command to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Mark 2:31).

Suicide, he wrote, violates the natural law to seek the “good,” particularly, the good of existing. He believed it also violated human laws against murder, which are a reflection of the divine and natural law. For Augustine, suicide is an attempt to control and escape suffering. As an alternative to suicide, Augustine presented the example of Christ’s suffering and exhorts us to imitate His patience and cultivate a society that empowers the sufferer to live with dignity. Dignity for some dying patients is lost through the problems associated with death. However, his beliefs did not extend to how Jesus might have orchestrated and responded to his suffering on the cross as will be explored later.

For Augustine, the soul is of divine origin and God-like (*De quantitate animae* 2 3); it is not divine on its own but created to be divine by God. In *De quantitate animae*, Augustine broadly argues the “greatness” of the soul does not refer to anything spatial but

¹⁵ Aurelius Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei*, Chpt.9, 4, accessed December 20, 2019, <https://carm.org/augustine/augustines-city-of-god-book-19/> and *City of God*, accessed May 5, 2023, <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/Augustine>

to its animating powers that enable it to move close to God and is of immateriality. He is convinced the soul is an incorporeal and immortal substance that could, in principle, exist independently of a body. Augustine thought God had placed no specification at the end of the command since it applies to the murder of *any* human being. Augustine argues this commandment is linked to the command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:31). Allegedly, one’s love of neighbor takes its meaning from the love of self.

Augustine saw suicide as a sin against charity since it harms not only the victim (oneself), but also one’s neighbors who are harmed by the violence done to the bonds of love which compose the fabric of society. However, he expressed no quantification or qualification of such harm or how suicide may benefit a sufferer as I believe it did for Jesus.

Augustine studied the attitude that a Christian ought to adapt to the society they live in. Starting from the axiom that all human beings naturally desire what is good for them and determined the goal every individual and every community pursues as “peace,” and this, in his view, is largely equivalent with “natural order.” He seems to believe that all nature acts equally within each’s own abilities, and now we know that is not true for animals.¹⁶

Saint Augustine decreed suicide to be an unpardonable sin that violated the commandment “not to murder.”¹⁷ Simultaneously, he and the Church fiercely opposed

¹⁶ Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance*, (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1999)

¹⁷ St Augustine vacillates between using kill and murder as though they were equal. He largely omits intent.

the Donatists (a heretical Christian sect) flinging themselves off cliffs in order to die and then go to heaven.

Augustine's recasting of suicide as murder, as opposed to the Roman ideal of heroic individualism, came at a time when the church was struggling to consolidate its authority over its followers. What made suicide a sin for Augustine was its voluntary nature, which he interpreted as a deliberate challenge to divine authority—an argument that persists among some of today's Christians who have never considered Jesus' death as assisted suicide.

Saint Augustine equates suicide to homicide or murder. "*Non Decides, nee alteram ergo nee te. Neque enim qui se occidit aliud quam hominem occii.*" (Therefore, you shall kill neither another nor yourself, for he who kills himself still kills nothing else than a human being.)¹⁸

The idea of suicide as a crime comes late in Christian doctrine and almost as the only biblical authority was a special interpretation of the Sixth Commandment, "Thou shalt not murder." However, the bishops of Augustine's era urged him into action, regarding this doctrine, but he, as Rousseau remarked, took his arguments from Plato's *Phaedo* not the Bible.¹⁹

Augustine approvingly quoted the Stoics who argued, "The first and greatest urging of nature is that a man should be at one with himself and therefore should instinctively flee from death, that he should be so thoroughly a friend to himself that he

¹⁸ Aurelius Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei*, I,20. Translated by Marcus Dodds. P. 22 accessed December 19, 2019: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/45304/45304-h/45304-h.htm>

¹⁹ Aurelius Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei*, I,20. Translated by Marcus Dodds. P. 22 accessed December 19, 2019: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/45304/45304-h/45304-h.htm>

vehemently wishes and desires to be alive, a living being, and to stay alive in this conjunction of body and soul.” Augustine, however, never contemplates that life can be a burden worthy of being cast off to flee untold suffering as I think Jesus did. To Augustine’s thought I would add to live as long as life is beneficial to the owner.

Augustine reviewed several cases of Christian women who had chosen to kill themselves rather than be raped and concluded their fear of bodily pain or public shame was evidence of weak thought: “Is it not rather proof of a feeble mind, to be unable to bear either the pains of bodily servitude or the foolish opinion of the vulgar?”²⁰ His aim was to reduce the number of Christian suicides during a period when there was no longer any external pressure for them to die. He argued that those who handed over sacred scriptures to non-believers (infidel conquerors) to avoid death were not faithless Christians.²¹ He argued against those who advocated Christians should choose death.

Apparently, he did not consider that many people would be unable to endure severe pain and suffering at the hands of mighty rapacious conquerors. Nor did he consider that Jesus surrendered his life as a result of pain and the need for him to be a sacrifice and scape goat for humanity’s sins.

To counter the vehement nature of the arguments by those who advocated that Christians should choose death, he emphasized that voluntary death (suicide or martyrdom) was equal to murder. “The commandment is Thou shalt not kill man.” Some

²⁰ Aurelius Augustine, “That Suicide Can Never be Prompted by Magnanimity,” *City of God*, accessed May 2023, https://biblehub.com/library/augustine/city_of_god/chapter_22_that_suicide_can_never.htm

²¹ Aurelius Augustine, *City of God*, accessed May 18, 2023, <https://thepilgrimjournal.com/the-city-of-god-book-1-chapter-twenty-one/>

scholars now interpret the commandment as meaning not to murder counter to Augustine's interpretation.

As Augustine writes in *The City of God*, Book I:21 "Neither may Samson be otherwise excused for crushing himself along with his enemies in the fall of the house, except that the Holy Spirit inwardly allowed this in order to perform a miracle through him."²²

In Judges 16:28 we read: Then Samson called to the Lord, saying, "O lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for [the loss of] my two eyes!"

It is interesting that Augustine chooses not to view Samson's actions as assisted suicide. Augustine speculates that God had wanted Sampson to kill God's enemies and Sampson's death was secondary.

It is worth noting again that Augustine did not call for punishment against unsuccessful suicidal acts. Nor did he morally and spiritually discredit every possible act of suicide. Even if he was skeptical about the excesses of suicide in his time, he allowed that suicide might be appropriate in some cases, even commanded by God. In instances where God's command might be claimed, Augustine's advice to a would-be suicide was quite simple— ". . . only let him be very sure that the divine command has been signified."²³ In the sixth century, St. Augustine's theological arguments about suicide

²² Eugene Portalié, (1907b). "Teaching of St. Augustine of Hippo." In Charles Herbermann, ed.). *Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 2. New York: Robert Appleton Company. *City of God*, accessed May 18, 2023, <https://thepilgrimjournal.com/the-city-of-god-book-1-chapter-twenty-one/>

²³ Granville Williams, *The Sanctity of Life and the Criminal Law*, (London, Faber and Faber, 1958), 232

became canon law and burial rites were denied to Christians who killed themselves no matter the cause.

Augustine apparently never considered Jesus' death as what today we call assisted suicide. One of the difficulties Saint Augustine and later theologians had in condemning suicide is that neither the Hebrew Bible nor the New Testament explicitly prohibits suicide but does prohibit murder. Even Judas' suicide received no condemnation in the Bible.

In the Bible, Jesus spoke of his "going away." This was reportedly seen by ancient Jews as a suicide threat.²⁴ Tertullian described Jesus' death as a form of voluntary death,²⁵ and Origen said, "Jesus voluntarily gave up his spirit...since it was impossible that the deity be at the mercy of the flesh." This point is echoed in John 10:18 (New King James Bible). "No one takes it [life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

Saint Augustine wrote, ". . . Jesus' spirit did not leave his body against his will, but because he willed it to happen, and he willed when and how it would happen."²⁶ While these words add to my argument that suicide is moral, they do not mention the

²⁴ John 8:22 (New King James Version), So the Jews said, "Will He kill Himself, because He says, 'Where I go you cannot come?'"

²⁵ Tertullian. *de resurrectione carnis*, chpt.13, 1-4, translator Peter Holmes, "Ante-Nicene Fathers", Vol. 3. edited. by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885)

²⁶ St. Augustine, *On the Trinity* 4.16 accessed August 30, 2022, <https://www.newadvent.org/father/130104.htm>

reason for Christ's death which I believe was for escape from the physical pain associated with his atonement.

Saint Thomas Aquinas (1227-1274 AD)

Another great Catholic theologian who argued against suicide is Saint Thomas Aquinas. In his writings, Aquinas begins each subject by stating the reverse of his conclusion and then states objections to a particular claim. He then responds with a statement of the correct conclusion and a rebuttal to each of his previous objections. In Question 64, article 5, he argues against the legitimacy of suicide, incorporating the arguments of both Aristotle (referred to as "the Philosopher") and St. Augustine. Thomas's central argument appeals to Augustine's interpretation of the Biblical commandment "Thou shalt not kill": since there is a prohibition against killing human beings and since suicide is killing a human being, therefore suicide is a sin, to which Thomas adds three more reasons against the act: an argument from the natural inclination to live, an argument based on social community, and the argument that life should not be rejected because it is a gift from God.

I shall quote Aquinas at length.

SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 2A 2AE, Q. 64, A. 5
Whether One Is Allowed to Kill Himself

We proceed to the fifth article.

1. It appears that one is permitted to kill himself. Homicide is a crime in that it is contrary to justice, but, as proven [by Aristotle] in *Ethics*, Book V, no one can do an injustice to himself; therefore, no one sins by killing himself.
2. Moreover, those with public authority are allowed to kill criminals; but sometimes one with public authority is himself a criminal, and so he is allowed to kill himself.

3. Moreover, it is permissible to submit oneself voluntarily to a smaller danger in order to avoid a greater, as one may amputate an infected member in order to save the whole body. Sometimes one may, by killing himself, avoid a greater evil, such as a wretched life or corruption through some sin; therefore, it is permissible for one to kill himself.
4. Moreover, Samson killed himself (Judges xvi), yet he is numbered among the saints, as is evident from Hebrews xi. Therefore, it is permissible for one to kill himself.
5. Moreover, it is said in II Maccabees xiv that a certain Razis killed himself, “choosing to die nobly rather than be subject to sinners and to injuries unworthy of his birth.” Therefore, it is not unlawful to kill oneself. On the contrary is what Augustine says in Book I of *The City of God*: “We understand the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ to pertain to man. Kill no other man, nor yourself; for he who kills himself kills another man.”

I [Aquinas] respond by saying that to kill oneself is altogether unlawful for three reasons. First, because everything loves itself, it is thus proper for everything to keep itself in being and resist decay as far as it can. Therefore, to kill oneself is contrary to natural inclination, and contrary to the charity according to which everyone ought to love himself. Hence self-killing is always a mortal sin, inasmuch as it stands against natural law and charity.

I ask, did not Jesus give up his life on the cross (lay down his life)? While Jesus loved his life, He loved human beings more and wanted to save them from spiritual death so he sacrificed himself via assisted suicide.

Aquinas’ natural law comments would forbid airplanes, antibiotics and many modern conveniences. Human beings want to live a natural life until it becomes burdensome by disease or trauma and then it can be disposable by law in some places.

Second, because everything that is a part belongs to a whole, every man is part of a community, and as such is of the community. Therefore, he who kills himself injures the community, as is proven by the Philosopher [Aristotle] in his *Ethics*, Book V.

As we know, injuries can be quantified and if a person, because of illness, can no longer contribute to his or her community, they are reduced as contributors and may

become a burden to society and of little use to their community which negates Aquinas' argument.

Third, because life is a gift divinely given to man, and subject to the power of Him "who kills and makes to live." Therefore, he who deprives himself of life sins against God, just as he who kills another's slave sins against the slave's master [Of note here is that the dead slave is not mentioned as being harmed only the slave's owner], and just as he sins who arrogates to himself power over something not committed to him. To God alone belongs the power over death and life, according to Deuteronomy xxxii: "I kill and I make to live." [Is God speaking against his Sixth Commandment?]

To the first [argument that suicide is permissible], it may be objected that homicide is not only a sin against justice but is also a sin against the charity that everyone ought to have for himself; on that ground, self-killing is a sin with respect to oneself. And with respect to the community and to God, it is a sin through its opposition to justice.

I ask if it is just to force a person to suffer greatly at the end of life if the person seeks and is denied assisted suicide? In such a case is not beneficence substituted with malevolence?

To the second, it may be objected that one with public authority may kill a criminal because he is empowered to judge him. But no one is allowed to be the judge of himself, and so one with public authority is not allowed to kill himself because of some sin, although he is allowed to commit himself to the judgment of some other.

I ask is not killing still killing no matter who performs the act?

To the third, it may be objected that man is indeed lord of himself through his free will and so may lawfully dispose of himself as far as what pertains to this life is concerned; that much is governed by man's free will. But the passage from this life to the other, happier one is not subject to man's free will, but to divine power. Therefore, it is not permissible for a man to kill himself in order to pass over into the happier life. Neither, likewise, to avoid the present life's miseries; the "ultimate" evil of this life, and the "most frightful," is death, as the Philosopher shows in *Ethics*, Book III, and so to kill oneself to evade the other miseries of life is to assume a greater evil to avoid a less. Neither, likewise, may one kill oneself on account of some sin committed; in that case one harms oneself as much as may be, by preventing the necessary time for penitence. Besides, killing a criminal is not permitted except through the judgment of public authority. Neither, likewise, is a woman permitted to kill herself to prevent another's violating her; she ought not commit the maximal sin on herself, which is to kill herself, to avoid another, smaller sin (for it is no crime for a woman to be

violated through force, without her consent, because “the body is not corrupted without the mind’s consent,” as Lucia said [*Golden Legend*, IV]). And it is certain that fornication and adultery are less sins than homicide, especially self-homicide, which is the gravest of all because it injures the self to which is owed the greatest love. And it is also the most dangerous, because there remains no time to expiate the sin through penance. Neither, likewise, is one allowed to kill himself in fear of consenting to sin, for “we must not do evil in order that good come from it” [Romans iii 8], or to avoid evils, especially smaller and less certain ones, for it is not inevitable that one will in the future consent to sin; God is capable, whenever temptation arises, to free man from sin.

This chapter raises the question, is every death brought about by God? Does God create disease or does He simply allow them to happen because of some non-naturality in our worldly environment of health? God does speak of killing as seen in Deuteronomy 32:39, I Samuel 12:6, Luke 12:5, Isaiah 11:4, and Isaiah 65:15, but therein He names the circumstances which are not of a normal world.

Did Aquinas contemplate whether rape is painful, dangerous or deadly? In considering suicide, how can a rape victim know their outcome in advance and decide to bear it? They can’t. I wonder if Aquinas thought about the deaths in Masada where it is conjectured that rape was a consideration in choosing to die. We can’t be sure.

To the fourth, it may be objected that, as Augustine says in *The City of God*, Book I, “Neither may Samson be otherwise excused for crushing himself along with his enemies in the fall of the house, except that the Holy Spirit inwardly commanded this in order to perform a miracle through him”; and he gives the same reason for certain holy women who killed themselves in time of persecution, whose memory the church celebrates.

Aquinas does not mention that Sampson sought revenge for the loss of his eyesight and that there is no mention in Scripture of God telling Sampson to perform the act he performed. Sampson asked for the strength to perform the act he did.

To the fifth, it may be objected that it is fortitude when one does not shrink from suffering death inflicted by another person, in the interest of virtue and the avoidance of sin; but when one kills oneself to avoid bad punishments, it has some appearance of fortitude, on account of which certain suicides are accounted

to have acted bravely, Razis among them. But this is not real fortitude, it is instead some weakness in a soul not strong enough to bear hardship, as is shown by the Philosopher in *Ethics*, Book III, and Augustine in *The City of God*, Book I.²⁷

Saint Aquinas repeatedly tells us that killing oneself is not only unlawful but sinful no matter what the circumstances. Aquinas does not appear to be referring to a legal authority's laws. These are the words of a great philosopher, but his ability to authoritatively declare these acts as sinful is simply the opinion of one man who often references another man (St. Augustine) who references the philosophy of another man (Aristotle). Such an opinion is one of ancient cultural and sociological circumstances and interpreted differently than today by many modern philosophers. Aquinas had no concept of modern diseases and their causes or treatment. Nor did he fully understand the horrors of suffering or psychological damage that can be caused by suffering of various kinds. Aquinas interpretation of the commandment not to murder is his personal interpretation of the Sixth Commandment which he interprets as "not to kill" except it is permissible if one is killed secondary to the order of a legal authority. This opinion could mean that Christ was legally killed, but Aquinas does not so state. His writings suggest he never saw a person in such horrific suffering that the death of the person would be a beneficent act. Not everyone is as fortified with personal strength as might have been the case of Aquinas who apparently died of a subdural hematoma secondary to head trauma.

I have found no point in Aquinas' work where he considered the direct reason for Christ's death other than some unspecified reason of atonement or that Christ's death was indeed a form of assisted suicide (self-sacrifice) or what today we might identify as

²⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2A @AE, Q 64, A. 5. "Whether One is Allowed to Kill Himself," accessed 2-10-25 <https://ethicsofsuicide.lib.utah.edu/selections/thomas-aquinas/>

“suicide by cop (Roman Soldier).” Aquinas does state there is no excuse for suicide (or assisted suicide) no matter the circumstances. This raises the question, “Did Christ sin against himself?” He did, after all, go willingly to his planned crucifixion.

Aquinas', however, apparently countenances killing for purposes of self-defense and under three conditions of a just warfare, emphasizing the importance of (1) proper authority, (2) just cause, and (3) right intention. For Aquinas, peace and protection constitute the most basic causes for war and its killing, because peace is in accordance with justice, “A cause is just when it attempts to restore true peace.” It is necessary that the belligerents [defendants] should have a rightful intention, so that they intend the advancement of good, or the avoidance of evil.”²⁸

Contrary to these philosophers, we judge ourselves all the time. Such judgement may lead to suicide as in PTSD or to seek assisted suicide in terminal illness—legal in ten states and the District of Columbia. Augustine and Aquinas and our current conception of a sense of justice, community, and charity do not, in my opinion, match.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

The writings of Immanuel Kant served as the “epistles” that secured the faith of the Enlightenment Period. His philosophy did much to consolidate Enlightenment convictions about the ultimate worth and sacredness of human life. Kant’s work, like the writings of his noted “enlightened” counterparts (David Hume, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Baruch Spinoza, and Voltaire), took on various Stoic themes and sensibilities,

²⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, (II-II, q. 40, a. 1).

including those pertaining to human sacredness.²⁹ At the heart of Kant's moral philosophy were two principles, which he termed the "categorical imperative" and the "practical imperative." Kant also wrote numerous philosophical articles concerning the subject of religion and God. He held that: "Christ should be revered as the first introducer of teachings which are those of *pure reason* and as such carry their own proof within them . . . We should not accept, unless forced, the view that 'pure rationalism' is Kant's name for a position in the philosophy of religion which he finds he cannot embrace."³⁰

The categorical imperative declared: "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."

I can interpret this to mean any terminally ill patient should be able to end their suffering on a voluntary basis (assisted suicide).

Kant's categorical imperative was meant to dissuade people from committing actions they would abhor if widely followed or if they produced deleterious consequences for everyone. Meanwhile, Kant's practical imperative stated: "So act as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of any other, always at the same time as an end, and never merely as a means."³¹ This second imperative anathematized any lessening of human beings into things. Although Kant's philosophy rejected any Stoic notion of a divine spark in human beings, his metaphysical arguments affirmed human life, "as

²⁹ John E. Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits and God's Assistance*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), online edition, Oxford Academic, October 3, 2011), accessed May 11, 2023, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.drew.edu/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198269571.003.0011>

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. (3rd ed.). translation by James W. Ellington, (New York, Hackett 1993), 36

always an end and never as a means,” reached virtually the same conclusion. Kant essentially sacralizes the human individual as popular references make clear.³² “Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”

Kant’s respect for the sacredness of human life was so great and so elemental he opposed any exercise of autonomy that led to suicide. Kant was adamant on this point:

Man cannot deprive himself of his personality so long as one speaks of duties, thus so long as one lives...To destroy the subject of morality in his own person is tantamount to obliterating from the world, as far as he can, the very existence of morality itself; but morality is, nevertheless, an end in itself. Accordingly, to dispose of oneself as a mere means to some end of one’s own liking is to degrade the humanity in one’s person (*homo noumenon*), which, after all, was entrusted to man (*homo phaenomen*) to preserve it.³³

Plainly stated, Kant believed an act of suicide was a betrayal of the sacred humanity in all of us. Whatever our desires may be, he thought we have a moral duty to preserve our own life. I find nothing moral, beneficent or of a highest good about forcing a terminal patient to endure great suffering when there is an escape via assisted suicide and a role model in Jesus and His death escape from the pain of the Father’s “harms.” To disallow such an escape detracts from one’s autonomy, self-agency, and respect.

“Highest good” which is, arguably, the foundation for Kant’s positive philosophy of religion, including what he means by “divine justice,” he routinely characterizes the “highest good” as an ideal situation in which happiness is distributed in “exact proportion” to our moral worth. Kant, in the Canon of the First Critique, almost commits

³² Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*, translation by James Ellington and Introduction., (Indianapolis, Warner Wick, Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), 83-84

³³ Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*, accessed 2-4-23, <https://praxeology.net/kant8.htm>

to a belief that this distribution will be ultimately realized. This seems to be the basis for his belief of God and immortality, and as stated in his Religion, will be ultimately realized.³⁴

Autonomy is the cornerstone of modern medical ethics and is debased by Kant when it comes to assisted suicide. His belief is no longer supported by large numbers of people and dying patients as seen in the 10 states and District of Columbia where laws recognize agency and autonomy not only with assisted suicide but with informed consent as to who and how one is to be “touched” or treated.

Fredrick Copleston, S.J., (1907-1994 AD) was a Catholic priest, historian, philosopher and BBC debater on religion. He authored a well-known book, *A History of Philosophy*, and believed Kant’s philosophy held that, “. . . [W]hatever our desires may be, we have a moral duty to preserve our own life.”³⁵

Some individuals say suicide is self-murder. I interpret the word *murder* to be the killing of a person who does not wish to be killed. In war, we see death (murder) as legitimate killing. In law we call a killing legitimate when done as a lawful execution. Let us not forget the commandment regarding murder (killing). See Exodus 32: 25-34 (Following the Israelites worshipping the golden calf):

²⁵ Now when Moses saw that the people *were* unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to *their* shame among their enemies),²⁶ then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, “Whoever *is* on the LORD’s side—*come* to me!” And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him.²⁷ And he said to them, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Let every man put his sword on his side and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his

³⁴ Immanuel Kant, “3.4 The Highest Good,” *Philosophy of Religion*, Accessed 7-5-2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-religion/#HighGood>

³⁵ Fredrick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 6:2, (New York, Doubleday, 1960),109

neighbor.” [We know not how the order was given.]²⁸ So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day.²⁹ Then Moses said, “Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed [killed] his son and his brother.”³⁰ Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”³¹ Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Oh, these people have committed a great sin and have made for themselves a god of gold!³² Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.”³³ And the LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.

In these verses the murderers (sinners) appear not to repent, and God temporarily waits to punish them. Note that Moses asked his followers to murder their brethren, yet he did not ask for forgiveness for himself. We can only guess as to why not.

Moses knew an Israelite should not murder, because Moses had seen, firsthand, the Ten Commandments instructing the Israelites not to murder, and yet, he ordered the murder of 3,000 people and then asked for God’s forgiveness.

There are biblical exceptions for punishment of a murder. We read in, Exodus 21:12-13, “He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. However, if he did not lie in wait [for the victim], but God delivered *him* [the victim] into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee.”

This is another example where a person can commit a murder if the victim was delivered into the hands of the murderer by God who will in turn direct the murderer to a refuge city of safety to stand trial. If found guilty, the killer may be executed.

I wonder how one would argue before a judge, “God told me to kill.”

The Mosaic Law was instituted when Israel was transitioning from a nomadic community to a more settled community that had developed civil laws and ethics. This civil law included the use of trials and judges. Cities of refuge were communities to

which a person who had (un)intentionally killed someone could flee and be protected from the victim's family ("avengers of blood") who wanted to kill the slayer while he awaited trial. If the killer was found guilty of intentional murder, he would be put to death by the avenger as prescribed in Exodus 21:14 and Numbers 35:16–21. However, if the trial proved the death had been unintentional (manslaughter rather than murder), the killer would be free to live in the trial city and be safe to return to his home city when the city's high priest died and then general immunity was granted to everyone (Numbers 35:25).

The prohibition against intentionally taking human life is so ingrained and morally embedded in us that even the killing of heinous criminals and war enemies is morally held as objectionable by some people. Even the United States allows an exemption from military service for conscientious objectors. Even those who accept capital punishment or the killing of enemy soldiers, they often do so with feelings of moral loss or rethink their moral justifications for their sentiments.

Almost every moral code and ethical theory, religious or secular, has a prohibition against taking innocent human life. This prohibition is at the heart of our criminal law system. Not only is murder the most serious offense, but even the consent of the victim is not recognized as a defense in states prohibiting assisted suicide where such acts are considered to be a homicide.

I have summarized some pundits' arguments about the main moral costs of allowing assisted suicide are:

1. Individuals who did not wish to die could succumb to family or social pressures (the drive to contain costs or save family inheritances):

2. In some cases, a homicide might be committed on a mentally incompetent person and be disguised as assisted suicide:

3. Allowing even limited instances of assisted suicide would weaken the reverence for life.³⁶

Professor Gilbert Meilaender of Valparaiso University, a Christian ethicist, a Fellow of the Hastings Center and was a member of the President's Council on Bioethics from 2002 to 2009, and author of many books about ethics, disparages assisted suicide. He does not see one's life as something to be willfully cast aside. To do so risk losing himself as one who always exists in relationship to God. "Life is a divine gift and trust."³⁷

Leon R. Kass' research leads him to his argument against assisted suicide as follows: "Often a demand for euthanasia is in fact an angry or anxious plea for help born of fear of rejection or abandonment or made in ignorance of available alternatives that could alleviate pain and suffering."³⁸ What if all the questions of possibilities are met? Then what? As for double effect of pain relief, he says, ". . .[T]he intent to relieve the pain of the living presupposes that the living still live to be relieved. This must be the starting point in discussing all medical benefits: there is no benefit without a

³⁶ "Why Assisted Suicide Must Not be Legalized," Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund, accessed April 5, 2025, <https://dredf.org/why-assisted-suicide-must-not-be-legalized/> bility Fund

³⁷ Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians*, 4th edition, (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 69-74

³⁸ Leon R. Kass, "Why Doctors Must Not Kill," *Last Rights, Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia Debated*, Michael Uhlmann editor (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 298

beneficiary. . . [W]hat humanity needs most, in the face of evil, is courage, the ability to stand against fear and pain and thoughts of nothingness.”³⁹

I say that not everyone has such courage, nor do they have empathy.

The dying are faced with alternatives in considering their mourners: whether to fight against our mortality to the bitter end or embrace what might be the right time to die. The Bible (Ecclesiastes 3:2) informs us there is “A time to be born, and a time to die . . .” However, the times are not noted. Some babies are delivered prior to or after their expected due date, and some people exit this life on their own timetable to avoid experiencing a so called “natural” and perhaps a protracted and painful death.

The Austrian poet Rainer M. Rilke (1875-1926) wrote:

And we, spectators, always, everywhere, looking at, never out of, everything! It fills us. We arrange it. It collapses. We re-arrange it and collapse ourselves. Who's turned us round like this, so that we always do what we may, retain the attitude of someone who's departing? Just as he, on the last hill, that shows him all his valley for the last time, will turn and stop and linger, we live our lives, forever taking leave.⁴⁰

The above sections concern themselves with opinions against suicide or assisted suicide. Many of the presented reasons for this belief by noted philosophers don't hold up in today's world as I will argue throughout this paper. While each of the above philosophers make their case in clear terms, their opinion is just that—an opinion that is not supported by many other philosophers and patients who find themselves in dire circumstances.

³⁹ Ibid., 30

⁴⁰ Rainer Maria Rilke, Alfred Corn (Translator), *Duino Elegies*, (New York, W. W. Norton & Company; bilingual edition, 2006), accessed January 4, 2024, <https://poems.com/poem/the-eighth-elegy/>

Positions contrary to the argument against suicide are seen in the following selections from history and the Bible. The Bible is filled with stories of “murder” or suicide and assisted suicide, and yet we read nothing in the way of condemnation of these ancient acts as seen in the following biblical sections.

Hebrew Bible Individuals.

Abimelech

Judges 9: 54 After having his skull crushed under a millstone that was dropped by a woman from the Tower of Shechem. Abimelech called on his armor bearer to kill him with a sword. He did not want it said that a woman had killed him.

Samson

Judges 16: 29-31 By collapsing a building, Samson sacrificed his own life, but in the process destroyed thousands of his enemy the Philistines.

Saul and His Armor Bearer

I Samuel 31: 3-6 After losing his sons and all of his troops in battle, and his sanity long before, King Saul, assisted by his armor bearer, ended his life. Then Sauls’ servant killed himself.

In a parallel passage, 1 Chronicles 10:3-7, Saul’s justification for committing suicide was that because of his injuries he might have been abused (suffered) and killed by the Philistines who were uncircumcised men.

Ahithophel

II Samuel 17: 23 And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulcher of his father.

Zimri

I Kings 16: 18 Rather than being taken prisoner, Zimri set the king’s palace on fire and died in the flames.

Regarding suicide, the only person of note mentioned in the New Testament is,

Judas

Matthew 27: 5 After he betrayed Jesus. Judas Iscariot was overcome with remorse and hung himself.

In the case of Abimelech, death must have been seen as inevitable and secondary to his skull injury. He was conscious, apparently able to reason, and knew he would die of his injury, but to save face, he wanted to die immediately and requested to be killed—assisted suicide.

Abimelech's situation is not unlike a scene from a movie where a policeman is trapped in a burning car with no way to escape. He knew he would burn to death and did not want such a horrific death. As the flames burned his flesh, he calls out to his despondent partner who had escaped the burning car, "Shoot me! Please, shoot me!" The grieving friend grants his burning friend his final wish—assisted suicide. I see this as a benevolent act.

In both above cases, death would come in a short period of time. Each man wanted to shorten that period of great suffering by having someone kill him (assisted suicide). One man wanted to die to avoid the disgrace of dying from an injury inflicted by a woman. The second person wanted to die to avoid a flaming death.

Despite having committed suicide, there is no mention of the above having sinned or who is to be made anathema.

The Siege of Masada 73-74 AD

Following the murder of Jerusalem's King Menahem in 66 AD, Eleazer Ben Yair, chief of the Sicarii, captured the fortress of Masada at the beginning of the Roman War and then became commander of the besieged fortress from 66 -74 AD. He had fled Jerusalem to Masada to command Judean rebels who had fought the Romans. When Jerusalem was

destroyed in 70 AD. The remaining rebels joined Eleazar at Masada to live in King Herod's former palace and grounds.

With Jerusalem in ruins, the Romans turned their attention to capturing Masada, the last Jewish community in Judea, with its 960 rebels, including women and children. When it became clear the Romans were going to capture Masada (April 15, 73 AD), on the instructions of Ben Yair, all the inhabitants (but for two women and five children who had hidden in a cistern and later told their stories) allowed the taking of their own lives rather than live as Roman slaves. According to Josephus' account in *The Wars of the Jews*: "They had died in the belief that they had left not a soul of them alive to fall into Roman hands."

According to Josephus, the long siege by the Romans led to the mass suicide of the Sicarii rebels and resident Jewish families in the fortress. It has been said that two of the rebels were chosen by lot to kill the other rebels and their families who apparently wanted to die to escape slavery and sexual degradation. Was this assisted suicide versus sinful murder? Yes. The residents chose death by friends over certain future sufferings.

Today Masada is a sacred site for Israelis, and none of them condemn the rebels for (assisted) suicide. Many consider their acts courageous in that they escaped Roman domination. However, because of the lack of details, David Noel Freedman (editor of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, New York: Doubleday, 1992) states many assume that in ancient Israel, suicide may have been considered natural or even heroic. Also in the same dictionary, Freedman quotes Socrates, "... from this [my] point of view, it is not unreasonable to say that a person must not kill himself until god sends some kind of necessity upon him such as now has come upon me."

In this chapter I have presented various voices against suicide or assisted suicide. I find the reasons for these various authors to be limited by their own opinions without regard to the consequences of their stand on these acts relevant to patients in great suffering at the end of their lives or if they even considered Jesus' death a form of assisted suicide. In the next chapter I will discuss authors with more conciliatory positions on assisted suicide.

CHAPTER THREE

OTHER PHILOSOPHERS' MORE OPEN ASSERTIONS ABOUT SUICIDE

In the last chapter, I presented some philosopher's arguments against (assisted) suicide. In this chapter I will present arguments of noted philosophers in favor of personal autonomy and assisted suicide.

Seneca, a stoic, (4 BC-65 AD), Socrates (469 BC - 399 BC) a Greek philosopher and Cicero (105-4 BC) a Roman philosopher

In the writings of Seneca, Friedman notes in volume VI, page 225 of the Anchor Bible Dictionary, “. . . the taking of one's life was extolled as the greatest triumph of an individual over fate.”

Seneca voiced his opinions on suicide in his own work, *On Anger* 3.15.3-4.

“. . . let us point out that however slavish a man's condition may be, there is always a path to liberty open to him. . . It is a man's own fault if he suffers, when by putting an end to himself he can put an end to his misery. . . Wherever you turn your eyes you may see an end to your woes. Do you see that precipice? Down it lies the road to liberty; do you see that sea? That river? That well? Liberty sits at the bottom of them. Do you see that tree? stunted, blighted, dried up though it be, yet liberty hangs from its branches. Do you see your own throat, your own neck, your own heart? There are so many ways of escape from slavery. . .Do you ask what path leads to liberty? I answer, any vein?”

Seneca goes on to say in his famous *Seventieth Epistle*:

...Above all, I (the gods) having taken pains that nothing should keep you here against your will; the way is open. If you do not choose to fight, you may run away. Therefore, of all things I have deemed necessary for you, I have made nothing easier than dying. I have set life on a downward slope: if it is prolonged only observe and you will see what a short and easy path leads to freedom (De Providencia, 6.7).

For the ancients, Socrates and Seneca were great examples of approving suicide—perhaps assisted suicide. However, the first time the English word *suicide* appeared in literature was in 1635 when Sir Thomas Browne wrote his *Religio Medici*.⁴¹

Saint Thomas More (1478 – 1535 AD) theologian and philosopher

Considering the official opposition expressed by Catholicism's greatest theologians, it may be surprising to read the words of Catholic Thomas More. "[T]hat a person should end [their] life by their own hand or the hand of another....[I]f the disease be not only incurable, but also full of continual pain and anguish, then the priests and the magistrates exhort the man (seeing that he is not able to do any duty of life, and by over-living his own death is noisome and irksome to others and grievous to himself) that he will determine with himself no longer to cherish that pestilent and painful disease; and ...either dispatch himself out of that painful life, as out of a prison or rack of torment, or else suffer himself to be willingly rid of it by another."⁴²

Contrary to suicide or assisted suicide, murder is the killing of another person against their will or absent a chance to consent. The above examples add weight to the argument that assisted suicide can be seen as moral and ethical even though some argue to the contrary.

Gregory Sayrus (1560-1602 AD), a Benedictine monk of note, wrote:

An individual undoubtedly would sin who, when there is no question of real pain, would permit himself to die when he could take care of the health of his body. To

⁴¹ Sir T. Browne, *Religio Medici* (authorized edition) i. §43. 98. (In public domain. Eugene, Ore Generic NL Free book Publisher, 1998), accessed August 31, 2023 <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=nlebk&AN=2009590&authtype=sso&custid=s8998431&site=eds-live&scope=site>. and A. Alvares, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970), p 50.

⁴² Thomas More, *Utopia and A Dialogue of Comfort*, 1516, ed. John O'Hagan (London, UK; New York, NY: Dent/Dutton, 1951), 98.

this, however, that he suffer the very intense pain of the amputation of a member or of an incision into his body, neither a prelate can oblige his subject, not a father his son. The reason is both because the sick individual is not held to conserve the life of his body with such great pain and torture and because superiors cannot prescribe all things licit and honest but those only which are moderate.⁴³

Sayrus is defending the right of refusal of treatment even if death occurs and suggesting that death (suicide) is acceptable.

David Hume (1711 – 1776 AD) Scottish Enlightenment Philosopher

David Hume suggested all religious belief "traces, in the end, to dread of the unknown."⁴⁴ He was an advocate of suicide as a release from suffering and wrote:

"Of Suicide," *Faith and death in the late Enlightenment*. Though death alone can the power with which that beneficent being has endowed him. The presents of God and nature are ravished from us by this cruel enemy, and notwithstanding put a full period to his misery, he dares not fly to this refuge [suicide], but still prolongs a miserable existence from a vain fear lest he offend his Maker by using that one step would remove us from the regions of pain and sorrow, her menaces still chain us down to a hated being which she herself chiefly contributes to render miserable. It is observed by such as have been reduced by the calamities of life to the necessity of employing this fatal remedy, that if the unseasonable care of their friends deprives them of that species of death which they proposed to themselves, they seldom venture upon any other or can summon up so much resolution a second time as to execute their purpose.⁴⁵

Hume recognizes that the horrors of death can grow, but, when superstition is added to man's natural fearfulness, it can deprive humanity of all power over their lives, even life's joys are stolen by the cruelty of suffering and fear.

⁴³ Gregory Sayrus, *Clavis Regia Conscientiae* (Venetiis, 1625), Cap.IX, n.38, as cited by Daniel A. Cronin, *Conserving Human Life*, (Broomall, PA, National Catholic Bioethics Center, 1989), 4,139-156

⁴⁴ John Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), 189-221; Immanuel Kant, "3.4 The Highest Good," *Philosophy of Religion*, Accessed July 5, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-religion/#HighGood>

⁴⁵ David O'Connor, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hume on Religion*, (Routledge, New York, 2002). 7-8, accessed December 19, 2023 <https://books.google.com/books?id=ntygPAezQJUC&dq=hume+religion&pg=PA7#v=onepage&q=hume%20religion&f=false>

Hume exhorts us to examine common arguments against suicide and shows that such actions may be free from guilt or self-blame (not shameful). To prove that suicide is no transgression of our duty to God, Hume suggests the following considerations may help the sufferer.

Man can be stopped by rivers, but he can also redirect them and make use of his other abilities to alter nature . . . What is the meaning then of the principle that a man who, tired of life and hunted by pain and misery, bravely overcomes all the natural terrors of death and makes his escape from this cruel scene; . . . The lives of men depend upon the same laws as the lives of all other animals . . . The fall of a tower, or the infusion of a poison, will destroy a man equally with the meanest creature. An inundation sweeps away everything without distinction that comes within the reach of its fury. Since therefore the lives of men are forever dependent on the general laws of matter and motion, is a man's disposing of his life criminal, because in every case it is criminal to encroach upon these laws?⁴⁶

But this seems absurd. . . We find that human life depends upon the general laws of matter and motion, and that it is no encroachment on the office of providence to disturb or alter these general laws. Has not everyone, of consequence, the free disposal of his own life? . . . But the life of a man is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster . . . Where then is the crime of turning a few ounces of blood from their natural channel? . . . I thank providence, both for the good which I have already enjoyed, and for the power with which I am endowed of escaping the ill that faith and death in the late Enlightenment threatens me.⁴⁷

Hume seems dispassionate toward death itself since everyone will be dead sooner or later and a “natural” death is just one way of reaching that state. He seems more taken with the method of exodus than the destination but continues to explain:

When I fall upon my own sword, therefore, I receive my death equally from the hands of the Deity as if it had proceeded from a lion, a precipice, or a fever . . . And why may I not employ one remedy as well as another? . . . (How) could one man deserve the appellation of hero, whom glory or friendship transports into the greatest dangers, and another merit the reproach of wretch or miscreant who puts a period to his life, from the same or like motives. There is no being which possesses any power or faculty that it receives not from its Creator. . . Be it

⁴⁶ David Hume, “Of Suicide,” *Faith and Death in the late Enlightenment*, accessed January 2, 2022, https://www.open.edu/openlearn/pluginfile.php/623438/mod_resource/content/1/ofsuicide.pdf

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 9, 28

animate or inanimate, rational or irrational, it is all a case: its power is still derived from the supreme Creator. . . . When the horror of pain prevails over the love of life, when a voluntary action anticipates the effects of blind causes, it is only in consequence of those powers and principles which he has implanted in his creatures [N]othing happens in the universe without its consent and co-operation. If so, then neither does my death, however voluntary, happen without its consent; and whenever pain or sorrow so far overcome my patience as to make me tired of life, I may conclude that I am recalled from my station in the clearest and most express terms A man who retires from life does no harm to society All our obligations to do good to society seem to imply something reciprocal. I receive the benefits of society, and therefore ought to promote its interests, but when I withdraw myself altogether from society, can I be bound any longer? I am not obliged to do a small good to society at the expense of a great harm to myself.⁴⁸

Like Hume, Shakespeare's Hamlet speaks in profound mixed metaphors as he contemplated suicide, speaking equally to the case of assisted dying: "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, to take arms against a sea of troubles, I by opposing end them? To die, to sleep."

Other Philosophers' Statements Favoring Autonomy and (Assisted) Suicide

A more contemporary Swiss theologian, Hans Küng, (1928- 2021) has put the case more bluntly than Hume in Küng's *Dying With Dignity*: "the fight for life is meaningful as long as healing is possible, but a fight against death at any price is nonsensical: it is a help which becomes a torment."⁴⁹

As John Parratt includes in his writing on dying, "Illness, infirmity, and lack of mobility are significant factors which lead to social isolation."⁵⁰ The psychological impact

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 29, 30

⁴⁹ Hans Küng, and Walter Jens, (editors) *A Dignified Dying*, tr. John Bowden, (London, SCM Press, 1995 and New York Continuum Press 1998), 16 ; *I Don't Cling to Life* accessed February 9, 2024, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/controversial-theologian-hans-kueng-on-death-and-church-reform-a-938501.html#fotostrecke-282cb7e0-0001-0002-0000-0000000104835>

⁵⁰ John Parratt, *So We Live, Forever Bidding Farewell: Theology & Assisted Dying*, (Durham, England, Sacristy Press, 2020), 25, 87

resulting from such loneliness may exacerbate physical decline. He quotes a poem of Austrian Franz Werfel: “Before you lie down, ready for the last night, you must taste the dry rusk of being excluded.”

As seen above, Hume is voicing what today we would call autonomy, a major component of modern bioethics. He ends his discourse on suicide this way: “If it be no crime, both prudence and courage should engage us to rid ourselves at once of existence when it becomes a burden. It is the only way that we can then be useful to society by setting an example which, if imitated, would preserve to everyone his chance for happiness in life and would effectually free him from all danger of misery.”⁵¹ In addition to autonomy, or the capacity to self-direct, there is another pillar of medical ethics (or bioethics). It is beneficence, the act of doing “good,” as opposed to another pillar of ethics known as nonmaleficence or the prevention of doing “harm.” The interpretation of “good” and “harm” are often open to interpretation especially in doing the work of medical ethics.

Justice and integrity should also be seen as part of the field of bioethics. Our actions toward others should be examples of equal or balanced responses to that of other responses which permits us to retain our integrity while dealing with others.

The pillar of medical ethics known as confidentiality is said to have been part of the original Hippocratic Oath, it is also part of the codes of many professions and occupations. This is also true for personal integrity—adhering to one’s defensible standards and moral character. One phrase in the oath that is often quoted is “...I will

⁵¹ David Hume, Y. T. Greig editor, *The letters of David Hume*, vol.1 Letter 53 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1932), 94-95, 97-98

neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it...” Some people interpret this phrase to mean a drug for the doctor’s patient. It may, however, be interpreted as not giving a deadly drug to one person for the purpose of murdering another, i.e., an enemy.

In 1947, Emil Brunner (1889-1966), a respected Swiss theologian, stressed that life is a gift of God. As seen in one of his books, Brunner meant “nothing less than the recognition of our existence as God’s property” and our responsibility to regard it and use it as God’s possession.⁵² However, Brunner did not believe that life should be preserved at all costs—self-preservation was not an “unconditional duty” nor does “God require us to throw ourselves away,” but, to the contrary, He demands we, as God’s “possession” and “instruments,” respect ourselves and have “a grateful love of ourselves.” Brunner added that it was impossible to imagine God could “will” us to end our life by our own act. However, God could will our death by numerous other means. The question is does God ever will our death or does he simply not interfere with so called degenerative natural events?

In 1994, Oregon passed the Death with Dignity Act. In the fourth and subsequent editions of their book, Beauchamp and Childress endorsed physician-assisted suicide and presented nine conditions under which assisted suicide is justified:

- (1) a voluntary request by a competent patient;
- (2) an ongoing patient-physician relationship;
- (3) mutual and informed decision making by patient and physician;
- (4) a supportive yet critical and probing environment of decision making;
- (5) a considered rejection of alternatives;

⁵² Emil Brunner, “*The Divine Imperative: A Study in Christian Ethics*, translator Olive Wyon, (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1947), 172-173

- (6) structured consultation with other parties in medicine;
- (7) a patient's expression of a durable preference for death;
- (8) unacceptable suffering by the patient;
- (9) use of a means that is as painless and comfortable as possible.

Additionally, in their fourth edition, they argue that assistance in dying is part of the physician's obligation of care for patients, and policies based on traditional attitudes need to be changed.

In Oregon law, the person whose death is to be brought about makes the final decision and performs the final act of taking doctor prescribed medications. This explains the label "physician-assisted suicide," which is avoided in Oregon law. Abraham Kaplan (1918-1993) declared: ". . . (F)or us to cope with the problems of the sanctity of life [doctrine] it is not necessary . . . to settle any questions of the relation between religious doctrine and moral practice." To the contrary, he stated, "I believe that we can all agree on the basic principle . . . that life is sanctified because for us, the living, it is the locus of all value . . . If life is not sacred, nothing else could be."⁵³

Kaplan's view of human life as the "locus of all value" was not only in keeping with Shils but also with the teachings of the "sage of Konigsberg," Immanuel Kant who wrote that suicide showed a disrespect for life and violated people's duty to be sentinels" on earth who may not leave their posts until relieved by God.

Many who die in war or are otherwise murdered are not generally believed to have died or left their "post" at the will of God. They were simply unlucky.

⁵³ Abraham Kaplan, "*Social Ethics and the Sanctity of Life*," *Life or Death: Ethics and Options*, (Seattle, Univ. of Washington Press, 1968), 166

Like Callahan, Edward Keyserlingk, author of a study written at the request of the Law Reform Commission of Canada, wrote: “. . . (S)ince both contemporary theology and human experience suggest that God does not in fact directly intervene in the biological processes of life or make life and death decisions, humans would be abdicating responsibility to passively leave the care, protection and control of life to God.”⁵⁴

Edward Keyserlingk argued public policy and law should affirm the absolute value, equality, and sanctity of human life. Nevertheless, he proceeded to reject biological vitalism, where the continuation of biological life is treated as an end in itself. He had trouble with absolute adherence to Kant’s thesis that persons are ends in themselves, not means. Death, Keyserlingk asserted, should not always be resisted: preserving life can even dishonor life’s sanctity. For Keyserlingk, this sanctity principle correctly functioned to impose in life and death situations the burden of proof on those who would opt for a cessation or medical treatment and life support . . . Where personal life is no longer possible, he insisted human bodily life does not need to be preserved.⁵⁵

From Beauchamp and Childress’ perspective, no supernatural revelation, mediated by organized religion, is needed to know life is sacred. Articles about the same reason for taking one’s life in one’s last days is to prevent a loss of one’s own dignity, while at the same time sparing a family grief and financial loss. However, regarding suicide in their chapter on autonomy, they state there are valid reasons for suicide: “One valid reason is maximizing not only one’s own interests but the interests of all

⁵⁴ Edward Keyserlingk, *Sanctity of Life or Quality of Life in the Context of Ethics, Medicine, and Law* (Ottawa, Law Reform Commission of Canada, Protection of Life Series, 1979), 36

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 76-79

concerned.”⁵⁶ Seventeen pages later in the same book, they say assisted suicide should not become policy because: “. . . although particular acts of killing may not violate the duty of nonmaleficence and may even be humane and compassionate, a policy of authorizing killing could violate the duty of nonmaleficence by creating a grave risk of harm . . .” In Beauchamp and Childress’ third edition of their book, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, the authors are still against physician-assisted suicide for the good of society. However, in their chapter on beneficence, they add, “. . . [A]cts of assisted suicide may sometimes be justified and even required by the principle of beneficence, in conjunction with the principle of respect for autonomy. . . .”⁵⁷ Nevertheless, these two ethicists must feel, notwithstanding the possibility of supernatural assistance, we are responsible for our own morality. Beauchamp and Childress do not posit life itself as a “good,” and certainly not a means to whatever individuals regard as good . . . [W]hen life sustaining treatment is withdrawn (or not initiated) by patients, they need to have their right to autonomy honored, the failure to grant the same right to lingering patients in equally unbearable circumstances seems tantamount to condemning the patient to a life he or she does not want.” Therefore, we are required by Kant’s appeal to the logic of “ought” as an inalienable right. Rather, life is a right only if individuals desire and claim it; life is good only as it implies “can” as well as to the “rational hope” of a reward that, according to Kant’s doctrine of the “highest good,” is supposed to follow from our becoming “well pleasing to God.”

⁵⁶ James Beauchamp, Tom Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 1st. edition, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979), 93

⁵⁷ James Beauchamp and Tom Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 3rd ed., (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989), 26

James Gustafson (1925-2021), an American theological ethicist, ably summarize his thoughts on the matter as: “An act on which very few of our contemporaries dare to make a moral judgement is for Kant morally wrong.”⁵⁸

Some people believe it is not always morally wrong to cause someone’s death. For example, one person can justifiably kill another in self-defense. Causing a person’s death is wrong not because it ends the person’s life, but because unjustified personal losses are produced. If such a death does not cause unjustifiable harm, the case becomes different. What then makes killing or “assisting” in causing a wrongful death? When is it wrong? Is it that a person unjustifiably suffers a loss of interest and experiences the person would or would not have experienced? The person loses certain goods and abilities to plan or choose a future. If one chooses death, rather than life and its goods, then helping that person bring about their death may neither cause harm nor wrong. Some would assert that help might harm society by harming its interests. This consequence might be a reason against allowing assisted suicide, but it would not alter one’s perspective on the justification of the act. Not helping people to die may interrupt or frustrate their plans and, from their perspective, the denial of assistance in dying causes them harm, indignity, or despair.

Rainer Rilke has written, “We cannot spare those we leave behind from the fact of death, but the option of assisted dying might well spare them the distress of co-experiencing a prolonged and painful death.”⁵⁹ It could be argued Jesus did just that. The

⁵⁸ James, M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, volume. 2 (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984), 119

⁵⁹ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Rilke Quotations*, accessed January 4, 2024, https://www.azquotes.com/author/12367-Rainer_Maria_Rilke?p=17

three Marys and John stood nearby as Jesus suffered and rather quickly died. He was apparently on the cross for only a few hours before giving up his life and escaping his suffering.

Each of the above philosophers' express opinions that in some ways support and simultaneously opposes, for different reasons, the acceptability of assisted suicide that exists across not only America but the world.

Joseph F. Fletcher

Anglican theologian Joseph F. Fletcher (1905-1991) taught Christian Ethics at Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and at Harvard Divinity School. He argued for a compassionate approach to ethics that would avoid legalism, which insists that for every situation of choice there is a moral rule that must be followed. Legalism, he thought, reduced Christian ethics to a system of inflexible rules that may be impossible to apply under new and unusual conditions. The general rule of this approach is that the correct action should be the most loving action. But Christian ethics must also void *antinomianism*, which holds that there is no purpose against which we can judge our individual choices and actions. Each ethical choice is a new reality, which must be decided entirely on its own terms. Fletcher coined a term called "situation ethics," which makes decisions by assessing the consequences in light of Jesus' teaching about love of God and neighbor, but he felt we are not left without guidance in new or difficult situations. Rules and principles help us see what love requires, but we cannot determine what to do just by following rules. Our aim must be to do the most loving thing for

everyone in a particular situation. If following rules helps to do that, then the rules should be followed. If not, they should be set aside without feeling regret or guilt.⁶⁰

It seems we often must make exceptions to general rules in order to do the right thing in particular cases. However, the problem is to figure out how to justify the exception without saying we like the result better than we like doing our duty. For those who admit that exceptions are possible, the way we argue from rules to cases becomes an important part of a reasoned moral life. This kind of reasoning is known as casuistry whose idea is to begin with the general rule, then stick to sound reasoning and good evidence, so when one reaches a conclusion, you can be sure it is an application of the rule and not an excuse for doing whatever you like. As Thomas Aquinas noted, (*Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q. 94, a. 4) ...” the more specific the question, the more difficult practical reason becomes, and the more likely we are to need adjustments and exceptions to the general rule.”

Overall, the above information concerns philosopher’s more favored stance to assisted suicide as do I. In the next chapter I will present a modern era activist of great interest in assisted suicide for all the right reasons even if he did not always follow his own argument for such assistance.

⁶⁰ Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality*, Library of Theological Ethics, (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press 1996)

CHAPTER FOUR

A NEW AGE: THE KEVORKIAN ERA

I will explore this era because it brought assisted suicide to a very broad array of citizens around the world and started a modern discussion of the pros and cons of this form of death that is now legal in 10 states and the District of Columbia and under consideration in many other states.

Doctor Jacob Kevorkian came to the attention of the American public in the 1980's and quickly became known as *Doctor Death*. He was known for saying, "Dying is not a crime."⁶¹ His medical specialty was pathology, the study of death causing diseases, tumors, trauma, poisons, etc., but he was best known as a euthanasia activist. He knew all too well the outcomes of disabling and painful maladies. He had seen their end results on the autopsy table and under the lens of his microscope. Many find it interesting such a man with his unusual career would also be a painter, author, composer, and instrumentalist. However, his greatest claim to fame was his role in publicly championing a terminally ill patient's right to die via physician-assisted suicide, a service he provided to some 130 patients.

Doctor Kevorkian was known for saying, "It's time for a society obsessed with planned birth to consider diverting some of its attention and energy from an overriding concern with longevity of life, at all costs, to the snowballing need for a rational stance on planned death."

⁶¹ Samuel Wells, Ben Quash, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, (Hoboken, John Wiley and Sons, 2010) 329.

In the 1980s, Doctor Kevorkian wrote a series of articles that appeared in the obscure German journal *Medicine and Law* in which he presented his thoughts concerning the ethics of euthanasia.⁶² One such article "The Last Fearsome Taboo: Medical Aspects of Planned Death" published in 1988 *Medicine and Law*. The article detailed his proposed system of planned deaths in suicide clinics.

Doctor Kevorkian's search for his first death-seeking patient led him to advertise in a Detroit newspaper as a "physician consultant" for "death counseling." The ad read: "DEATH COUNSELING. IS SOMEONE IN YOUR FAMILY TERMINALLY ILL? Does he or she wish to die - and with dignity? CALL A PHYSICIAN CONSULTANT."

He received two responses to his ads. In March of 1990, a Detroit newspaper published this Kevorkian ad:

Applications are being accepted. Oppressed by a fatal disease, a severe handicap, or a crippling deformity? Write BOX 264, Royal Oak, Mich. 48068-0261. Show him proper compelling medical evidence that you should die, and Dr. Jack Kevorkian will help you kill yourself free of charge.

On June 26, 1995, Doctor Kevorkian opened a suicide clinic in an office in Springfield Township, Michigan. Ms. Erika Garcellano, a sixty-year-old Kansas City, Missouri, woman with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), was his first client. Days later, the building's owner forced Kevorkian out of the building.

At first, Doctor Kevorkian considered carbon monoxide for assisted euthanasia. In his book *Prescription: Medicide*, Kevorkian wrote, "The gas is toxic enough to cause rapid unconsciousness in relatively low concentrations. Furthermore, in light-

⁶² *Frontline*. "The Kevorkian Verdict: A Chronology," May 1996, PBS.; accessed August 4, 2022. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/kevorkian/chronology.html>. and RELIGION & ETHICS NEWSWEEKLY, <https://www.pbs.org/video/religion-and-ethics-newsweekly-perspectives-dr-kevorkian/>

complexioned people, it often produces a rosy color that makes the victim look better as a corpse.”⁶³ Eventually, Kevorkian used a lethal injection for assisted suicide.

He used \$30 worth of scrap parts scrounged from garage sales and hardware stores to build a suicide machine on his kitchen table. He called it the Thanatron, which is Greek for death machine. He later presented it on the Donahue TV show. He said, “. . . [T]he device is dignified, humane, and painless, and the patient can do it [commit suicide] in the comfort of their own home at any time they want.”

Doctor Kevorkian's first “official” client, to use his new machine, was Janet Adkins, a 54-year-old Alzheimer's patient, from Portland Oregon. She had been recently diagnosed with early Alzheimer's Disease and was frightened of her expected future of mental and physical deterioration.

Her husband initially contacted Kevorkian for information and later consulted him during planning sessions. November 30, 1989, was the date selected for her death so it “wouldn't spoil Christmas for the kids.”

Janet confirmed all the plans associated with her anticipated death. “She selected the music and readings for her memorial service,” writes author Betzold.⁶⁴ She also arranged for a therapist to mediate final ‘closure’ sessions with her family.

Using the “suicide machine,” Janet Adkins died in Kevorkian's 1968 Volkswagen van in Groveland Oaks Park, Michigan. The doctor was later charged with first-degree murder, but the Oakland County [Michigan] District Court dropped charges two years

⁶³ Dr. Jack Kevorkian, *Prescription Medicide, the Goodness of a Planned Death*, (Buffalo, Prometheus Books, 1991), 193

⁶⁴ Michael Betzold, *Appointment with Doctor Death*, (Troy, MI, Momentum Books, 1993), 68-74

later after a two-day preliminary hearing. The court ruled Kevorkian had not broken any law by helping Adkins commit suicide, because there was no law outlawing suicide or the forty-four cases where medical assistance in suicide occurred in Michigan.

According to *The Gerontologist*, 25% of the patients who committed suicide with Kevorkian's help had no complaint of pain. The report further asserted Kevorkian's counseling periods were too brief (nineteen patients were dead less than twenty-four hours after meeting Kevorkian). There were no recorded psychiatric examinations in at least nineteen cases, even though five of the cases involved people with histories of depression, however, Kevorkian was allegedly alerted that the patient was unhappy for reasons other than their medical condition.⁶⁵

On November 22, 1998, in the broadcast of CBS News' *60 Minutes*, Doctor Kevorkian aired a videotape he had made on September 17, 1998. It depicted the voluntary euthanasia of Thomas Youk, age 52, who was in the final stages of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease). After Youk provided his fully informed consent (a somewhat complex legal determination made and printed, in this case by editorial consensus) Kevorkian administered to Thomas Youk a lethal injection—with no assistance from the patient. This fact was very important, because all of Kevorkian's earlier clients had reportedly completed the process themselves. Doctor Kevorkian was arrested, tried, and sentenced to prison. His sentence did not, however, still the growing interest of Americans in legally assisted suicide. As expected, the loudest cry against its legalization came from the Christian community.

⁶⁵ Lori A. Roscoe, "A Comparison of Characteristics of Kevorkian Euthanasia Cases and Physician-Assisted Suicides in Oregon," *The Gerontologist*, Volume 41, Issue 4, 1 August 2001, Pages 439–446, accessed May 5, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/41.4.439>

Dr. Kevorkian helped stimulate America's interest in end-of-life situations and did much to create an environment in which many states made assisted suicide legal. Without his involvement being as public as it was, I do not think assisted suicide would be as acceptable as it is today and as a movement growing stronger.

In the next chapter, I will explore a concept that has caused many concerned citizens to fight the legalization of assisted suicide on the basis of the value or sacredness of life.

CHAPTER FIVE

IS HUMAN LIFE SACRED?

Throughout this manuscript, we will see the word *sacred* used many times. Dennis Hiebert goes to great length to discuss the meaning of sacred and concludes: saying so is the beginning, not the end, of the discussion, but for some Christians, choosing to end the life of an embryo, or their own, is not sacrilege.⁶⁶ The word is responsible for many people's argument against assisted suicide. The phrase "sanctity of life" was first mentioned in 1970 discussions about (killing) taking of life but primarily in the context of abortion.⁶⁷ I will explore this phrase in the context of assisted suicide and share the thoughts of some philosophers who have addressed this concept.

Many late 20th century secular humanists felt an obligation to verbalize a rationally autonomous sanctity of life principle in the defense of human life. For some, the challenge was not as formidable as it first appeared: nature, they believed, was literally and figuratively on their side. Resisting popular prejudices in this area, Edward Shils argued the sanctity of life, as a current principle, had never been dependent upon Christian theology or any other code of belief. Instead, it was a sensibility that came to men and women naturally.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Dennis Hiebert, "What Does 'Life is Sacred' Mean," *Journal of Sociology and Christianity*, vol. 11, 2, (Omega Graduate School, Dayton, TN, 2021), 1-3

⁶⁷ John Parratt, *So We Live, Forever Bidding Farewell: Theology & Assisted Dying*, (Durham, England, Sacristy Press, 2020), 27

⁶⁸ E. Shils, (ed.): *Life or Death: Ethics and Options*, (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1968), 79, 149; Geoffries G. Drutch, *Is Life Sacred*, (Cleveland, Pilgrim Press, 1998), 78

Dennis Hiebert's book, *What Does "Life is Sacred" Mean?* goes to great length to discuss the meaning of sacred and concludes: "For those of us who do indeed believe life is sacred, saying so is the beginning, not the end, of a necessarily nuanced discussion. Sacredness of life is simply a statement and respect offered by one to a thing. We make it sacred by our words and our actions. As we can proclaim something as being sacred, we shall see that we can unproclaim something that was once sacred and now not so. For some Christians, choosing to end the life of an embryo, or their own, is not a sacrilege."⁶⁹

This subject will be further explored later in this chapter.

Many Christians believe human life is sacred and use this phrase in their arguments against medically assisted suicide. If the sanctity or sacredness of life principle is absolute, how absolute is absolute? If we "pull the plug" or disconnect a machine and shorten a life, have we committed an immoral act? Some say we have simply let nature take its course, and the interference of a machine interferes with natural forces. Why then do we wear glasses, have cataracts removed, take antibiotics for infections, use insulin to control blood sugar levels, have surgery for cancer, etc.? Each is an interference with nature, without which in some cases could lead to death. However, let us not forget that such interferences do not always produce the desired results.

For the departed we say, "May they rest in peace." But what price is peace? Are condoned wars, killing hundreds of thousands of people, to bring about peace always moral? We condone the taking of lives in certain circumstances: self-defense, as capital punishment, and in war. To this end, the Catholic Church developed the concept of a

⁶⁹ Dennis Hiebert, "What Does 'Life is Sacred' Mean?", *Journal of Sociology and Christianity*, volume 11, 2, (Dayton, TN, Omega Graduate School, 2021), 1-3

“Just War Doctrine.” This doctrine places a moral frame around war, i.e., is the proposed war moral and is its conduct moral? What acts are necessary (its proportionality) and what consideration is there for non-combatants?

Leon R. Kass M.D., Ph.D., (author and former member of the President's Council on Bioethics) has said: “To the best of my knowledge, the phrase “sanctity of life does not occur either in the Hebrew Bible or in the New Testament. Life as such is not said to be holy (*qâdosh*), as is, for example The Sabbath. Traditional Judaism places great emphasis on preserving human life. Yet the duty to preserve one’s life is not absolute: to cite one example: “a Jew should accept martyrdom rather than commit idolatry, adultery, or murder.”⁷⁰

Problematic for any agreement among secular sanctity-of-life-advocates is the unresolved question of which aspect of human existence is sacred. Is the preservation of our bodily life the supreme value, or is it our psychosocial capacities that matter most? Some argue life is sacred because we are made in God’s image, but does God have a “life” such as ours? Kass translates “God’s image” as: “God exercises speech and reason, freedom in doing and making, and the powers of contemplation, judgment, and care.”⁷¹

Which is more important or sacred in a conflict-of-values situation—the life of an individual, the well-being of community, or the survival of the human species?⁷² Most Christian ethicists see life as having “inherent” value, the vague definition of which is of little assistance in doing the work of medical ethics.

⁷⁰ Leon R. Kass, (Michael M. Uhlmann, editor), *Last Rights: Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia Debated* (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 204

⁷¹ Ibid., 208

⁷² Geoffrey G. Drutchas, *Is Life Sacred*, (Cleveland, Pilgrim Press, 1998), 81

In 1931, Pope Pius XI found it expedient to appropriate the sanctity of life rhetoric commonly used by an otherwise detested liberalism. For the first time, the Roman Catholic Church identified “innocent” human life as sacred, including in that category fetal or embryonic life.⁷³ It seems this argument negates the concept of original sin allegedly present in all beings. No commentator has been able to cite any earlier comparable papal statement about the sacredness of human life, whether fetal or already born individuals.

In the mid-1960s, a social philosopher, Edward Shils argued, at the Reed College Symposium on the Sanctity of Life, that only a general adherence to a sanctity of life doctrine would keep science from becoming ensnared by sadistic and inhumane impulses. Shils’ proto-religious “natural metaphysic” was quite simple. It amounted to an innate awareness on the part of all humanity that life is sacred. He wrote:

The chief feature of the proto-religious “natural metaphysic” is the affirmation: “... [T]hat life is sacred. It is believed to be sacred not because it is a manifestation of a transcendent creator from whom life comes: It is believed to be sacred because it is life. The idea of sacredness is generated by the primordial experience of being of experiencing the elemental sensation of vitality and the elemental fear of its extinction ... the sense of awe is the attribution and therefore the acknowledgment of sanctity.”⁷⁴

Daniel Callahan’s complaint against Christianity and its sanctity of life stance was multifold. In his view, it had not addressed the problems posed by changing technology that encouraged moral passivity where human responsibility was necessary. Christianity, a minority religion in some places, could not provide a consensual norm to which all

⁷³ Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*,⁶⁴ accessed 1-14-24, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19301231_casti-connubii.html

⁷⁴ E. Shils, (ed.) *Life or Death: Ethics and Options*, (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1968), 79, 149

religions could have access. He argues human beings need to use reason and experience rather than blindly following heteronomous principles from the past. He argued “all moral rules are human artifacts” and “the fiction of divinely imposed rules does no justice to the moral rules or to God.”

Daniel Callahan wrote:

God does not directly enter into the processes of nature and human life, at least not in the sense of immediately intervening in the biological processes of life and death . . . Man is responsible for everything to do with man, including control over life and death . . . contraception, abortion, euthanasia. Medical experimentation, and the prolongation of human life are all problems which fall totally within the sphere of human rules and human judgements. To place the solution of these problems “in the hands of God” is to misjudge God’s role and to misuse human reason and freedom . . . The theology behind the excuse that man can’t “play God” is a defective theology.⁷⁵

To counter this defective theology, Callahan outlined a process for using the sanctity of life principle that relies on rational and intuitive understanding. Early in his work, he conceded that there is agreement that “the sanctity of human life” principle is worth affirming, yet it appears to be abstract and ambiguous as a principle. If it is possible to deduce from such a principle, differing moral rules and duties, it is open to us to interpret the principle in different ways, and if the widespread confirmation of the principle does not lead to any consensus about what it implies, and if each of the important words in the principle: “sanctity,” “human,” and “life” is open to differing definitions, then what value is such a principle? Are we not deluding ourselves in trying to hold on to that principle, or in thinking it can serve as a basis for consensus? Doesn’t it

⁷⁵ Callahan, Daniel, “The Sanctity of Life,” in *The Religious Situation*: editor. Donald R. Cutler, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1969), 331-332

raise more questions and problems than it solves?⁷⁶ It should serve as a guide and not a law.

Julian R. Pleasants, a twentieth century scientist and theologian, warned that unless humanity reaches a consensus about the sanctity of human life, not only within groups, but between groups, they may commit the ultimate biological sin—self-extermination. *Brave New World* may be closer than we thought, and that responsibility should frighten us, deciding who shall live and who shall die, or manipulating people like we manipulate our resources of land, energy, and talent which we have managed to keep at our disposal. He thought we stood at a moral crossroads.

Just a couple of years after the famous Reed College Symposium on life where Shils had spoken and later wrote his book,⁷⁷ the young philosopher and ethicist Daniel Callahan published an extended essay about the growing threat to human well-being in modern society. Callahan was reluctant to criticize a particular group but noted the proliferation of state supported hospitals and research facilities often meant people gather in relatively impersonal, professional relationships. He stated, “. . . [T]he layman, whether as client or experimental subject, is wholly at the mercy of a professional or an institution.” Callahan’s view about the impersonality of institutions and staffs and their concerns with rational efficiency and economies of scale presented threats that needed monitoring so human beings would not be unknowingly reduced to objects.⁷⁸ Callahan

⁷⁶ Ibid., 311-312

⁷⁷ E. Shils, ed., *Life or Death: Ethics and Options*, (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1968)

⁷⁸ Daniel Callahan, PhD, Bruce Jennings, MD, “Ethics and Public Health: Forging a Strong Relationship,” *American Journal of Public Health*, February 2002, accessed February 15, 2024, <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.92.2.169>

made it clear; Christianity was not up to the moral task that its time required. This thought somewhat echoed the thoughts of Julian R. Pleasants mentioned above.

Rudolf Steiner, a late 19th century esoteric spiritualist and founder of Anthroposophy, is quoted by Prokofieff regarding Steiner's understanding of illness:

“... a patient's death-wish, as well as a suicide-wish or will, can be seen as a part of, or an expression and result of a serious illness. This “wish” can evoke psychological empathy as it can be understandable and justifiable in various situations in light of the circumstances of a patient's life and consciousness. However, the ultimate disposition over life is not granted to us—being neither creator nor consummator. One's life is not a possession and does not belong to oneself personally no matter how much this contradicts the post-modern feeling of autonomy. It is a loaned property; the doctor is forbidden in the strictest sense to cooperate in its destruction”⁷⁹

Steiner's thoughts are not shared by all modern medical ethicists, for the degree of life's sacredness is not measured in only one way.

An often-used argument is “life is sacred” and if medical professionals were permitted to kill (euthanasia not assisted suicide), the fundamental trust in the physician/nurse-patient relationship might/would be damaged if not destroyed. Some say allowing physicians to kill might involve mistaken assumptions that physicians are not already killing patients and their doing so is anti-patient trust. Secondly, those who assume the harms of legal assisted suicide would be unthinkable fail to realize the case for allowing intentional deaths rests on the values that support the general prohibition against intentional killing, values that can both guide the development of appropriate safeguards and simultaneously prompt us to implement and monitor them.

⁷⁹ Sergei O. Prokofieff, Peter Selg Rokofieff, *Honoring Life Medical Ethics and Physician-Assisted Suicide*, trans. W. A. Walshe, (Great Barrington, MA, Steiner Books, 2014), 5

Founded by the Rev. Billy Graham, a conservative evangelical minister, the magazine *Christianity Today* has a high regard for life yet on December 6, 2016, it published “Opposition to Assisted Suicide Dies Out.” The article reports, “. . . 4 in 10 evangelicals, want doctors to help terminally ill patients end their lives.”⁸⁰

Secularist Leon Kass, does not use the phrase sanctity of life, but he believes life has “dignity.” J. H. Channer, a British ethicist, believes life is “ultimately meaningful.” Joseph Fletcher, founder of the theory of situational ethics, translates sacrosanct life into “intrinsically good” and “valuable.” Wildung Harrison, American Presbyterian feminist theologian, affirms life’s “intrinsic worth.” John J. Haldane, a British philosopher and former papal adviser to the Vatican, sees life as an affirmation of the inviolability of innocent life. In 1980, Helga Kuhse, founder of the Centre for Human Bioethics at Australia’s Monash University attacked the concept of sanctity or sacredness of life but associates it with its inviolability. She believes it is absolutely prohibited to intentionally terminate life, because all human life, no matter its quality, is equally valuable and inviolable. A remaining question is does all life have equal utility and how is it measured?

Helga Kuhse leaves us wondering about her definition of valuable. How would she view the value of a person in a persistent coma? Can the patient’s value be quantified? While she does not consider life to be sacred, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary lists a synonym for her word *inviolable* to be sacred.

Even in Thomas Aquinas’s desire to prohibit suicide, he wrote nothing about the sacredness of life. For him, it appears the condition and fate of a person’s soul, in the

⁸⁰ A Christian Magazine (Wheaton, Illinois) founded by the evangelist Billy Graham in 1956

hereafter, rather than the preservation of human life in the here and now, was his highest concern. Moreover, some of Aquinas's stronger arguments against suicide were largely indebted to secular and non-Christian sources as mentioned earlier. Even so, his arguments are the thoughts of a philosopher and not considered to be divine revelation.

Many Christians regard all human life as sacred and equal in value without distinction or discrimination as to physical or mental abilities or possibilities. However, Geoffrey G. Drutchas, theologian and historian, wrote:

“ . . . [N]either the pope nor anyone else . . . has put forth credible evidence to substantiate the sanctity of life position, or that it has any biblical basis, or even of widespread concern . . . before the nineteenth century . . . and that concern came from secular rather than religious sources . . . [T]he doctrine may actually represent a divergence from earlier traditional Christian teachings.”⁸¹

Secular ethicist Leon Kass (born 1939) is an American physician, scientist, educator, and critic of euthanasia and often referred to as a bioethicist, but refers to himself as "an old fashioned humanist." He searched for a doctrine of life's sacredness in the Judeo-Christian traditions and failed to find the phrase "sanctity of life" or "sacredness of life" in either the Old or New Testament. He finds the word "sanctity" in Scripture, but it always referred to God's people attaining a state of holiness not a reference to life's sacredness.⁸²

The concept of life being sacred is not supported by scripture. It is a human concept.

⁸¹ Georffres G. Drutchas, *Is Life, Sacred*, (Cleveland, Pilgrim Press, 1998), 4

⁸² Leon R. Kass, "Death with Dignity and the Sanctity of Life," *Commentary*, Mar;89(3):33-43. PMID: 11652555. 1990): Mar;89(3):33-43. PMID: 11652555

In May of 1980, *THE SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH: DECLARATION ON EUTHANASIA* was published by Pope John Paul II, but it never mentioned life as being sacred.⁸³

Some Christians argue man is made in the image of God (*Imago Dei*), and therefore, man's life is sacred (Genesis 1:27). Theologian and ethicist, James M. Childs, Jr., is said to concede the Hebrew Bible never intended to offer a "doctrine of the dignity and worth of man by using the image of God concept to highlight noble qualities possessed by man."⁸⁴ The Hebrew Bible does not celebrate life—it exalts God.

Childs referred to the creative task in developing a Christian anthropology that embraced the concept of the sanctity of life. He feared a failure to develop such a Christian anthropology, would allow other ideologies to prevail—ideologies that would not protect humanity from manipulation and abuse, which would further push Christianity aside. Childs did not hesitate to declare his own Christian anthropology, which he felt would defend humans as sacred beings. Childs used traditional church doctrines to clarify his anthropology affirming the sanctity of human life. His and other's feelings about the sacredness of human life incorporated interpretations of *Imago Dei* doctrine, updated conceptions of natural law, and the notion that human life is a divine gift or loan.⁸⁵ He does not tell us how to define or distinguish between a gift or a loan or the harm in returning a gift or a loan to the creator.

⁸³ Franjo Cardinal Seper, Prefect, *THE SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH: DECLARATION ON EUTHANASIA*, accessed July 20, 2023, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19800505_euthanasia_en.html

⁸⁴ John J. Haldane, "The Ethics of Life and Death," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38, (Cambridge, 1985), 609

⁸⁵ James M. Childs, Jr., *Christian Anthropology and Ethics*, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1978), 85-103

Arthur Dyck goes to great length in his book, *Life's Worth*, to discuss life's sacredness as if everyone already knew that to be true. Unfortunately, he does not inform us as to what makes it sacred or how it is made sacred.⁸⁶

The theologian most instrumental in the development of the transcendent-relational-account of human sanctity was the conservative Protestant theologian and ethicist Paul Ramsey—Karl Barth's major interpreter. Ramsey converted Barth's "respect for life" statements, and other references to the sacredness of life, into a narrative about the sanctity of human life that could be seen apart from the inherent worth model. Ramsey was eager to establish a Protestant account of the sanctity of life. More than anyone, he appears to be responsible for the sanctity of life perspective which prevails in many current Protestant communities. He wrote, "Respect for life means that a man should "treat as a loan both the life of all men with his own and his own with that of all men."⁸⁷

If life is a loan what is the harm if it is self-delivered to the loaner? Is that not what Christ, the incarnate, did when he gave himself up to assisted suicide?

Glanville Williams, a legal scholar and one of the first to write about the sanctity of life, noting the Sixth Commandment states one is not to "murder."⁸⁸ Protestant

⁸⁶ Arthur J. Dyck, *Life's Worth: The Case Against Assisted Suicide*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 2002), 58-71

⁸⁷ Paul Ramsey, Edward Shils (editor), "The Morality of Abortion," *Life or Death*, (Portland, Reed College, 1967), 75

⁸⁸ (Exodus 20:13). The following modern English translations of the Bible use "murder" instead of "kill": New International Version, New Living Translation, English Standard Version, Berean Standard Version, New King James Version, New American Standard Bible, Legacy Standard Bible, Amplified Bible, Christian Standard Bible, Holman Christian Standard Bible, Aramaic Bible in Plain English, Contemporary English Version, English Revised Version, GOD'S WORD® Translation, Good News Translation, International Standard Version, JPS Tanakh 1917, Literal Standard Version, Majority Standard Bible, New American Bible, NET Bible, English Revised Version, GODS WORD translation, Good News Translation, International Standard Version. JPS Tanakh 1917, Literal Standard Version, Majority Standard

theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) concurred, but he did not include the sacralization of all human life. He dismissed such acts if there was not a divine command to do so.⁸⁹

Barth employed the idea of human life as a divine gift or loan to counter claims regarding human autonomy and freedom in the modern era. Barth declared:

God alone is truly independent. He alone belongs wholly to Himself and lives in and by Himself. Man's creaturely existence as such is not his property; it is a loan. As such it must be held in trust. It is not, therefore, under the control of man. But in the broadest sense it is meant for the service of God.⁹⁰

Barth's conclusion leaves us wanting to know what is meant by service to God. Is living in a vegetative state of service to God?

Barth is probably best described as an "ecumenical" since his work is broadly read by mainstream Protestants, Roman Catholics, and evangelicals. He was described by Pope Pius XII as the most important theologian since Thomas Aquinas, and his work continues to be a major influence on students, scholars, and preachers, but neither considered Jesus' death as assisted suicide and an example for suffering humanity.

Saint Augustine had great respect for life but can hardly be said to have endorsed the concept of the sanctity of life. His primary focus was on the sovereignty of God rather than the sacredness of human beings or their lives. His own writings avoided any mention of references to human sacredness, but if he had would that have made it so?

Bible, New Revised Standard Version, World English Bible, Young's literal Translation, A Faithful Version, Catholic Public Domain Version, Peshitta Holy Bible Translated (from Aramaic), NASB 1977, NASB 1995,

⁸⁹ Karl Barth, "III A Letter to Great Britain from Switzerland," *This Christian Cause*, (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1941), 38-72

⁹⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3 (Doctrine of Creation), part 4, sect 55, from the 1961 authorized English translation (London & New York City, A.C. Black publishing now Bloomsbury Publishing), 327

Martin Luther believed life and body were the most valuable treasures men and women had (perhaps good health being assumed), but he apparently did not believe or state life approached infinite value. He was most interested in furthering his Reformation and forgoing earlier Patristic ways. For him, original sin removed from man any image of God.⁹¹

On the other hand, John Calvin, wrote, “We must not regard the intrinsic merit of men, but consider the image of God in them, to which we owe all possible honor and love; but that this image is most carefully to be observed in them ‘...who are of the household of faith’ [Galatians 6:10], in as much as it is renewed and restored by the Spirit.” Calvin later wrote, “It is true that our Lord created us after His own image and likeness, but that was wholly defaced and wiped out of us by the sin of Adam: we are accursed, we are by nature shut out from all hope of life.”⁹²

Protestant theologian James M. Gustafson noted every theology involves a selective retrieval from a store of biblical and traditional claims. Any proof that Christian churches were committed to the sanctity of life as a unique Christian moral paradigm hinged upon a highly selective and biased reading of historical records. In fact, a “sanctity of life” paradigm cannot be biblically proven.⁹³

⁹¹ Martin Luther, Commentary on Romans, “But what, then, is original sin? According to the Apostle it is not only the lack of a good quality in the will, nor merely the loss of man’s righteousness and ability. It is rather the loss of all his powers of body and soul, of his whole outward and inward perfections. In addition to this, it is his inclination to all that is evil, his aversion against that which is good, his antipathy against they are all together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. . . .” accessed December, 29 2023, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/598370->

⁹² John Calvin, Ford Lewis Battles (translation by John Thomas McNeill ed)., *Institutes of the Christian Religion, 2 Volumes*, (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1960), 87-88

⁹³ James M Gustafson, *Ethics From a Theocentric Perspective*, volume 2, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992), 140-5

Gustafson further added that “the concept of the ensouled body, which gives it supreme value has, in Catholic ethics, had a decisive preference for certain moral choices. Under the circumstances, Christians were prompted to evaluate every human act in terms of its impact upon the well-being of the human soul.”

Saint Augustine spoke against suicide. So did Thomas Aquinas. Apparently, their complete and total condemnation eventually carried the day and shaped many Christians’ perceptions of suicide even to today, but their protestations were not a profession about the sanctity of life as Lecky, an Irish moralist, once claimed.⁹⁴

Saint Aquinas was much sterner than Augustine on the morality of suicide. He insisted suicide was a mortal sin, always wrong with no self-justifying exceptions, and excluded the possibility of repenting of one’s final sin, specifically, the taking of what belonged to God. I ask does suicide negate God’s owning the yielded life? Yet, even in Aquinas’ desire to prohibit suicide, he makes no mention of the sacredness of life. For him, the fate of a person’s soul in the hereafter, rather than preservation of human life in the here and now, was his greatest concern. He claimed self-destruction was contrary to natural law. His insistence that society has a right to forbid the taking of one’s life, which is partially a Stoic philosophy and has little to do with the gospels.⁹⁵ Recent USA state’s legislation has changed this opinion.

⁹⁴ William E. H. Lecky: A historian in the latter half of the nineteenth century. He coined the term “euthanasia” and was the first person to invoke the phrase “sanctity of human life.” Lecky insisted that the whole idea of life’s sanctity was the fruit of Christian church doctrine and belief. *The History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne*, (New York, D. Appleton and Company, 1870), 22,47 Accessed May 18, 2023, https://archive.org/details/historyofeuropea02leck_0/page/n9/mode/2up

⁹⁵ Roy Enquis, “ABORTION AND THE IMAGE OF GOD,” *Dialog*, Volume: 23 Issue: 3, (Gettysburg, 'Gettysburg Theological Seminary Press,1984), 198-201

While the beliefs of many Roman Catholic moralists, from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, forbade acts of voluntary or involuntary euthanasia, they did allow, or regard as morally acceptable, indirect involuntary euthanasia. They were, however, silent about the sanctity of life.

The American Lutheran Church statement of 1974 reflects a dramatically different perspective. It protested the "alarming increase of induced abortions since the 1973 decision (of the Supreme Court) is an irresponsible abuse of God's gift of life and a sign of the sinfulness of humanity and the brokenness of our present social order . . . [for] human life from conception, created in the image of God, is always sacred."⁹⁶

According to English law writers Rob Heywood and Alexandra Mullock:

We are of the view that barristers Brazier and Ost mean *reverence* for life to be something more than just a linguistic alternative [to sanctity of life]. The idea has a much greater potential in so far as it conveys importance to humanity, offering a less absolute position that reflects the rebuttable presumption for preserving life in a way that might be developed as a coherent compromise between sanctity; inviolability and concerns about autonomy, dignity and quality of life.⁹⁷

John Locke defined "person" as a being with reason and reflection that can "consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places." Only a person can want to go on living, or have plans for the future, because only a person can understand the possibility of a future existence for herself or himself. This means that to end the lives of people, against their will, is different from ending lives of beings who are not people. To have a sense of self and of one's continued existence over time, makes

⁹⁶ "Abortion, a Statement of Judgment and Conviction," Tenth General Convention of The American Lutheran Church, Summary Exhibit D, (Minneapolis, 1980), 1077

⁹⁷ Rob Heywood, Alexandra Mullock, *The Value of Life in English Law: revered but not sacred?*, Legal Studies, Vol. 36 No. 4, (Manchester, England., 2016), 658–682

possible an entirely different kind of life.⁹⁸ Those who can perceive the fear and anxiety of an animal in distress can see beyond this argument.

Those who use life as a “gift theory” (primarily based on an Aquinas tradition) often appeal to the concept that sanctity of life means every life is valuable in the sight of God, and believe they make a valid religious point. However, those who argue about “sanctity of human life” often go beyond the aforementioned point. Others assert the point in question would better be called “the inviolability of life,” meaning the taking of life in any way is forbidden. This is not a new position.

The Catholic ethicist Heike Baranzke investigated the origins and the meanings of the “sanctity of life.”⁹⁹ She argues the phrase, as used in ethical discussions, is based on a misunderstanding. She writes its origin relies on bans in the Hebrew Bible, “Be holy for I (God) am holy (found in Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; 20:7,26). It is also seen as a Christian precept in 1 Peter 1:15–16. Concerning these passages, Baranzke writes, “Their use of the Hebrew root *qdsh*, like the Greek *hagios*, is translated in English to both be “holy” and (as a verb) “to sanctify.” The term “holy” is used in an explanatory sense of God alone. When applied to human beings, it never means human life is by nature “holy” or “sanctified,” but is an ethical demand to act in such a way as to approximate to the nature of God. In Christian thought, God alone is ontologically holy, i.e., holiness is his essential

⁹⁸ See John Locke, *SECOND TREATISE OF GOVERNMENT* (1690), C.B. McPherson ed.1980) Locke's "social contract" theory formed the basis of our constitutional structure. See James A. Gardener, “Consent, Legitimacy and Elections: Implementing Popular Sovereignty Under the Lockean Constitution,” 82 U. PITT. L. Rev. (1990) 189, 197-198. Accessed, May 18, 2023, University of Pittsburg Law Review, 1990, accessed May 24, 2023, http://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/cgi/view_content.cgi?article=1225&context=journal_articles

⁹⁹ Heike Baranzke, “Sanctity-of-Life”, A Bioethical Principle for a Right to Life?”, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 15(3):295-308 August 2013.

being. When applied to human beings, “holiness” or sanctity is a demand to act toward something ethically—even legally or with justice. Baranzke argues the modern use of the term “the sanctification of life,” as in the “inviolability of life,” does not refer to the origins of life. It is legitimate to argue for sanctity on secular ethical grounds, though life, in the sense of inviolability, would logically lead to a pacifist position, which apparently is only a minor option in Judaism and Christianity. Therefore, the concept of “the sanctity of life” is not helpful in the debate on assisted death. Perhaps, it might be replaced by “the dignity of life”, or “respect for life”, which seems to be a firmer theological justification.

David P. Gushee believes “respect” rather than “reverence” is a more commonly used term today.¹⁰⁰ He points out that in the Oxford English Dictionary, there is no mention of human life being described as sacred.¹⁰¹ As I pointed out earlier, life is an electrical event.

I question the concept of life being inviolable. Life is violated every day by disease, cancer, trauma, genealogical defects, etc. Some people see these factors as normal occurrences in day-to-day life. While these happenings are common, they are not natural. Hundreds of thousands of people work every day to find ways to interrupt, stop, or reverse these abnormalities—anyone of which can destroy our internal electrical forces and end life.

¹⁰⁰ David P. Gushee, *The Sacredness of Human Life*, (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmann Pub. Co., 2013), 20

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 21

Lacking knowledge about diseases in centuries past, the catastrophes of life were thought to be a punishment for sins committed by the sufferer or sometimes by their parents (Exodus 34:7; Ezekiel 18:19-20; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9). We now know better.

German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900), the bane of many Christian philosophers, has this to say about suicide:

To die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly. Death of one's own free choice, death at the proper time, with a clear head and with joyfulness, consummated in the midst of children and witnesses: so that an actual leave-taking is possible while he who is leaving is still there, likewise an actual evaluation of what has been desired and achieved in life, an adding-up of life – all of this in contrast to the pitiable and horrible comedy Christianity has made of the hour of death. One should never forget of Christianity that it has abused the weakness of the dying to commit conscience-rape and even the mode of death to formulate value judgments on men and the past.¹⁰²

At this point we need to ask, “What is sacred?”

Merriam Webster Dictionary has this definition: “dedicated or set apart for the service or worship of a deity,” or “worthy of religious veneration: holy,” or “entitled to reverence and respect.”

Who or what makes something sacred? No matter the religion, believers say their God creates life, and therefore, life is sacred. Do these people simply mean a physical body, an animated body, a soul, or all three? Is a dead body sacred?

God is said to have created trees and rocks—even diamonds, but so far, other than some indigenous peoples and pagans, no one considers trees or rocks to be sacred.

¹⁰² Friedrich W. Nietzsche, R. J. Hollingdale, editor and translator, *Twilight of the Idols* (New York, Penguin Books, 1968), 88

Creativeness and Sacredness

Man has experimented with amino acids and other chemicals to create various proteins that constitute human life, and so far, no one has reported having produced a “creature.” Physicians have, using human eggs and sperm, created invitro fertilization resulting in almost immediately implantable human embryos and embryos that can be frozen for future use. No one refers to these entities as sacred, however, the Alabama Supreme Court has declared them to be children.

If God does not directly create something, how does it become sacred? Man creates so called sacred spaces, but are they sacred? Does sacredness last forever? Consider a church or synagogue built by the hands of human beings. It is a person, usually a “holy man,” minister, priest, or rabbi, who pronounces the structure as sacred through a consecration ritual, and it is man who can deconsecrate the same object via another ritual. These rituals can range from simple to elaborate ceremonies. So, sacredness, it appears, is an ethereal human concept that can be temporary.

We create sacredness by how we treat or respect an “it” as part of our religious lives. We don’t treat babies as sacred, but we value their life force as sacred only if one views the life force as important in his or her religious belief system. What is the life force? Some say it is an unknowable energy given by God. Some say it is a soul. Others counter this argument by referencing the process of cloning. Cloning is accomplished by adding the nucleus of one party’s cell into the denuclearized cell of another similar party and then the new “entity”, bathed in a special solution, is given a small-voltage electrical

shock to mimic nature's fertilization process. In 1996, after multiple trials and methodical problems, this process successfully created a normal sheep called Dolly.¹⁰³

Currently, human cloning is forbidden by laws and ethical standards because of multiple possible problematic outcomes with the process, but if a human being was so created, would its life be considered sacred? The movie *Never Let Me Go* delves into this subject where children, cloned for body parts, are investigated to learn if they have a soul. The question is unanswered in the movie.

Whether everyone can agree that life is sacred we can believe it is precious and desirable except when life is a burden as so often happens to people facing a painful death. While Jesus' life was precious, He too laid it aside in his assisted suicide.

In conclusion, we are left in want of an adjective that fully describes a human life. In the next chapter, I will investigate the concept of incarnation or the method in which God became Jesus, the man, and his life's role (assisted suicide) in the salvation of sinful humanity.

¹⁰³ Judith L. Fidovich-Kiel, "Dolly: Cloned Sheep," *Britannica*, accessed November 14, 23, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dolly-cloned-sheep>

CHAPTER SIX

THE THEOLOGICAL GROUNDS FOR SEEING JESUS' DEATH AS ASSISTED SUICIDE

In this chapter, I will explore the path Jesus made from what Christians believed was revealed in the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) to His life as revealed in the New Testament concerning His death and its purpose.

Messianic Prophecy

Christians can argue Hebrew biblical messianic prophecies set the stage for the planned voluntary (assisted suicide) death (crucifixion) of Jesus even though Jews did not see their holy books pertaining to Jesus.

For millennia, ancient Jews had expected the arrival of a messiah, a special leader or a warrior king, who would be a savior of the Jewish people. Christians have for centuries believed the Hebrew Bible foretold the Messiah to be Jesus—a belief not accepted by all Jews (ancient and modern). Modern Judaism denies The Messiah has yet arrived nor do they think the Messianic Age has started.

Jews believe The Jewish Messiah will completely change life on earth. They hold four things about the Messiah.

1. He will gain sovereignty over the land of Israel;
2. He will gather the Jews to Israel from all over the world;
3. He will restore them to full observance of Torah law and finally bring peace to the whole world.

4. Pain and suffering will be conquered, thus initiating the Kingdom of God and the Messianic Age on earth.

Jews do not believe Jesus did any of these things. However, some Christians alleged Hebrew Bible “prophecy” verses exist as part of their Christology and are presented below. Most Hebrew biblical scholars do not accept these verses to be a prophecy about Jesus being the Messiah. Some Christian scholars¹⁰⁴ argue the authors of the New Testament wrote their scripture specifically to have their writings reflect their interpretations of Hebrew Bible literature as prophecy revealed in the books of the New Testament (Romans 15:4, Mark 12:36, Acts 1:16, Acts 28:25, and Hebrews 1:5-8). Christians argue some Hebrew Bible verses can be seen as fulfilment statements in the New Testament and seen below where Jesus is believed by some to be The Messiah.

1. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me so far from my cries of anguish?” (Psalm 22:1).

Fulfilled in Matthew 27:46: “About three in the afternoon [from the cross] Jesus cried out in a loud voice, *‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’*” [which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”]

2. “Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet” (Psalm 22:16).

Fulfilled in John 19:36-37: “These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: ‘Not one of his bones will be broken,’ and, as another scripture says, ‘They will look on the one they have pierced.’”

3. “They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment” (Psalm 22:18).

Fulfilled in John 19:23–24: “. . . Let’s not tear it,” they said to one another. “Let’s decide by lot who will get it.” “This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled

¹⁰⁴ J. B. Gay, Lectures: Hard Texts, accessed March 12, 2022 <https://equip.sbts.edu/event/lectures/jb-gay/hard-texts-why-does-hebrews-cite-the-old-testament-like-that-part-1/>; Ronald E. Clemens, “The Use of the Hebrew Bible in Hebrews,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, vol.28, Fall 1985; C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures : the sub-structure of New Testament theology*, (London, James Nisbet and Company. Limited., 1961), 16, 23, 127

that said, ‘They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.’ “So this is what the soldiers did.”

4. “Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, Lord, my faithful God” (Psalm 31:5).

Fulfilled in Luke 23:46: “Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.”

In these verses one can see why Christians say the Hebrew Bible does contain prophecies that came true in the New Testament. See appendix 3 for more examples of what Christians call fulfillment of Hebrew biblical statements.

Incarnation

The Incarnation shows that, according to traditional Christian confessions Jesus was God incarnate “truly God and truly man, two natures in one person” (God taking on human form that is divine and God’s very self-incarnate in the flesh). This is a concept that can be difficult to comprehend. However, its acceptance is a necessary act of Christian faith. Jesus was a free divine subject exercising autonomy of decision (divine sovereignty) and so choosing what happens to him, particularly the manner and timing of His death.

Most Christians come to believe in God through his prophets and Gospel writers who had prophesied his representative (Jesus) would be sent to earth to redeem a sinful humanity through his voluntary death as part of God’s plan (assisted suicide) and then the resurrection of His Son, Jesus, who is part of the Trinity. Incarnation involved the combining of a human being with “part” of God—His Son. Colossians 1:15 “He is the image of the invisible God . . .” This act of creating Jesus became known as the incarnation—a term which would lead to much past and current discussion about this occurrence.

As opposed to Jesus, ancient Greek gods were believed to be part human and part divine, but they were never seen by humans but believed to live in a sky palace on Mount Olympus. Jesus was human and divine but could however be seen, touched, heard, suffer, cry, thirst, tire, sleep, bleed, and die just as any other human being. The story of this miraculous occurrence is noted in several chapters of the New Testament:

Mat. 1:18-21 “. . . Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Luke 1:30-35 Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end. And the angel answered and said to her, “*The Holy Spirit* will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that the Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.”

If one accepts Scripture, then these verses are clear that Jesus was man divine.

For Cyril of Alexander, a major voice at the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in AD 431, the union of Christ’s divinity and humanity occurred in the womb of Mary. Cyril argues the *Logos* experienced a human birth because the *Logos* was united to human flesh in Mary’s womb in such a way that the birth experienced by the flesh of Jesus Christ is also attributed to the *Logos*.¹⁰⁵ Through the union with human flesh, the

¹⁰⁵ The *Lexham Bible Dictionary* defines *logos* (λόγος) as “a concept word in the Bible symbolic of the nature and function of Jesus Christ.; Logos is broadly defined as the Word of God, or principle of

divine *Logos* was also united to the human experiences associated with the flesh.

According to Cyril, as the eternal *Logos* experienced human birth, making the impassible divinity of God's son, Jesus was capable of experiencing human suffering.¹⁰⁶ Jesus' planned death (assisted suicide) was by God's plan and wish.

Many Christian theologians believe the difference between Jesus and other men is one only of degree. Yet the Catholic Church's traditional claim, as expressed in the definition developed by the Council of Chalcedonian, is that Jesus was both creature and Creator, fully man and fully God.

Chalcedon Creed (451 AD):

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rationale] soul and body; consubstantial [coessential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather of the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning (have declared) concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.¹⁰⁷

divine reason and creative order, identified in the Gospel of John with the second person of the Trinity incarnate in Jesus Christ. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In John 1:1

¹⁰⁶ Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, 73-77, accessed February 18, 2023, <https://stnouer.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/on-the-unity-of-christ-by-st-cyril-of-alexandria.pdf>

¹⁰⁷ English translation taken from Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 2, (*Grand Rapids, MI*, Baker Books, 1984), 62-63

It appears the early Christian church firmly believed Jesus was truly God and man in one being and passed down this dogma to today.

Saint Augustine argues the first reason for the incarnation was that man's (spiritual) death might be abolished (through Jesus' crucifixion and his sacrificial death of atonement). The Curse of spiritual death required the Word of God to unite Himself with humanity by fully taking on humanity to defeat death.¹⁰⁸ Modern writers may say Jesus Christ's physical death and that of the "death" of His soul occurred simultaneously.

Michael Jones writes, "He [Jesus] is different from the Father and the Spirit. He has clothed His deity with sinless human nature. He is different from other members of the human race in that He [Jesus] is God without a sinful nature. However, He did not cease to be God just because He became a man, nor was He less a man because He was God. He was as human as the rest of the human race. However, He was not like anyone in the universe. He combined in Himself an undiminished deity along with perfect sinless humanity."¹⁰⁹

The Scriptures tell us Jesus Christ had a human body like ours but without a sinful nature (John 1:14; Heb. 10:5; 1 John 1:1; 1 John 4:2-3), and He has a human soul (Matt. 26:38a; Isa. 53:11a) and a human spirit (Luke 23:46; John 13: 21; 19:30). He did not have a sinful nature [original sin] like every human being. He was perfect—flawless.

Philippians 2:8: And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the* point of death, even His death on the cross. The statement

¹⁰⁸ Saint Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, 9, (London, Aeterna Press, 2020)

¹⁰⁹ Michael Jones, *God the Son Revised*, P.29, accessed August 15, 22 https://www.academia.edu/40792713/God_the_Son_Revised_May

“He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” is a further suggestion that Jesus was a human being since a deity alone cannot die, only human beings (such as Jesus) can die.

In the *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas begins his discussion of Jesus Christ by recounting the biblical story of Adam and Eve and the telling of Christ's Incarnation. "Divine Wisdom judged it fitting that God should become man, so that one and the same person would be able to restore man and to offer satisfaction to God the Father."¹¹⁰ The substitutionary aspect of the atonement was an important part of the theology of Saint Athanasius as well.¹¹¹

“Hypostatic Union” is the term used by theologians to describe the teachings of the Scriptures that Jesus Christ is an undiminished deity (God’s Son) and true sinless humanity in one bodily person. The hypostatic union is the complete and unique person of Christ. “Therefore, Christ is the unique anthropic person of the universe . . .” as stated by Lewis Sperry Chafer.¹¹²

William E. Wenstrom and others have echoed this point. “. . . when the Son of God became a man, He did not attach Himself to another human being or add a humanity

¹¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, p. 228-229, accessed January 17, 2019, <http://www.newadvent.org>.

¹¹¹ John R. Meyer, “Athanasius’ Use of Paul in His Doctrine of Salvation,” *Vigilae Christianae* 52, (Leiden, Brill, 1998), 146-71.

¹¹² Lewis Sperry Chafer, “The Person of the Savior,” *Systemic Theology*, vol.3, Chapter 2, (Dallas, Dallas Seminary Press, First Edition, January 1, 1948), (Dallas, Dallas Seminary Press, First edition, January 1, 1948), 111-117, accessed April 23, 2023, https://books.google.com/books?id=b-JfSYC8HSMC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

with the attributes of a human being.”¹¹³ He became a man!

New Testament References About Jesus’ Humanity:

1. The birth of Jesus was the birth of a human child (Matt.1; Luke 2; Gal. 4:4).
2. Jesus has human genealogies (Matt. 1-17—Joseph); Luke 3:23f. -- Mary).
3. As a boy, he grew in "wisdom and stature" (Luke 2:52).
4. He was subject to pain, pleasure, hunger, thirst, fatigue, suffering, and death.
This evidence is seen throughout the gospels.
5. He had flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14) and after the resurrection, flesh and bone (Luke 24:39).
6. He had a human soul: he increased in wisdom, thought, reasoned, felt joy, and sorrow. He was ignorant of the time of the day of judgment (Matt. 24:36).

Jesus became man so humanity might better relate to him who lived, loved, and experienced death as will all men.

Jesus, The Man and His Mission

One of the most difficult things to explain is God creating Jesus with a physical body and yet be the Son of God. These two entities were “united” to become interatomically or intraatomically (if God has substance) joined and indistinguishable one from the other without becoming a third party. Created by God, Jesus was to be the symbolic Jewish lamb sacrificed by the High Priest in the temple as well as the scape goat for ancient Hebrews and modern humanity. However, in his death, Jesus was the High Priest, the sacrificial lamb, and scape goat simultaneously. Why God would choose crucifixion can only be surmised. Why God chose the time and place of Jesus’ death is a mystery. Perhaps, the previous references explain why God infused his son with a human body. In the Son-and-(human) Jesus’ fusion (the hypostasis), there was a reference object, a man, easily identified and relatable with human beings. A visible entity that

¹¹³ Michael Jones, *God the Son Revised*, (Marion, Iowa, William E. Wenstrom, Jr. Bible Ministries, 2014), 45

could be, tempted, touched, heard, a comforter, a healer, thirsty, hungry, able to feel pain, bleed, suffer, seen to raise the dead and to die, but most of all a man who could die and be resurrected and then continue his human-like life as before—a miracle—to be a savor available to all of humanity at the “end of times.” His *raison d’être*.

The Bible reveals that Jesus performed human functions and suffered circumstances common to all of humanity. First, He was said to have “wept” (John 11:35; Hebrews 5:7). He “slept (Mark 4:38) and became hungry” (Luke 4:2). He was “thirsty” (John 19:28), “ate” and “drank” (Mark 2:16, Luke 5:30). Scripture tells us He was “weary” (John 4:6) and was in “agony.” He experienced pain (Luke 22:24). He had to “grow” physically and mentally (Luke 2:40) and had to “learn” the Scriptures (Luke 2:52). He also had to learn “obedience (Hebrews 5:7). Jesus also “prayed” (Luke 21:41-42; (Hebrews 5:7). He was also “tempted” (Luke 4:2; Heb.2:18,4:15).and was a man of “sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3). He was “despised” and “forsaken” of men (Isaiah 53:3). He is also said to have” rejoiced” (Luke 10:21). He physically “died” (John 19:33) and “died” spiritually (Matthew 27: 45-46).

Jesus’ human traits were revealed in:

Matt. 4:1-4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”

No other human being would be able to survive a fast for forty days and nights.

Only Jesus was capable of such a feat (even though he was tempted by the devil). His perseverance is seen as a testament to his divinity and noted in the miracles listed below:

Matt 14: 18-21 “Bring them here to me,” he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves . . . The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Jesus’ care for humanity is seen in:

Mat 9:20-22 And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment . . . But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her. He said, “Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And the woman was made well from that hour.

John 11: 23, 43,44 Jesus said to her [Mary, sister of Lazarus], “Your brother will rise again. . . When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

John 9:6-7 When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.” So he went and washed, and came back seeing.

Matt 8:1-4 When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” Then Jesus put out *His* hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Atonement: Reason for Christ’s Assisted Suicide

Most scholars accept the view that the death of Christ is representative. That is to say, it is not that Christ simply died and somehow the benefit of that death possibly becomes available to men. Saint Anselm (1034-1109) asked to whom, more fittingly than to us, could the benefits be given? Jesus was the substitute representative in our soul’s death due to sin. This is expressed succinctly in 2 Cor. 5:14, “one died for all; therefore, all have died.”¹¹⁴ Those claiming salvation will no longer live for themselves.

¹¹⁴ A. Morris, “Atonement”, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. Wood & Marshall editors, (Leicester, England, Intervarsity Press, 1996), 102-106 ; Also see, *Jonathan Burke, Apostolic Teaching Series vol. II, Crucified With Christ: The Biblical view of atonement*, (Peachtree Corners, GA, Lively stones Pub., 2013),

A. Morris' article states, "There is a marked disinclination among many modern scholars (though not by any means all) to use the older language of substitution for atonement. Nevertheless, this seems to be the teaching of the New Testament, and that not in one or two places but throughout the Bible."

Jesus' capture and death (assisted suicide) needed to happen so his resurrection would occur so believing Christians could be resurrected from the death-of-sin at Jesus's second coming. His death was self-directed and laden with great suffering, the degree and purpose of which is still debated. Was his death an atonement? Was it a substitute suffering for the Father's "harms"? Did God empty His wrath on Jesus?¹¹⁵ Was his death a simple sacrifice? Was he a paschal lamb? These aspects of Jesus' death will probably be debated forever. However, I agree with Thomas Finger who writes, "Jesus bore sins by enduring an amount of punishment that is religiously equivalent to that which was due all sinners."¹¹⁶

Heb 2:9-10: But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone . . .

Heb 9:11-14: But Christ came *as* High Priest of the good things to come . . . Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place . . . who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God . . .

These two verses seem to imply if Jesus had not been made a little lower than the angels he could not have died (assisted suicide) and hence not made atonement for

accessed May 29, 2024, https://www.academia.edu/41774043/Crucifie%20_With_Christ_The_Biblical_View_of_Atonement?+=)

¹¹⁵ See Appendix regarding Wrath

¹¹⁶ Thomas N. Finger, *Christian Theology, an Eschatological Approach, Volume 1*, (Nashville, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1985) 327

humanity's sins nor have given suffering terminal patients an escape route for the pain of the "hurt" to the Father, which he chose to take onto himself as our atonement.

Ancient Jews often sacrificed animals in the Temple to please God. However, we read in:

Heb 10:4 For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

How then could humanity be saved from itself and sinning against God? How then could compensation be made to an aggrieved Father? Theologians have proposed several ways.

Atonement Theories

Gregg Anselm's satisfaction theory states Jesus Christ died in order to pay back the injustice of human sin against God and to satisfy the justice due God.¹¹⁷

To quote Anselm, "It is not sufficient merely to repay what has been taken away: rather he ought to pay back more than he took, in proportion to the insult which he has inflicted." Christ did this through His suffering for humanity.¹¹⁸

The eighteenth-century Unitarian and scientist, Joseph Priestley argued that this debt payment was the original Biblical teaching, and claimed it was present in the writings of early Christian believers.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Stephen Morrison, *7 Theories of the Atonement Summarized*, accessed 9-29-22 <https://www.sdmorrison.org/7-theories-of-the-atonement-summarized>

¹¹⁸ Gregg Allison, "History of the Atonement," Southern Baptist Journal of Theology 11 (2) p7, 2002, accessed August 21, 2021, <http://equip.sbts.edu/category/publications/journals/journal-of-theology/sbjt-112-summer-2007/>

¹¹⁹ Jonathan Burke, *Crucified With Christ: The Biblical View of Atonement*, accessed August 31, 2022, http://www.academia.edu/41774043/crucified_With_Christ_The_%20Biblical_view_of_Atonement?+email

I too lean toward this understanding.

As a substitution, Jesus vicariously paid the price of God's satisfaction on behalf of all humanity. Everyone who sins is under an obligation to repay God the honor which man has violently taken from him through sinning, and this is the satisfaction which every sinner is obliged to give to God.¹²⁰

Advocates of the substitutionary nature of Jesus' death use another word as a sacrificial term, *Hilasmos* which means propitiatory sacrifice. John applied this term twice for Christ (1John 2:2; 4:10); it is also found in Hebrews 2:17.

Expiation is a general term for a wide range of sacrifices while propitiation is an offering that is offered mainly to appease the wrath of an offended god.¹²¹

Some scholars believe The Hebrew Bible strongly implies substitution in the following texts:

Isaiah 53:4-6, 11-12:

Surely, He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, everyone, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all....He shall see the labor of His soul and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

¹²⁰ Gregg Allison, "History of the Doctrine of Atonement," Southern Baptist Journal of Theology 11(.2) 2007, p. 9

¹²¹ Thomas Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach, Vol. I* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 310

Schreiner notes that “God’s anger is not capricious or whimsical or arbitrary,” but it “flows from his holiness . . . from his goodness, his matchless character.”¹²²

Some scholars say it is hard to imagine how such wrath fits into the Gospels’ portrayals of Jesus’ crucifixion. How could the Father, seeing his beloved Son, bloodied and battered, suffering in agony hour after hour, have “righteous” anger in his heart rather than heart-broken love and compassion? A possible explanation is said to be that Jesus propitiates God’s wrath for humanity while not experiencing it personally.¹²³ This thought is counter to how I see Jesus’ atonement for humanity’s “harms” to the Father.

In the Hebrew Bible, only God, not the Son, was known to the ancient Jews. Their only way to approach God was through praise, animal sacrifice, and asking God directly for forgiveness. Jesus became the new sacrifice-of-old. God laid on Christ the punishment humanity warranted for their sins. Christ thus bore the punishment instead of individuals or humanity (a substitute). This view is seen in various writings of early Christian writers. Athanasius and Augustine developed it in some detail. “Jesus Christ came among us . . . He offered up his sacrifice on behalf of all people. He yielded his temple—that is, his body—to death in the place of everyone.”

Athanasius described how Jesus’ sacrifice (suicide) paid the penalty for the sins of all humanity:¹²⁴ “The sin-debt owed [to God] by everyone should be paid, and the debt owed was the death of all people. To avoid this, Jesus came among us . . . He offered up

¹²² Thomas R. Schreiner, “Penal Substitution View,” *The Nature of the Atonement*, (Downers Grove, IL, IVP Academic; 2006), 80

¹²³ Denny Burk, “Review of The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views,” *Criswell Theological Review*, Fall 1990, Volume 5, p, 119-121

¹²⁴ G. Allison, “History of the Doctrine of the Atonement,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 11 (2), 2007, p 3-17

his sacrifice [suicide] on behalf of all people. He yielded [sacrificed] his temple—that is, his body—to death in the place of everyone.¹²⁵ And so it was that two things came to pass at the same time: The death of all people was accomplished in Jesus’ body, and death and corruptions were annihilated by the Word that was united with it. For His death was necessary, and His death must be suffered.”

Calvin and Luther saw the substitution theory as Jesus dying to satisfy God’s wrath against human sin. Jesus was punished [penalized] in the place of sinners [substitution]. In light of Jesus’ death, God forgives the sinner for Jesus was punished in place of the sinner.¹²⁶

Religious reformers placed heavy emphasis on the wrath of God and the need for violent appeasement of His displeasure with sin, and Jesus became the substitute for humanity. He died as a sacrifice to pay humanity’s penalty and suffered the divine wrath against sin and removed its condemnation forever.¹²⁷

As a result of the Reformation, penal substitution became the standard atonement paradigm for succeeding reformation groups down to the twentieth century. Substitution has been the most influential and enduring theory and remains an essential feature of evangelical theology. While it can certainly be argued that there is more to the atonement than substitution, it could equally be argued that penal substitution (Jesus’ suffering) is the heart of the atonement. If we lose Jesus’ work of substitution and propitiation, we

¹²⁵ J. K. Beilby, & P. R. Eddy, *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic 2006) 17

¹²⁶ Ibid., 103-120

¹²⁷ Ibid.

lose the gospel and are left with [only] a theory of the atonement, which is untrue.”¹²⁸

It is difficult to imagine the extent of God’s wrath, but one has to look no further than Gen 6:5-8:

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

On a lesser scale of wrathful destruction see Josh 6:16,17, 20, 21:

And the seventh time it happened, when the priests blew the trumpets, that Joshua said to the people: “Shout, for the LORD has given you the city! Now the city shall be doomed by the LORD to destruction, it and all who *are* in it. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who *are* with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.... So, the people shouted when *the priests* blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. And they utterly destroyed all that *was* in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.

The nearest one gets to an idea of a price being paid for sin in the New Testament is in Mark 10:45, where Jesus’ death is said to be a *lytron anti pollon*, (a ransom for many). The use of *anti* (“in place of,” or “for”), can suggest ideas of substitution and equivalence, and the ransom idea in *lytron* could be argued to reinforce this idea.¹²⁹

No matter what one might think about the various theories of atonement, Jesus was crucified and died on the cross for a purpose. Did it transpire so Jesus could be resurrected and then be seen as living flesh just as he had been seen dead while hanging

¹²⁸ Noel Woodbridge, ‘Understanding the Emerging Church Movement: An Overview of Its Strengths, Areas of Concern and Implications for Today’s Evangelicals’, *Conspectus* (4. 1.105), 2007, 95-113, accessed September 22, 2023, https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/AJA19968167_24

¹²⁹ C. Tuckett, “Atonement in the New Testament,” *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, Vol 1, (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1996), 518–522

on the cross? After all, it does take the first act to lead to the second occurrence.

We should not forget Jesus had been in physical danger on numerous occasions during his lifetime and could conceivably have been killed in any one of those moments of danger but was not. So, perhaps, the date of his crucifixion had a role in His plan, but we will never know.

There was no reason for Jesus to simply suffer and die for being a social troublemaker and a political activist. His suffering and death were a religious gift of this Christ-man. Some Christians believe during the last moments of His life, as he took on God's "hurt" from sin, His horrific physical and spiritual suffering grew beyond any level comprehensible to humanity. He bore sins' overwhelming "harms" to God the Father. Mark 15, Matthew 27, and Luke 23 reveal this in few but weighty words. The Hypostasis absorbed the crushing agony of humanity's sin against God's purity as redemption for humanity's past and future iniquities. When the man-God had taken on all the anguish of the iniquities enveloping him, His body sought escape from the engulfing of God's "harms and injustice" so the man-God ended his life. His suffering love for all of humanity had delivered His own death—His escape from the pain of the "harms" against the Father. He had taken into his own hands his autonomous death and escape from sinful "hurt" and its pain.

What did Jesus experience on the cross ("the tree")? He experienced crucifixion with all its mental and physical torture and eventually, physical death, which was unique in that He died of His own volition (suicide). Reverend Wenstrom wrote,

He experienced more than physical death. He experienced spiritual death as a substitute for all of sinful humanity. Jesus, through His impeccable human nature, was forsaken by the Father, to discharge His wrath on the God-man, Jesus, during the last hours on the cross to redeem the human race from sin and to reconcile

them to and propitiate God. The greatest suffering Christ endured was not the physical and mental torture of crucifixion but rather the imputation of the sins of the entire world onto Christ while abandoned by the Father during Jesus' last hours on the cross. It has been said He first died spiritually and then physically after He had accomplished His work (John 19:30). He died physically of His own volition (suicide) and not from asphyxiation or exhaustion as some medical experts have said.¹³⁰

His spiritual and physical suffering of the wrath of God was all the pain this man-God could endure and then willed His death as the culmination of His assisted suicide. We read in John 10:17–18 “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”

Few Christians wish to interpret these verses for what they are—Christ telling us he chose assisted suicide as a way to die and a way of finalizing His propitiation of “hurt and harms” to the Father.

In His plan, Jesus had motivated many people in many ways to move His plan of assisted suicide forward. Included in His strategy was among others: Temple priests, Judas, angry Jewish crowds, Pilate, local citizens, and Roman soldiers. Revealed in Isaiah 53:1-10 we see that the anguish of the Son's soul while experiencing spiritual death satisfied the Father, which refers to propitiation. These passages further substantiate that it was Jesus Christ's spiritual death that propitiated the Father and not His literal blood as some suggest via the image of Jesus as a sacrificed lamb who would have been exsanguinated before the altar in the Temple.

¹³⁰ William Wenstrom, Jr., What did Jesus Experience on the Cross and What Did It Accomplish? accessed January 7, 2023, https://www.academia.edu/33947922/what_did_Jesus_Christ_experience_on_the_cross_and_%what-did-it-accomplish-doc?email-work-card=view-paper

If Jesus had not suffered and died, God would not have received atonement for the “hurt” of sins against Him. No sacrifice other than Jesus’ would have sufficed. The blood of sacrificed animals could not accomplish the remission of sins. The death and sacrifice of any other being (other than the Incarnation) would not have made it possible for God to forgive sin (Jeremiah 7:31; Micah 6:7). It took the (assisted suicide) death of God Himself—in the person of His Son Jesus. Only that unique sacrifice could make it possible for God to forgive human sin. Only Jesus’ death and suffering could accomplish that and helps support my thesis of Jesus’ assisted suicide to realize this goal.

An objection sometimes arises in that the paschal sacrifice was not considered an atonement for everyone; rather, atonement was provided for Jews but only via the sacrifices on Yom Kippur (the Jewish Day of Atonement). Therefore, so the objection goes, Jesus’ death, at Passover time is often referred to as “our Christian Passover” in the New Testament, which could not have been an atonement for sin. Jewish tradition viewed the Passover sacrifice as being expiatory; that is, the lamb removed sin from God’s view. The Passover lamb died (was sacrificed) under God’s outpoured wrath, thus covering over the sins of the one(s) (Jews) making the offering in the Old Temple. Rashi, a respected medieval Jewish commentator, wrote, “God meant, ‘I [God] see the Paschal blood and propitiate you [Jews] . . . I mercifully take pity on you by means of the Paschal blood [on the lintel and doorposts] and the blood of circumcision, and I propitiate your souls.’”¹³¹ These words were appropriated by Christians to support their faith but differently than the Jews who did not recognize Jesus as a messiah or savior.

¹³¹ Rabbi Dr. S. A. Lehrman, translator. Exodus Midrash Rabbah, [Ex. R. 15, 35b, 35a], (London, Soncino Press, 1939) 176

The incarnation was the beginning of God's plan (assisted suicide) for the salvation for humanity through all the ages where the Son bore God's "hurt" of injustice to the Father caused by the sins of all people and thus Jesus' death (assisted suicide) provided a substitutionary escape from humanity's eternal spiritual death. This fact then provides a Christian basis for seeing a Christological basis for affirming assisted suicide, i.e., the incarnation means that Jesus' death was planned, by himself, within the Trinitarian life of God and so fully chosen by himself in both divine and human freedom.

John 15:12-13 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

One reason for Christ's death can be seen in a person who is near death and notes the worry and suffering of their caretakers and loved ones. Perhaps the man-God, Jesus, saw his mother (aunt and friends) who stood near the foot of the cross and wanted their suffering to end, which could only happen when his suffering ended—when he had given up his spirit and willed his death. This sentiment is expressed in John Harding's book *Is There a Duty to Die?*:

Recognizing a duty to die affirms my ... moral agency.... Secondly, recovering meaning in death requires an affirmation of connections. If I end my life to spare the futures of my loved ones, I testify in my death that I am connected to them. It is because I love and care for these people (and I know they care for me) that I wish not to be such a burden to them.¹³²

John Calvin (1509-1564) explains the death of the Hypostatic Union act as:

Christ interposed, took the [our] punishment upon himself and bore what by the just judgment of God was impending over sinners; with his own blood expiated the sins which rendered them hateful to God, by expiation [Christ] satisfied and duly propitiated God the Father, by this intercession appeased his anger, on this

¹³² John Harding, *Is There a Duty to Die?* (New York, Routledge, 2000), 133-134

basis founded peace between God and men.¹³³

According to H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr.,

...[B]ecause it is not possible to give a rational account for ranking of values and goods, this plurality is incapable of being overcome by philosophy, even Rawls who in *A Theory of Justice* attempted to do so, but later abandoned his effort to ground morality in a robust account of rationality as such and instead a political account of reasonableness. However, many within the field of bioethics assume that there is an agreement about fundamental principles of morality as evidenced by Beauchamp and Childress's *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*. But, according to Engelhardt, such false beliefs are an obstacle to those functions that bioethicists do perform in a clinical as well as an academic setting.¹³⁴

The Right to Die Societies have written:

Helping dispirited patients in recognizing the value of their remaining lives has been described as one of the main goals of palliative care. Right to die organizations, in contrast, regard a patient's own judgment, all things being equal, as [one's] will that must be taken seriously. The individual alone defines at which point life has or will become meaningless or unbearable and when the time is ripe to die a good, still dignified death. According to this ideal, self-determination is extended from the circumstances of the dying process to the time of death itself.

The World Federation of Right to Die Societies believes accordingly that "all those who fully appreciate the consequences of carrying out their [autonomous] wish to die and who take into account the reasonable interests of others should have access to a peaceful death at the time of their choice. The timing of Jesus' plan of assisted suicide will be further explored in the next section.

¹³³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2. 16, trans. Henry Beveridge, (Edinburg, Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 435

¹³⁴ Aaron E. Hinkley, "Introduction: Embryonic Stem Cell Research, Abortion, Euthanasia, and the Plurality of Moralities in Bioethics," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, vol. 36: 217–220, 2011

CHAPTER SEVEN

ACTS AND ACTIONS LEADING TO JESUS' ASSISTED DEATH AND WHY UNDERSTANDING HIS MODE OF DEATH IS IMPORTANT

In this chapter we will examine the various acts of Jesus that led authorities to cause His arrest, trial, crucifixion, and then His rather rapid death on the cross as revealed in Scripture.

According to traditional Christian confessions of faith, the timing of Jesus' capture and death was planned and foretold in the Hebrew Bible long before the actual event. God's plan was even declared by Jesus himself. Perhaps, his death was centered around Passover so the Passover meal might provide the backdrop for what was to become the ritual of Holy Communion—"Do this in remembrance of me." Passover was also a time when Jerusalem would be filled with families gathered for the Passover celebration thus providing an adoring audience for Jesus, which would prod the temple priests to initiate Jesus' "death watch" and provide witnesses to his crucifixion, as well as prepare the Jesus-believing Jews for the future destruction of the Temple and all of Jerusalem.

Jesus' riding into Jerusalem on a donkey and being lauded by a crowd of admirers surely angered Jewish authorities as well as some Jewish citizens. Jesus had to know this. He had planned such. His activities threatened Temple authorities' self-rule, economics, (especially the driving out of money changers in the Temple) and the danger of Rome's tightening their domination of the city, its Temple rulers, and its Jewish inhabitants.

Throughout Jesus' lifetime, His wellbeing and safety were often deliberately

tested and sometimes took him to the brink of death as revealed in the New Testament.

Luke 4:28-30 So, all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him [Jesus] out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.

John 10:31-33 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God."

The above verses see Jesus acting as Saint Aquinas would have had him do, i.e., protecting his life.

Matt 15:10-12 When He had called the multitude to *Himself*, He said to them, "Hear and understand: Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man." Then His disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?"

Matt 20:17-19 Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again."

John 11: 45-54 Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation . . . Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death . . .

Matt 21:23, 25, 27 Now when He came into the Temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?" . . . The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men? . . . So they answered Jesus and said, "We do not know." And He said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Those of the Christian faith see the foretelling of Jesus demise in Isaiah 53:7:

He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

I assert His passiveness was necessary to fulfill His role in His assisted suicide.

Jesus had to provoke local leaders in order to set in play his sacrifice for humanity's salvation. To have resisted any phase of the process would have negated the purpose of His incarnation—atonement.

The Last Supper was prescient for the death of Jesus. He spoke of Passover bread as his broken body and the wine as his spilled blood, and a ritual that was to be repeated in his memory in the Catholic mass and what protestants call Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper.

Luke 22:15-20 Then He said to them, "With *fervent* desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide *it* among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And He took bread, gave thanks and said, "You; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise, He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.

Many scholars argue this special Passover meal occurred on a Thursday.¹³⁵ John states the Jews had not yet eaten the Friday evening Passover meal because it was the *morning after* Jesus' arrest but before his death.

John 18:12-15 From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar." When Pilate therefore heard that saying he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" But they cried out, "Away with *Him*, away with *Him*! Crucify Him!"

¹³⁵ Andreas Kostenberger, *Why We Can Know the Date Jesus Died*, accessed August 20, 2024, <https://cbs.mbts.edu/2020/04/08/april-3-ad-33-why-we-believe-we-can-know-the-exact-date-jesus-died/>

By John's apparent reckoning, Jesus ate the Last Supper one day earlier than ordinary Jews ate the Passover meal. In regard to Passover, Scholar R. T. France, wrote, "Jesus, knowing that he would be dead before the regular time for the Passover meal, deliberately held it in secret one day early . . . While it was incorrect to hold a "Passover" at any time other than the evening of Nissan 14/15 (that is, at the end of the 14th and beginning of the 15th day of Nissan¹³⁶), but Jesus was not one to be bound by formal regulations . . . It was therefore a Passover meal in intention, but without a lamb to be eaten.¹³⁷

R. T. France's thoughts would mean Jesus and the disciples, did not, strictly speaking, eat a Passover meal at the Last Supper. Lamb is not mentioned as being part of the meal. If Jesus ate the "Passover meal" one day earlier than other Jews did, he simply disregarded tradition? That, in itself, if true, would be instructive, indicating His meal represented a break with covenant institutions. This discussion of the timing of the Last Supper may be of importance in the timing of Jesus' death. Did Jesus have enough time between his last meal and his flogging to have become weak via dehydration or hunger because of a lack of either food or drink? Did dehydration play any role in his death as some researchers believe? Was Jesus forced to stand throughout his trials as well as walk from one trial venue to another? If so, did standing, walking, and a lack of sleep weaken him?

We should not forget that potable water was available within Jerusalem's walls. The ancient Israelites had diverted water into the city to be used in times of siege, and its

¹³⁶ First month of Jewish calendar marking spring (March-April)

¹³⁷ R. T. France, *Matthew: Tyndale New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Pub. Co. 1987), 365

channel can still be seen in the city's underground.¹³⁸ The man who led Jesus' search party to the "upper room" for the Last Supper carried a water jar. Could we assume that Jesus and his disciples had water as well as wine at the Last Supper. If so, Jesus would not have been dehydrated later that night or early the next day. We know nothing as to whether or not Jesus had any water to drink after the Last Supper but prior to his crucifixion. However, it was not unusual for men and women to carry water containers as they traveled about ancient Israel.¹³⁹ Did one or more of the disciples carry water? Was Jesus thirsty after sweating so heavily as he prayed in Gethsemane? Did he have any water to drink there? We do not know.

The telling of the stories of Jesus' trials and death were written decades after the fact and deal primarily with major aspects of what had been an oral story told over months and years before being written as the Gospels. Minor details of everyday life that might have occurred to, for, or with Jesus are either intentionally or accidentally omitted, forgotten, not considered to be of major importance, or simply ignored. What things did Jesus discuss with his disciples as a group, with individual disciples, with strangers he might have passed on his way to Gethsemane, or with the Roman soldiers who took him into custody and would ultimately lead him to his death?

The New Testament reveals in:

John 10:14, 17: I am the good shepherd; and I know My *sheep*, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep . . . Therefore, My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.

¹³⁸ Hillel Geva, Jerusalem Archaeology Sites: Biblical Water Systems accessed May 7, 2023, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/biblical-water-systems-in-jerusalem>

¹³⁹ "Waterskins" accessed May 6, 2023, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waterskin#/media/File:Leather_Waterskin,_Cave_of_the_Letters_Judean_Desert,132-135_AD_\(28349539727\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waterskin#/media/File:Leather_Waterskin,_Cave_of_the_Letters_Judean_Desert,132-135_AD_(28349539727).jpg)

Isa 53.6 “the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Isa 53.12 “He poured out his soul to death ...”

Rom 4.25 “handed over to death ...”

2 Peter 2.221 “Christ also suffered for you.”

Heb 2.9 “by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

Here we are being told a mini version of Jesus’ assisted suicide and its atonement.

Many medical professionals and scientists have researched the nature of Jesus’ crucifixion and death. After having reviewed the relevant details, two of their summary points are worth highlighting. Among the researchers (all reviewing the same materials), there are twice as many who thought asphyxiation or asphyxiation-dominant causes of Jesus’ death led the opinions of all medical options combined.¹⁴⁰

Jesus underwent Jewish and Roman trials, was flogged (probably while naked), prior to crucifixion. A typical scourging produced deep lacerations and could have caused appreciable blood loss perhaps setting the stage for hypovolemic shock as some people believe happened to Jesus. According to Edwards, Gabel, and Hosmer, this did occur, because He did not carry the crossbar (patibulum) of his cross to Golgotha.¹⁴¹

However, could one interpret Jesus’ “weakness” as not being due to hypovolemia, but to pain? What if Jesus was not weak but was simply walking too slowly to Golgotha where the soldiers wanted to complete their work and then move on to other tasks?

See Mark 15:20-21 And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him. Then they compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross.

¹⁴⁰ Gary Habermas, “Medical Views on the Death by Crucifixion of Jesus Christ,” *Proc. Baylor Univ. Med. Cen.* v.34(6); 2021 accessed October 30, 2022 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8545147/>

¹⁴¹ W. D. Edwards, W. J. Gabel, and F. E. Hosmer, “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ,” *JAMA*. 1986, March 21;255(11):1455-63

There is no mention in Mark of Jesus falling nor being unable to carry the patibulum (horizontal bar of a crucifixion cross).

In Matt 27: 31-32 And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His *own* clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified. Now as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to bear His cross.

We do not know why Simon was told to carry the patibulum for there is no mention in Matthew of Jesus falling or dropping (being unable to carry) his cross.

In John 19:16-17 we read, “Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. Then they took Jesus and led *Him* away. And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called *the Place* of a Skull . . .”

Again, there is no mention in John of Jesus having any difficulty carrying his cross or falling.

See Luke 23:26 Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus [who apparently walked ahead of Simon without with no mention of him falling].

Once more we have no details about Jesus’ ability to carry his cross due to weakness or anything else. Of note, what today is known by Catholics as the Stations of the Cross came much later and was first noted by Saint Jerome (342-420 AD).¹⁴²

During the approximately twelve hours between 9 PM Thursday and 9 AM on Good Friday, Jesus no doubt suffered great emotional stress. Some believers think Jesus sweated blood (hemosiderosis) as he prayed in Gethsemane. Other Christians believe his sweat came in large drops like drops of blood (a metaphor) but contained no blood. In either case, this sign suggests great emotional stress.

¹⁴² Father William Sanders, *HOW DID THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS BEGIN?* Accessed July 2023, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/how-did-the-stations-of-the-cross-begin-1155>

Jesus underwent a physical beating after the first Jewish trial. In the setting of a traumatic and sleepless night, he had been forced to walk more than 2.5 miles (4.0 km) to and from the sites of the various trials (See Appendix, Figure 1). Whether fatigue from walking was a significant contributor to his death is uncertain. The Bible suggests he was a young man, probably around thirty-three years of age at the time of his trial and should have been physically fit.

We are informed in John 9:2 that Jesus, Peter, and John had climbed a high mount. In John 9:9, the three men climbed back down the high mountain. From there Jesus walked to Galilee (John 9:30) then to Capernaum (John 9:33). From there he walked to Judea (John 10:1) He then walked toward Jerusalem via Jericho (John 10:32). As he neared the villages of Bethphage and Bethany, (about 2 miles from Jerusalem) he sent his disciples for a donkey (and her colt), which he rode (foretold in Zechariah 9:9) into Jerusalem on what is now known as Palm Sunday. Here and in driving out the money changers in the temple, we see Jesus as a provocateur. We don't know what happened to the donkey after Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Jesus possibly walked back to Bethany, then returned to Jerusalem, and once again returned to Bethany and then walked back to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover.

He had walked all over Israel during his approximately three-year ministerial period. To do that, he had to be physically fit, after all, the distance he walked from Capernaum to Jerusalem (in a straight line) is about 90 miles.

Physical and emotional factors may have rendered Jesus vulnerable to any adverse hemodynamic effects of the scourging and might have hastened his death. [Some question whether Jesus received the usual flogging (39 or 40 strikes) or some other

number.]¹⁴³ Frederick T. Zugibe, a forensic pathologist, has written, without references, that “. . .when they [Romans] did not want the victim to succumb too quickly, they usually administered only a few lashes as a prelude to crucifixion.”¹⁴⁴

How do we evaluate Jesus’ blood loss prior to Crucifixion? Matthew 27:26-31 and John 19:1 tells us that Jesus was first flogged, then covered with a robe. How long he wore the robe is unknown, but perhaps, it had helped stem bleeding from his back. However, the robe was later removed and that no doubt reopened some wounds. Jesus’ own clothes were then placed on him, likely helping to further stem bleeding from his back until he reached Golgotha where the soldiers stripped him and then crucified him.

If Jesus had bled profusely from his flogging, as some scholars think, presumably his garments would have been blood soaked. We do not know how long he might have worn his garments before he reached Golgotha, but the probability is high that some of the blood would have soaked in and dried in some areas of his clothing. This has to cause one to wonder why the Roman soldiers, who crucified Jesus, would want the blood-soaked clothing of a supposed reviled criminal. Some of His clothing had been torn into four quarters and one piece left intact. Luke 23:34 Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they divided His garments and cast lots.

Jesus’ forgiveness is necessary in that he created the opportunity for his enemies and Roman soldiers to crucify him. A “suicide by cop” scenario. Then we read in:

John 19:23-24 Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the

¹⁴³ M. Hengel, *Crucifixion: in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, Bowden, J., trans. (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1977) 32, 87

¹⁴⁴ Frederick T. Zugibe, *The Crucifixion of Jesus, Completely Revised and Expanded: A Forensic Inquiry*, (New York, M. Evans & Co., 2005) 19

tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be,” that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: “They divided My garments among them,

And for My clothing they cast lots.” [Psalm 22:18] Therefore, the soldiers did these things.

We read in:

Matthew 27:35 Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: “They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.”

Omitted from the Gospels is any information about the character of Jesus’

utterings from the cross in contrast to the more descriptive phrases about Jesus being in agony as he prayed and sweated great drops of sweat (perhaps bloody sweat) in Gethsemane.

His last words, spoken from the cross, are presented in the Gospels in flowing prose as are the words of the crucified men on either side of Jesus. There is no mention of breathlessness, stuttering, long pauses between words, broken words, trailing words, rising tones during some utterances, or falling tones during other utterances. We are left with the image of a young man hanging on a cross, making declarative statements and who asked only one question—why had God forsaken him.

At about 3 PM on crucifixion Friday, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, bowed his head, and died.¹⁴⁵

An interesting factor of note was the short time Jesus had been on the cross before dying. Crucifixion was intended to be a prolonged agonizing death, but Jesus’ death, after

¹⁴⁵ William D. Edwards, MD; Wesley J. Gabel, MDiv; Floyd E. Hosmer, MS, “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ” *JAMA* 1986; 255:1455-1463

only three to six hours on the cross, surprised Pontius Pilate as revealed in:

Mark 15:43-45 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. So when he found out from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.

According to Pastor William E. Wenstrom Jr., Jesus experienced crucifixion and horrendous mental and physical torture that ended in death, which was unique in that He died of his own volition [and not the product of crucifixion and the often-argued associated suffocation]. This is a position with which I agree but which may not be acceptable to others. However, He also experienced spiritual death as a substitute for sinful humanity. The Son of God, despite His perfect human nature, was forsaken by the Father during the last hours on the cross to redeem humanity from sin and to reconcile them and propitiate God. Jesus' greatest suffering was not the physical or mental torture of crucifixion but when, as I believe, He received the imputation of the sins of the world by the justice of The Father and abandonment by Him during Jesus' waning hours on the cross.¹⁴⁶

It is said humanity's sins did not touch Christ, but He experienced the "hurt" of their injustices to The Father's divinity and therefore took on mental and physical suffering related to the on laying of the Father's "harms." A writer with whom I agree, Pastor Wenstrom goes on to write:

Jesus' fading moments were filled with incomprehensible suffering. This came not only from being crucified but also from The Father laying upon him the unimaginable "hurt" of injustices the Father had or would suffer as a result of mankind's sinning. This inconceivable "hurt" is what led to the crucifixion of Jesus and his resurrection after his preplanned and voluntary death where the

¹⁴⁶ Bill Wenstrom, *What Did Jesus Christ Experience on the Cross and What Did It Accomplish*, accessed October 12, 2023, https://www.academia.edu/33947922/What_Did_Jesus_Christ_Experience_

voluntary assisted suicide of Jesus was a volitional death, not asphyxia as ascribed by researchers. Jesus' death was metaphysical as well as physical and provided the basis for mankind's future. He bore the wrath of The Father redirected from mankind to Jesus—the man-God and His death.¹⁴⁷

Japanese theologian Kazoh Kitamori was the first modern writer to examine the relationship of God, Christ, and divine pain.¹⁴⁸ The *Theology of the Pain of God*, published in 1947 in the aftermath of Hiroshima and is about the “pain of God” in the crucifixion of Christ. Kitamori's title is from a phrase in Jeremiah 31:20, which he translates as “my heart is pained for him” and “God will have mercy.” Kitamori argues the patristic theology of the impassibility of God is mistaken, for we require a God who has pain. Kitamori's book is about the relationship of pain between God and Christ and that it is “God in pain who resolves our pain.” Kitamori argues the pain of God is communicated by the suffering of Jesus, and thus “gives meaning to our pain.”

Kitamori's book has a two-fold meaning: (1) pain is not only physical, but is also psychological and spiritual, involving the whole person. (2) Kitamori sees pain as relational rather than individual and would no doubt object to today's assisted suicide. Kitamori sees pain as part of the nature of God. Some people find strength to cope with pain by contemplating the physical sufferings of Jesus (1 Peter 4:12). This is not saying pain and suffering are meant to bring us nearer to God. On the contrary, physical or mental pain may lead to alienation from God and the destruction of one's faith. As for those who regard pain as being beneficial, such views fail to appreciate how pain is experienced by other people. Extreme pain may feel like being struck with a heavy blunt instrument. Few of us know how such a blow would affect us, especially if struck

¹⁴⁷ Ibid

¹⁴⁸ Kazoh Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God*, (London, Wipf and Stock, 2005), 19-31

repeatedly and/or continuously. The worst of all is horrific pain from which there is no escape.

There is another but important dimension to pain, i.e., psychological, or spiritual. Parratt suggested it was this, rather than the purely physical suffering, which was behind the cry of abandonment of the crucified Christ.¹⁴⁹ There is also the agony in Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane in which He contemplates his death.

The psychological and spiritual pains of an impending death have never been better expressed than in John Donne's *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, written during his life-threatening illness in 1623. Donne's dilemma was:

We cannot enjoy death because we die in a torment of sickness,"[for] ". . . We cannot stay till the torment comes, but pre-apprehensions and presages, prophesy which induces that death before either comes: For him it is not the point of death and what comes after it that is problematic, but rather the ill health which precedes it, and the fear of suffering pain before the end comes. What he was apprehensive about is not so much the fact of dying, but rather the awareness that the process of dying—especially if it involves pain, indignity, and the loss of physical and mental abilities." The sense of death is most in apprehension," Is he a world to himself only therefore, that he hath enough in himself, not only to destroy and execute himself, but to presage that execution upon himself; to assist the sickness, to antedate the sickness, to make the sickness the more irremediable by sad apprehensions, and, as if he would make a fire the more vehement by sprinkling water upon the coals, so to wrap a hot fever in cold melancholy, lest the fever alone should not destroy fast enough without this contribution, nor perfect the work (which is destruction) except we joined an artificial sickness of our own melancholy, to our natural, our unnatural fever. O perplexed discomposition, O riddling distemper, O miserable condition of man!¹⁵⁰

In my opinion, Jesus' atonement for the harm to God's justice took on the form of significant physical and spiritual pain that required Jesus' death for the fulfillment of his sacrifice, and his death was self-directed and occurred at the moment of receipt of the

¹⁴⁹ John Pratt, *Theology & Assisted Dying*, (Durham, Sacristy Press, 2020) 35-44

¹⁵⁰ John Donne, "Devotions Upon Emergent Occasion I," *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, editor John Hayward, London, Nonesuch Press, 1978) 508

total discharge of God's "harms" onto Christ. Jesus' example thus provided a plan for ending human suffering at the end of a person's painful and burdensome life—assisted death.

Medical experts' assessment of the cause of Jesus' death was shared earlier in this work. They expressed a scientific medical opinion—suffocation. What they did not take into consideration (and did not have to) was the fact that Jesus was man and God—a divine man who could do anything. He could determine the length of His suffering and the very second of His death and when it would end—as Jesus, the Son of God, He could control everything – even His time of death, and He did. So can suffering patients.

Jesus' Death

Now I want to further explore in depth the mechanics and other aspects of Jesus' death and its benefit for humanity.

So far, we read that the Holy Spirit caused the pregnancy of Mary with a male human being (incarnation), i.e., Jesus, thus creating a new "entity" now known as the Hypostasis. We are told in Scripture this had to occur so Jesus (The Hypostasis) could physically die for the sins (all past and future) of humanity, but how did his death occur. There are those who would have us believe he was almost dead, due to exsanguination, as he was nailed to his cross, but we have no way to prove or disprove how much blood was lost during his flogging.

Because Jesus may not have carried part of his cross to Golgotha, some believe Jesus, a virile young man, became physically weak in his last hours and had to have a surrogate carry the horizontal bar (*patibulum*) of his cross to Calvary. We hear nothing as to back pain playing the greater role in his inability to carry the patibulum, nor do we

know how the criminals crucified alongside Jesus did or did not carry their cross or have the “usual” or lessor scourging.

Researchers Bordes, Jenkins, McBain, Hanna, Loukas, and Tubbs wrote in “The Clinical Anatomy of Crucifixion,” that crucifixion caused Jesus even more pain due to nail damage to nerves in His wrists and feet than they would have created blood loss.¹⁵¹ According to them, blood loss, on the cross, did not contribute significantly to His death.

Crucifixion forces a person’s weight to be mostly borne on their upwardly outstretched arms. This positioning lengthens the chest cavity, making breathing laborious, forcing victims to push themselves upward against their nailed feet and hands to inhale. Once they ran out of energy, or the effort became too painful, they would suffocate as carbon dioxide accumulated in the body thus producing the feelings of smothering thus driving the body to try to breathe deeper.¹⁵² The body’s chemical processes would begin to fail as blood oxygen levels fell and acidosis set in, sending Christ’s metabolic system into a downward spiral toward death. However, I do not believe He died of asphyxiation but willed his death after he had atoned for humanity’s sinful “harms” against the Father which ended Christ’s suffering.

The position in which the victim was nailed determined how long they would survive. It has been reported that those whom Rome wanted to have lingering deaths would have a small seat called a *sedile*, affixed onto the cross to allow the victim to sit and breathe more easily thus suffering longer. There is no mention of a *sedile* on Jesus’ cross.

¹⁵¹ Stephen Bordes, Skyler Jenkins, “The Clinical Anatomy of Crucifixion,” *Clinical Anatomy*, Vol 33:12–21, 2020

¹⁵² Pierre Barbet, *THE CORPORAL PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST*, accessed November 5, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20091211204031/> ; <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/arch/barbet.html>

While nailed to the cross, Jesus' words are reported in:

Matt 27: 45, 50 My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? . . . And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit.

In the book of Mark, we find slightly different utterances of Jesus:

Mark 15:34, 37 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" (This is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?") . . . And Jesus cried out with a loud voice and breathed His last.

The above four references of the crucified Jesus are the only words mentioned in Mark and Matthew.

Luke 23:34, 43, 47 reveals the following phrases:

Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." . . . And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." . . . And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." Having said this, He breathed His last.

John quotes Jesus' words from the cross in Chapter 19:26-28,30:

When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple (John) whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" . . . So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

From the four Gospels, we cannot be sure in which order the above phrases were spoken, but it could be argued that the phrase ". . . Why have you forsaken me?" was followed by "I command my spirit." Then finally "It is finished." and Jesus dies (gives up his spirit by willing his death). The question often arises as to why Jesus asked about his Father abandoning him. Some scholars say it was at that moment the Father visited all the sins of humanity, past, current, and future on to Jesus so restitution for any punishment due for their sins against the Father could be forgiven, and all people could have claim to

eternal spiritual salvation. It was then that Jesus died as revealed in Romans 5:9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

Spiritual Death of Jesus

Often in the New Testament, when the word death is used for Christ's dying on the cross, the word contains the figure of speech called the heterosis of the number, which means that the singular form of a word is used for the plural form of the word. The New Testament writers are said to use this figure of speech many times when referring to the death of Christ, indicating that when they are speaking of His death, they are referring to his spiritual and physical death on the cross. Jesus physical death was unique in that He died physically of his own volition.¹⁵³ Christ did not die from suffocation or exhaustion, nor did He bleed to death, or die of a "broken heart," but rather, He died namely by His own volition as revealed in John 10:17,18: "Therefore My Father loves Me because I lay down My life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself...."

There are theories counter to the idea of Christ's suffocation.¹⁵⁴

Matt 27: 46, 50: And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" . . .And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit. When Jesus Christ cried out "My God. My God why have you forsaken Me?"

¹⁵³ William E. Wenstrom, Jr., *What Did Jesus Christ Experience on the Cross and What Did It Accomplish*, Doc. accessed February 7, 2023, <http://www.Wenstrom.org>

¹⁵⁴ Thomas W. McGovern, MD, David A. Kaminskas, MD, and Eustace S. Fernandes, MD, "Did Jesus Die by Suffocation?: An Appraisal of the Evidence." *The Linacre Quarterly*, Volume 90, Issue 1 (Thousand Oaks, CA, August 22, 2022), accessed May 23, 2023, <http://doi.org/10.1177/00242639221116217>

Some Christians believe He was experiencing spiritual death, meaning that, in His human nature, He suffered the loss of fellowship with His Father. I think after He experienced all the pain and hurt laid on him that he could or had to endure, He ended His suffering by willing His death. He chose the time of his death—an autonomous act.

As a divine human being, Jesus had not only control over the resurrection of men (Luke 7:11-15 and John 11:44) but the moment of his own self-sacrifice and (suicide) death (John 10:18).

The following verses use various words revealing the many ways in which Jesus, the Son of God, revealed his humanity and His ability to suffer, bleed, and die.

1 Peter 2:24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.

Isa 53:1-12 Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

Rev 1:5 And from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.

1 Peter 1:18-20 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.

1 Cor 15:3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, Gala 3:13 Christ

redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”

Rev 12:11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

Eph 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

Heb 9:12 He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

Rev 5:9 And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

Matt 26:28 For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Acts 20:28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

Col 1:20 And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Rom 5:9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

1 John 1:7 but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Lev 17:11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

Heb 10:19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus.

Eph 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Heb 9:14 How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Rom 3:25 Whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

Heb 13:12 So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.

I believe the word *blood* is used here to mean not only literal blood but also the loss of life—Christ's assisted death.

Throughout this chapter I have presented various arguments as to why Jesus had to die and the cause, I believe, He served as propitiation for the Father's "harm" caused by sinful humanity and also the salvation for those who believe in Jesus' position and role on earth.

In the next section I will explore the role of Jesus' assisted suicide, heretofore outlined, and how it fits in with modern medical ethics.

How Is Christ's Assisted Suicide Related to Modern Medical Ethics?

The morality of assisted suicide and euthanasia has become one of the most hotly contested issues of our time. Yet the problem is not new. The major arguments against it were argued in pagan antiquity and throughout the history of the church. From Plato, Saint Augustine, and Saint Aquinas, from Donne and Hume to the present day, all kinds of voices have entered the dispute. Uhlmann's anthology of primary sources is an essential reference work for anyone interested in understanding the arguments on both sides. His book examines the moral, theological, medical, and legal perspectives, and each section of essays is accompanied by an introduction guiding readers through the debate.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ Michael M. Uhlmann, editor, *Last Rights?: Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia Debated*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Erdman Publishing Company, 1998), 60

The components of medical ethics and assisted suicide of most interest are compassion, autonomy, beneficence, empathy, integrity, benevolence, non-malevolence, and the responsibility of care. No doubt, physicians who are willing to assist terminally ill patients consider these aspects of ethics not knowing they relate in one way or another to the death of Christ.

As has been described earlier in this dissertation, Christ knew He would suffer as seen when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: Matt 26:39:

He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

It may appear that Jesus' autonomous desire was equal to that of His Father. To have failed to be crucified and die would have been contrary to His destiny. Once on the cross, Christ had to know His mother and friends standing nearby were heartbroken seeing Him suffer. Perhaps this led Christ to will his death earlier than what happened to most crucified victims. He could have done so as an act of compassion for the small group of His mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, Mary Magdalene, and John the beloved disciple. This compassion is understandable as seen in modern suffering patients who seek assisted death to cease being a burden on loved ones who wither while witnessing the suffering of their terminal loved one.

How many people have spent hours upon hours caring for the medical and nonmedical needs of a dying patient? These activities include such tasks as worrying if the patient swallowed a certain pill, is he/she getting enough food or water, what to do about every moan or groan, frequent changes of pillows, tucking in sheets, changing sheets due to bowel or bladder "mistakes", readjusting the hospital bed in the patient's

living room, stroking the patient's forehead, holding the patient's hand for long periods of time, straining to hear every weakly spoken word and not understanding the thready communication, adjusting the patient's hair, sitting in the same chair for hours, getting little sleep, constant worrying about what else could be done for the patient, worrying about one's own personal needs and demands like occupation, friends, children, and spouse.

It is these kinds of stressors on caregivers and patients that produce bodily and emotional exhaustion and physical harm. Many caretakers experience great relief when death comes to their loved one. Other caregivers suffer regret and guilt for not having done more for their companion and wonder how they can reweave their life's purpose when their beloved one is no longer present.

Many patients who travel the road toward death are fully aware of their situation. As they approach their demise, they often become aware of the stress their dying has on one or more caregivers—usually family members. The patient can see the stress, concern, and sadness on those familiar faces: perhaps a lack of makeup, wearing the same clothes for several days, the same person in the same chair day after day, the struggle to change sheets while the patient is in bed, the effort required to get the patient from bed to chair and back, perhaps the loss of weight of usually the caregiving daughter, or spouse, and whispered conversations in the patient's presence. These perceptions affect the patient's stress and psychological suffering because of the demands their status places on family, friends, and even professionals. All these patient concerns have to do with their compassion for caregivers who respect the patient's dignity while displaying benevolence and non-malevolence in every way possible toward their ward.

Doctor Chochinov's research has produced three classifications of dignity that provide caregiver guidance about factors to be considered in supporting a patient's end of life concerns: illness-related concerns; dignity conserving repertoire; and social dignity inventory. How patients perceive themselves is a powerful mediator of their sense of dignity. The more healthcare providers affirm the patient's value—that is, seeing the person for who they are or were, rather than just the illness they have—the more likely the patient's sense of dignity will be upheld.¹⁵⁶

For a physician, their feelings of sympathy and compassion are, no doubt, a compelling force in helping patients seeking assisted death. Compassion is often combined with the physician's empathy. The doctor's ability to put themselves in the patient's suffering body and emotional mind set often makes the patient's decision to seek relief via assisted death easier when desired by those with terminal suffering.¹⁵⁷ In such cases, assisted suicide is a form of benevolence as revealed by Jesus in dying for humanity and escaping the pain of the Father's "harms."

Being a burden to others can be a difficult source of distress for dying patients. Some studies report that being a burden is highly associated with interest in physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia. When patients perceive their illness weighs heavily on their support network, or death will continue to lay a burden on those who will be left behind often triggers in depth discussions with their physician. Patients can be reassured that burdens can be counterbalanced by the privilege others have in being with them, or

¹⁵⁶ H. M. Chochinov, "Dignity-conserving care—a new model for palliative care: helping the patient feel valued," *JAMA* 2002;287:2253-6

¹⁵⁷ Luke 6:31 And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to [for] them likewise

caring for them, in the little time they and their loved ones have left.¹⁵⁸ Such concern was expressed by Jesus in voicing a new relationship between John and mother Mary.

While beneficence was shown by Christ's dying as the substitute of death-doomed humanity, a physician can show beneficence by helping a terminally ill patient through assisted death when requested by his patient. They can now help terminal patients seeking an early death in states where the procedure is legal. They are: California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Maine, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington state. The State Supreme Court of Montana found that there was no state law preventing such acts and therefore are considered to be legal there. Most of these states follow the process first made legal in Oregon which legalized physician assisted death in 1997.

In each state the patient must have a terminal illness and be expected to live less than six months, is of sound mind, and requires a witnessed and signed declaration and two verbal requests over a fifteen-day period. If the request is granted by the physician, a prescription for barbiturates is written which the patient can have filled and then self-administered when desired. This point references the fact that Jesus determined his own moment of death and so can a suffering patient.

The laws permitting physician assisted death do not consider such deaths as being any form of suicide or a homicide which is illegal in these states.

Regarding assisted death, Archbishop Desmond Tutu said:

I wish to help to give people dignity in dying. Just as I have argued firmly for compassion and fairness in life, I believe terminally ill people should be treated with the same compassion and fairness when it comes to their deaths. Dying

¹⁵⁸ Harvey Max Chochinov, "Dignity-Conserving Care--a New Model for Palliative Care: Helping the Patient Feel Valued," *JAMA*, (vol.287, 17, 2002) 2253-2

people should have the right to choose how and when they leave Mother Earth. I believe that alongside the wonderful palliative care that exists, their choices should include dignified assisted death.¹⁵⁹

There have been prominent Christian leaders who have approved of assisted death, one of which was Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng. He first publicized his thoughts on assisted dying (then called voluntary euthanasia) in a seminar for German churches. He said the issue was too important to be left to the decisions of medical and legal specialists. He argued that our own dying can be discussed anew in a sober, dignified, and morally serious way without dogmatism and fundamentalist reasoning.¹⁶⁰

In 2009, Paul Badham, Ph.D., an Anglican English theologian published *Is There a Christian Case for Assisted Dying*. He challenged opposition to assisted dying among Anglicans. He pointed out that the authority of Christianity is claimed by opponents of euthanasia, though they rarely appeal to Christian principles in their debate.¹⁶¹ Agape being one principal often overlooked.

Among these principles was compassion and caring as seen in the story of the Good Samaritan and Christ's compassion toward his family and friends and all of humanity's sinfulness.

The concept of benevolence is another consideration in assisted death. The decision to pursue assisted death is often viewed as an important aspect of autonomy and

¹⁵⁹ Archbishop Desmond Tutu, "Opinion," Washington Post, October 6, 2016, accessed May 20, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/archbishop-desmond-tutu-when-my-time-comes-i-want-the-option-of-an-assisted-death/2016/10/06/97c804f2-8a81-11e6-b24f-a7f89eb68887_story.html

¹⁶⁰ Hans Küng and W. Jens, editors, *A Dignified Dying*, translator John Bowden, (London, SCM Press, 1995)

¹⁶¹ Paul Badham, *Is There a Christian Case for Assisted Dying*, (London. SPCK Publishing 2009)

control over one's life.¹⁶² Healthcare providers need to have extensive knowledge about what it is like to travel the dying trajectory within our healthcare system. They also need clinical communication skills to elicit the patient's suffering story. Only then will the moral and legal obligations of accepting patients' suffering stories and attempting to ameliorate that suffering be fulfilled. If assisted death is requested for intolerable suffering, how could a physician refuse their patient? A refusal could be seen as malevolent. If the physician did refuse, they would probably suggest hospice care where the solution may be increasing doses of morphine until the patient enters a state of continuous palliative sedation. In this state, most patients receive no food or liquids. Starvation and worsening health may take days to weeks for the patient to die. Most of these patients remain on their back until expiration. This can lead to decubitus ulcers (bed sores), which no one would wish for a dying loved one even if the patient is unaware of the condition.

Madam Justice McLachlin, writing for a unanimous Canadian Supreme Court decision, described a patient's choice to seek assisted death "... as "rooted in their control (autonomy) over their bodily integrity; It represented both their deeply personal response to serious pain and suffering . . . [T]here is no ethical distinction between physician-assisted death and other end-of-life practices whose outcome is highly likely to be death."¹⁶³

¹⁶² A. Rodriguez-Prat, E. van Leeuwen, "Assumptions and moral understandings of the wish to hasten death: a philosophical review of qualitative studies," *Med Health Care Philos.* 2018;21(1):63–75

¹⁶³ Barbara Pesut, David Kenneth Wright, "What's suffering got to do with it?", *BMC Palliat Care*. London, 2021; 20: 174 accessed, February 24, 2021, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34758799/>; S. van Hooft, "The Meanings of Suffering", *Hastings Cent Report*, 1998;28(5):13–19.

According to Bearman and Steele, arguments against the legalization of assisted dying tended to portray religious perspectives of suffering as redemptive, transformative, and a means by which one could sacrifice self to the glorification of God. In contrast, those who argued for assisted dying portrayed suffering as cruel and a threat to human dignity.¹⁶⁴ And I might add contrary to Jesus' actions on the cross.

David Hume, mentioned earlier in this paper, is what many people describe as a "soft skeptic about the issue of a "God." As regards suicide, he wrote:

Suicide may often be consistent with interests and with our duty to ourselves, No one can question, who allows that age, sickness, or misfortune, may render life a burden and make it worse than annihilation . . . If it be no crime, both prudence and courage should engage us to rid ourselves at once of existence, when it becomes a burden . . . and would preserve to everyone his chance for happiness in life and would effectually free him from all danger of misery . . . for no other reason than because it was a burden to them, and have died with more composure than they lived?¹⁶⁵

I would encourage patients not to too closely identify with Jesus as a model for their lives for they are not like Jesus, a divine man, even though they might share pain as part of life and death.

We read in John 1:29 where the Lamb of God is said to "[take] away the sin of the world!" Here the reference seems to be the occasion when a real lamb or sheep was sacrificed on the alter within the Holy Temple of Jerusalem as well as the laying of sins onto the scape goat which was thought to carry away the citizens' sins as the goat died in the wilderness. Christ's life, at its end, became a burden of great suffering and having accomplished His life's goal, He drew upon His autonomy and willed His death. This same sense of autonomy is, by Christ's example, available to all suffering humanity at the end of their burdensome suffering life via assisted death were legal. This path was noted in an essay written by Samuel Williams in 1870 in which he advocated the use of

¹⁶⁴ Lori G. Bearman, Cory Steele, "Transcendence/religion to immanence/ nonreligion in assisted dying," *International Journal of Human Rights in Healthcare* 11(1); (Emerald Publishing, Cambridge, MA, March 2018)

¹⁶⁵ David Hume. "ESSAYS ON SUICIDE AND THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL", accessed February 22, 2024, <https://archive.org/details/essaysonsuicidei0000hume/page/6/mode/2up>

chloroform to end cases of hopeless and painful illnesses when desired by the patient.¹⁶⁶

Autonomy

At this point we need to consider autonomy more thoroughly, as did Christ, a cornerstone of modern bioethics.

Oxford Learners Dictionary defines autonomy as the ability to act and make decisions without being controlled by anyone else. I like to call this self-agency. This is not to say that there cannot be external considerations by significant others such as family. They may try to influence the patient in question, but they should never try to manipulate information or try coercion to gain their favor. However, it is fair to point out to the patient familial, cultural, and societal issues that may be impacted or should be considered by the patient.¹⁶⁷ Autonomy is not always absolute as seen during times of epidemics where a person may be confined to avoid spreading disease. Several writers in the field of bioethics have written about autonomy. Among them are: Peter Singer, a noted American philosopher, who classifies euthanasia as voluntary, involuntary, or non-voluntary. Voluntary euthanasia is that to which the subject consents. He argues in favor of voluntary euthanasia but opposes involuntary euthanasia.

Ronald Dworkin succinctly puts the point this way: “government must impose no sacrifice or constraint on any citizen in virtue of an argument that the citizen could not accept without abandoning the sense of one’s equal worth, nor should it enforce private

¹⁶⁶ John Wyatt, *Right to Die?: Euthanasia, Assisted Suicide and End-Of-Life Care* (Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2015), 47

¹⁶⁷ T.L. Beauchamp, James Childress, *Principals of Biomedical Ethics*, 8th edition, Oxford Press, New York, 2022, chapter 4; James Childress, Michael Quante, ed., *Thick (Concept of) Autonomy: Personal Autonomy in Ethics and Bioethics*, Springer, Switzerland, 2022

morality.”¹⁶⁸

Dworkin goes on to speak of human life as being intrinsically valuable, even rejects the view that nothing is valuable, absent instrumental value, but then he proceeds to sacred, and suggest that one reasonable (if not exclusive) “interpretation” of the value of human life is the “liberal view” that the importance of human life depends on the level of “human creative investment” or “[T]hat human life is inviolable because (and only to the extent that) it is created...by personal choice, training, commitment, and decision. In short, the value of human life turns on the ability to express oneself autonomously.”¹⁶⁹

Doctor Timothy Quill, from the University of Rochester School of Medicine, is the Georgia & Thomas Gosnell Distinguished Professor in Palliative Care and professor of medicine, psychiatry, and medical humanities. He says, “We need people who are committed to caring for people all the way through to their death as if they were family members, committed to relieving their suffering. Sometimes that requires helping people to die.”¹⁷⁰

Sherry Colb, professor of law at Rutgers University; criticized fellow assisted suicide advocates who would make what she calls “the distinction between the terminally ill and everyone else.” As Colb wrote:

[S]uch a distinction does not keep faith with the ethical foundation for the right to die. The moral principle that distinguishes physician-assisted suicide from murder is a respect for the autonomy of the individual.... It is essential in this context that

¹⁶⁸ Ronald Dworkin, *A Matter of Principle*, (Harvard University Press, 1985), 205-206

¹⁶⁹ Ronald Dworkin, *Life's Dominion: An Argument About Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom* (London, Vintage Press, 1994), 93; Ronald Dworkin, *A Matter of Principle*, (Harvard University Press, 1985), 205-206; Ronald Dworkin, *Life's Dominion: An Argument About Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom* (London, Vintage Press, 1994), 93

¹⁷⁰ Arthur L. Caplan, PhD; Timothy E. Quill, MD, “Should Physicians Help Terminal Patients Die?” MedScape, Internal Medicine, 2016, accessed July 5, 2023, <https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/867914>

we do not substitute our own judgment about which lives are and are not worth living for that of the individual whose own life is at stake.¹⁷¹

Margaret Pabst Battin, an American philosopher, medical ethicist, author, and a distinguished professor at the University of Utah, suggests the conflict between the competing autonomy interests of those who wish to die and those who wish not to be killed can be resolved in favor of allowing euthanasia—that is, “perhaps our protecting ought to be the allowing of euthanasia. She suggests society’s laws and traditional willingness to protect one innocent man at the expense of letting ten guilty men go free is based, at least in part, that in doing so imposes no “harm” on the guilty men, but by contrast, preventing patients from seeking assistance in dying imposes real harms on them.¹⁷² Non benevolence in this case equals malevolence and an injustice.

John Stuart Mill (1806-1833), a nineteenth-century British philosopher, wrote, in *On Liberty* the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent the member harming others. A person’s own good either physical or moral, is not a “sufficient warrant [to restrict anyone].”¹⁷³ This is another way of expressing members of society’s autonomy just as did Christ.

Many patients who have requested assistance in dying do so because of intolerable pain. An often-underlying addition to the request is their fear of loss of

¹⁷¹ Sherry E. Colb, *A Controversy over the Netherlands New Euthanasia Legislation*, accessed April-12-23, <https://supreme.findlaw.com/legal-commentary/a-controversy-over-the-netherlands-new-euthanasia-legislation.html>

¹⁷² Margaret Pabst Battin, *The Least Worst Death, Essays in Bioethics on the End of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 101-129

¹⁷³ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1960), 72-73

dignity, i.e., unbearable embarrassment. This may be voiced in terms of loss of modesty or loss of control of bodily functions. I have heard patients say, “If I ever have to wear diapers, that is something I could never tolerate. As a baby, I had no choice, but as an adult, death would be preferable to total defenselessness and dependency.”

There may be a connection of shame to Christ’s death in that it is possible He was crucified without clothing.¹⁷⁴ The Bible tells us that His clothing was in the hands of the Roman soldiers. Michelangelo sculpted the Santo Spirito Crucifix and the Risen Christ both of which were nude figures that were “lost” or hidden away for years (for indignity) before being “rediscovered” in modern times and returned to public view.

Leon Krass has written this about dignity.

Dignity is, to begin with, an undemocratic idea. It is worthiness, elevation, honor, nobility. In short, it is of excellence or virtue. Dignity is, in principle, aristocratic. The universal attribution of dignity to human beings pays tribute more to human potentiality and the possibilities for human excellence. Full dignity...would depend on the realization of these possibilities.... For a death with dignity—as for a life with dignity—of dignified human intercourse with all those around us...Dying people are all too easily reduced to “thinghood” by those who cannot bear to deal with the suffering or disability of those they love. Objectification and detachment are understandable defenses.... Life can be revered not only in its preservation but also in the manner in which we allow a given life to reach its terminus.... Humanity is owed humanity not humaneness. Humanity is owed the bolstering of the human even, or especially, in its dying moments, and in resistance to the temptation to ignore its presence at the scene of suffering.¹⁷⁵

Dr. Stephen Post’s book, *Dignity for Deeply Forgetful People*, brings attention to patients who have Alzheimer’s Disease. He writes:

My interactions with deeply forgetful people affirm that the basis for living

¹⁷⁴ Ben Witherington III, Biblical Views: Images of Crucifixion: Fresh Evidence - The BAS Library (biblical-archaeology.org), accessed May 9, 2024, <http://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/departments/biblical-views-images-of-crucifixion-fresh-evidence>

¹⁷⁵ Leon R Krass, “Death with Dignity,” Michael M. Uhlmann, editor, *Last Rights: Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia Debated*, (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998) 213-216

human dignity is consciousness itself and nothing more....While I do not place any moral weight on rationality as the capacity to make decisions, I do recognize rationality as a source of self-identity—of who we are rather than how we proceed to act in the world....While it is true that even in the more advanced stages of dementia, the symbolic self will usually persist, this is not perhaps always the case, and therefore it is not the basis for unconditional dignity. What clearly persists is consciousness, so that has to be the basis of unconditional dignity and respect.¹⁷⁶

By virtue of birth, we all deserve respect for the inherent dignity within us. Our withholding respect does not diminish one's dignity. Even the dead receive respect in the way we behave in their presence. We remove hats, visit at wakes, stand at funerals, as Catholics we pray for them and light candles. We visit graves and bring flowers or stones. A long-respected tradition, attributed to Chilon of Sparta, who was one of the Seven Sages of Greece, is to "never speak ill of the dead."

Concern for the dignity of others is often manifested via the act of caring. One can be concerned for another's dignity yet do nothing, but care, in its physical form, is the overt manifestation of true concern and honor that respects other's dignity. However, the act of caring is a two-way street. The receiver of care and respect should, if possible, acknowledge and show appreciation for the act and its intent. It is possible the actions of care could be viewed as disrespectful if not performed out of an act of respect for the person who is the object of care.¹⁷⁷

Authors Robert Stake and Merel Visse state in their book, *A Paradigm of Care*, how we are to provide for others, how we are to nurture them, give succor, how we are

¹⁷⁶ Stephen G. Post, Ph. D., *Dignity for deeply forgetful people*, (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022), 130-131

¹⁷⁷ Bernice Fisher and Joan C. Tronto, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Care." *Circles of Care: Work and Identity in Women's Lives*, edited by Emily K. Abel and Margaret K. Nelson. (State University of New York Press, 1990), 35-48.

disposed toward them or not, and how to sacrifice to relieve their hurt. Care is not only caring for those visibly needing care, unable to care for themselves, but caring for all. Caring is the true manifestation of respect for the dignity of all.¹⁷⁸

Respecting involves love, even agape, but what is love? “What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like.”¹⁷⁹

Dignity may contain a kernel of vanity. Consider a dying patient who may not wish to be seen as a starved, gaunt-looking individual because of their inability to ingest or digest food. Such an end point is the person who has been kept in a constant sedative state and not given food or water for many days or weeks. Such a physical state can be unacceptable for a family who feels they would have to have a closed casket funeral for their loved one—a form of care and dignity for the deceased.

Had Jesus refused to follow through on his destiny, he would have in one way or another negated the pillars of modern bioethics, but he did not, thus leaving a clear path for dying patients to follow his lead.

¹⁷⁸ Robert Stake, Merel Visse, *A Paradigm of Care*, Information Age Publishing, 2021

¹⁷⁹ St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) as recounted by William C. Graham in *100 Days Closer to Christ* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2014) 92

EPILOGUE

How should we speak of actions in doing the work of ethics? How are human actions to be described to indicate the dependence of doing the work of ethics by describing actions in certain terms and at the same time redescribing them in end-terms. One cannot have it both ways. The woman, whose actions in *Never on Sunday* (a 1960 Greek romantic comedy film), might be described as “administering love’s therapy” or be described as a “prostitute” and presumably she was in that act, which was up for justification in the case of her “lover” in the movie.

In the biblical story of Judith, in the Apocrypha, she was praised for lying to Holofernes and using her feminine charms to murder him—an action seen as “saving the people of Israel.” We need to avoid confusion in our use of language (action-terms like *murder* versus *saving Israel* and acts of *love* versus *euthanasia*) in doing medical ethics. There can be no expectation of orderly ethical discussions or hope for any fruitful discourse unless ethicists come to a consensus concerning how they describe the actions they reveal so others can evaluate them.

The role of bioethics is to help understand the ways people determine who they should be and what they should do. Researchers have studied thousands of bioethical disagreements over issues such as abortion and assisted suicide. It turns out that, when people come to different ethical conclusions, it is for one of four reasons: a difference in facts, beliefs, loyalties, or reasoning. Two people may be similar in three of these four areas, but a significant difference in one of them alone can result in two people reaching different decisions on a bioethical issue. For Christians, a biblical ethic challenges us to

recognize that we cannot live as we ought unless we are willing to look to God to provide a standard for our character and direction for our thinking.¹⁸⁰ This standard can be found in the example of Christ's assisted suicide as previously described. "We are always somewhere socially, culturally, historically, linguistically, [biblically] and never nowhere when we interpret data [situations in bioethics]."¹⁸¹ All who do the work of ethics need to beware of this.

Noted authors Beauchamp and Davidson use Baruch Brody's definition of assisted suicide as, "an act of euthanasia is one in which one person ... (A) [helps] kill another person (B) for the benefit of the second person, who actually does benefit from being killed."¹⁸²

We have seen throughout this work the many reasons given by respected writers who argue against suicide but apparently have never considered Christ's death an assisted suicide. I propose we examine certain aspects of Christ's death as I see it fitting into a common model of morally acceptable suicide.

1. He had foretold of his death in numerous sections of the Bible (death threats).
2. He chose the time of his death autonomously.
3. He knew and chose the place of his death (Jerusalem).
4. He chose the method leading to his demise (crucifixion for non-Romans).
5. He knew who would assist in his planned death (soldiers, Temple priest etc.).
6. He knew why he would die (sin forgiveness and the transfer of God's "hurt" (atonement) and his concurrent suffering).
7. He knew who might be harmed by his death (community, family, and disciples).

¹⁸⁰ John F. Kilner and C. Ben Mitchell, *Does God Need Our Help?* (Wheaton, IL, Tyndale House Publishers, 2003), 37

¹⁸¹ Merold Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Academics 2009), 35

¹⁸² T L Beauchamp, A I Davidson, "The definition of euthanasia," *J Med Philos.* 1979 Sep;4(3):294-312; Brody, Baruch, "Voluntary Euthanasia and the Law". Marvin Kohl, editor, *Beneficent Euthanasia*. Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books. 1975) 218-230, accessed May 16, 2023, <https://archive.org/details/beneficenteuthan00kohl/page/218/mode/2up>

8. He made no plans for the disposal of his body.
9. He was not mentally ill, only a great sufferer under the weight and “hurt” of His atonement for sin.

If the above listed items are associated with the death of Christ, then he, according to noted Christian writers, has committed the sin of suicide; He injured His community and contrary to not creating a “good” (beneficence), He did—and that was atonement. He asserted His autonomy for His purpose—love. He did not want humanity to suffer for their sins against God.

Autonomy is meant to encompass the notion that it is only by exercising our God given “free will” do we define ourselves as individuals. A second point to consider suggests autonomy as a prerequisite for putting the philosophy of utilitarianism into practice. Medical autonomy is the product of two concepts—my right not to be harmed without my consent and what we call “informed consent.” Paraphrased, it is my body and my choice as to how I am to be “touched.” I have a moral duty to choose and permit who may touch me and how. No doctor can know their patient like the patient knows his or herself. Each knows what’s best for them, but medical autonomy is not limited just to “important” choices; it covers all choices. Autonomy needs the addition of the concept of wanting mercy for us and toward the suffering of others, an act motivated by human compassion and agape, and an identification with another person as someone who, but for fate, could be us.

Dignity is another subject we hear in discussions with people nearing their death.

Alisa Carse has coined this phrase “dignitary vulnerability.” She writes:

We are creatures who are susceptible to dignitary struggle: we can be shunned, mocked, dishonored, and subjected to contempt, aversion, and indifference in ways that deeply challenge our sense of value and respect-worthiness...Persistent devaluation or sustained mistreatment can concretize the degradation of our

status...Our dignity is a fragile, vulnerable good...We commonly think of vulnerability in a negative sense. To be vulnerable is to be susceptible to loss, injury, and insult... Our flourishing is subjected to the vicissitudes of fortune, to disease and disability, to the powers of nature, to the choices and conduct of others—in short, to a world that is, in many ways, outside our control...While our flourishing can be imperiled by our vulnerability, it [life] also requires that we be vulnerable.¹⁸³

This is indeed an aspect of Christ's death and how he willingly surrendered his physical dignity out of agape.

Another author, Marvin Kohl, puts the "death with dignity" argument this way:

A person is a locus of meaning and value and has a center of activity. It matters, therefore, how he dies...To die with dignity, a person must achieve equanimity before the awful majesty of death. He may not allow events or other persons to take command of him but should master himself and his situation. He should conduct himself according to his own standards, setting his goals and deciding how to achieve them. Dignity demands the fulfillment of his reasonable purposes through the exercise of his agency. And other people should respect him not only by feeling themselves into his experience, but by concerning themselves to reserve his integrity and his sense of identity to the last.¹⁸⁴

Christ willingly allowed himself to be taken, which was an unusual form of autonomy necessary for him to complete his role in his fate and succumbed to the overwhelming hurt of atonement for humanity's sins while providing a role model for patients to escape unescapable suffering through assisted death as did he.

Those who do not recognize Christ's actions in toto will find themselves in the position of author Timothy Quill who described a woman, Mrs. B, who lived for ten days in continuous deep sedation without food or hydration before dying. Her friends and family "found the experience deeply disturbing" and, to Quill, forcing Mrs. B "into a

¹⁸³ Alisa Carse, "Vulnerability, Agency, and Human Flourishing," *HEALTH AND HUMAN FLOURISHING*, editors, Carol Taylor and Robert Dell 'Oro, (Washington D. C., Georgetown University Press, 2006), 34

¹⁸⁴ Marvin Kohl, "Voluntary Beneficent Euthanasia," *Beneficent Euthanasia*, (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1975), 134

medically induced twilight zone so she could then die of ‘natural causes’ seemed macabre.” And Quill adds, “. . . doing so is ‘cruel and absurd. The compassionate response, and therefore ethical response, to Mrs. B’s pain and suffering would have been physician assisted death [with the patient’s agreement].”¹⁸⁵

There is empirical evidence that the preference of assisted death over continuous deep sedation primarily relates to patients who seek control at the end of life and obtain relief from existential suffering.¹⁸⁶ The authors note that patients’ requests for continuous deep sedation are rare.

There are reasons for suicide other than pain or suffering, such as: feelings of guilt at being a burden to others, mental depression, alienation from the world of the healthy, fear of the process of dying, spiritual confusion, the dissolution of life plans, as well as the attitudes of care-givers, friends or family whose fear and distaste for the sight of suffering will be perceived by the suffering person...[and] add to the desire to be rid even of life, to escape [it all].¹⁸⁷

Those who argue against assisted suicide, when sought, and argue for palliative care should consider the words of author Michael Stiglitz:

We must remember that palliative treatments are medical treatments, and like all medical treatments, their medical benefits may not be worth the psychological burden of the patient’s condition to the patient him or herself. Whether a fully treated medical condition is worth enduring depends on the patient’s values and,

¹⁸⁵ . Timothy E. Quill, *Death and Dignity: Making Choices and Taking Charge*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) 140; Timothy E. Quill, *Caring for Patients at the End of Life: Facing an Uncertain Future Together*. (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2001) 38

¹⁸⁶ . Kasper Raus, Sigrid Sterckx, and Freddy Mortier. “Is Continuous Sedation at the End of Life an Ethically Preferable Alternative to Physician-Assisted Suicide?” *The American Journal of Bioethics* 11, no. 6 (2011): 32-40.

¹⁸⁷ Edmund D. Pellegrino, “Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide,” *Dignity and Dying: A Christian Appraisal*, edited by John F. Kolner, Arlene B. Miller, and Edmund D. Pellegrino, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Paternoster Press, William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996), 105-119

most importantly, on what the patient considers to be a life worth continuing, given his or her fundamental beliefs about the value of life.¹⁸⁸

It is here that I wish to focus on Joseph Fletcher's book, *Situation Ethics*.¹⁸⁹ He notes that many ethicists focus on ethics models similar to Kant's imperatives and are too interested in laws and regulations—legalisms. This may be especially true for some Christian ethicists. Fletcher points out that Jesus was not a man who felt bound by religious laws. In fact, he ignored many Torah laws. Most of all he planned his own assisted suicide but did so out of love which Fletcher says should be the reason for all ethical decisions—love for the person (patient) of concern in an ethical formulation. "Christian ethics or moral theology is not a scheme of living according to a code but a continuous effort to relate love to a world of relativities through a casuistry obedient to love; its constant task is to work out the strategy and tactics of love, for Christ's sake."¹⁹⁰ The freeing of a suffering person from pain and impending death through assisted suicide can be an act of love (*agape*). Fletcher goes on to say that, just as Jesus acted, the end justifies the means.

In conclusion, I suggest no physician should ever initiate a discussion with a terminal patient regarding assisted suicide. The subject should either be hinted at by the patient or by their direct questioning—legalities being observed.

¹⁸⁸ Michael Stingl, "Voluntary and Nonvoluntary Euthanasia," *The Price of Compassion*, (Peterborough, ON, Canada, Broadview Press, 2010), 148

¹⁸⁹ Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality*, (Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1966)

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 158

APPENDIX 1

Map¹

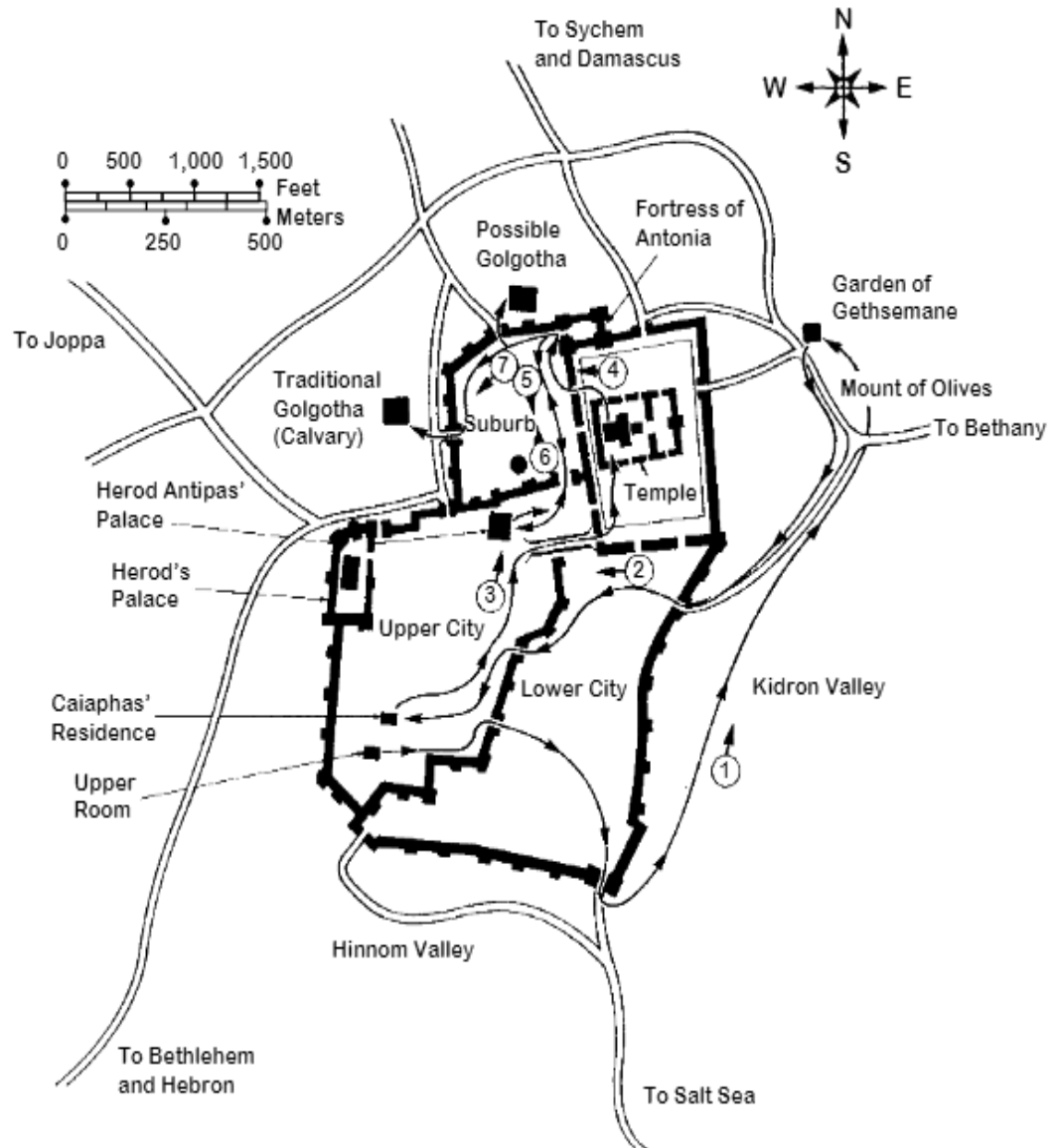


Fig 1.—Map of Jerusalem at time of Christ. Jesus left Upper Room and walked with disciples to Mount of Olives and Garden of Gethsemane (1), where he was arrested and taken first to Annas and then to Caiaphas (2). After first trial before political Sanhedrin at Caiaphas' residence, Jesus was tried again before religious Sanhedrin, probably at Temple (3). Next, he was taken to Pontius Pilate (4), who sent him to Herod Antipas (5). Herod returned Jesus to Pilate (6), and Pilate finally handed over Jesus for scourging at Fortress of Antonia and for crucifixion at Golgotha (7). (Modified from Pfeiffer et al.³²)

1. Floyd Hosmer, "On the Physical Death of Jesus," JAMA 1986;255: p.1455-1463 (Used by permission from Author William D. Edwards, M.D. Mayo Clinic via personal email May 3, 2023)

APPENDIX 2

Usage of the phrase “Wrath of God.”

The wrath of God is His eternal detestation of all unrighteousness. Wrath is the displeasure and indignation of divine equity against evil. It is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin. It is the moving cause of the just sentence which He passes upon evildoers. God is angry against sin, because it is rebelling against His authority, a wrong done to His inviolable sovereignty. Insurrectionists against God’s governance shall be made to know that God is the Lord. They shall be made to feel how great that Majesty is which they despise, and how dreadful is that wrath which they disregarded. Not that God’s anger is a malignant and malicious retaliation, inflicting injury for the sake of it, or in return for injury received. No, but while God will display His dominion as Lord of the universe, He will not be vindictive.¹

The following verses speak of God’s wrath but with little detail about what the wrath is. Is it death by the sword, flames, drowning, disease and suffering, captivity, or crushing?

Ezra 5:12 But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon ... and carried the people away into Babylon.

Ezekiel 22:31 Therefore have I poured out mine indignation up on them; I have consumed them with my wrath...

Deuteronomy 9:7 Remember, and forget not, how thou provoked the Lord thy God to Wrath in the wilderness...

Nehemiah 13:18 Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel...

¹ A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, (Swengel PA.: Reiner Publications, 1968 [Reprint]), 76

Job 20:23 When he is about to fill his belly, God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him...

Jeremiah 10:10 Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?

Exodus 32:11 And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people...

2 Chronicles 24:18 And they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served groves and idols; and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem...

2 Chronicles 29:10 Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us

2 Chronicles 36:16 But they mocked the messengers of God...until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.

Isaiah 26:21 For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity.

Ezekiel 25:17 And I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them.

Nahum 1:2-6 God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries...

Psalms 7:11 "... God is angry with the wicked every day.

Psalms 59:13 "Consume *them* in wrath, consume *them*, that they *may* not be...

Revelation 14:19 And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

Revelation 16:19 "... and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

Psalms 78:31 The wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them...

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...

Romans 2:5 But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasures up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;

Romans 9:22 What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endures with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:

Romans 13:4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good...a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

John 3:36 "... (H)e that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

2 Peter 2:9 The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:

Matthew 10:28 And fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

John 15:6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch ... and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

Luke 12:5 But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed; hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.

1 Thessalonians 5:9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.

Revelation 15:1 And I saw...seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.

Revelation 15:7 And on of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God...

Revelation 16:1 And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying...pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.

APPENDIX 3

1. “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14), meaning God with us.

Fulfilled in Luke 1:35: “The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”

2. “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me, one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” (Micah 5:2).

Fulfilled in Matthew 2:4–6: “When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written: “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”’

3. “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire—but my ears you have opened—burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, “Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:6–8).

Fulfilled in Hebrews 10: 8-10: “First he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them’—though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then he said, ‘Here I am, I have come to do your will.’ He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

4. “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.” (Isaiah 42:1–4).

Fulfilled in Matthew 12:21: “. . . “He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem” (Isaiah 53:3), and also fulfilled in Luke 4:28–29: “All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff.”

5. “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13–14).

Fulfilled in Luke 1:31–33: “You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

6. “Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9).

Fulfilled in Matthew 21:8–10: “A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!’ “When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, ‘Who is this?’”

7. “It [Passover lamb] must be eaten inside the house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones” (Exodus 12:46).

Fulfilled in John 19:36 “. . . Not one of his bones will be broken.”
The above suggests the crucified Christ equals the sacrificed Passover “lamb.”

8. “‘He trusts in the Lord,’ they say, ‘let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him’” (Psalm 22:8).

Fulfilled in Matthew 27:42–43: “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him,” for he said, “I am the Son of God.”

9. “My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death” (Psalm 22:15).

Fulfilled in John 19:28: “Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.’”

A dry mouth and thirst probably happened because of mouth breathing necessitated by the stress of Jesus fighting for breath while crucified.

10. “Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbors and an object of dread to my closest friends—those who see me on the street flee from me” (Psalm 31:11).

Fulfilled in Mark 14:50: “Then everyone deserted him and fled.”

11. “For I hear many whisperings, ‘Terror on every side!’ They conspire against me and plot to take my life.” (Psalm 31:13).

Fulfilled in Matthew 27:1: “Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed.”

12. “Those who want to kill me set their traps, those who would harm me talk of my ruin; all day long they scheme and lie. I am like the deaf, who cannot hear, like the mute, who cannot speak” (Psalm 38:12–13).

Fulfilled in Matthew 27:12-14: “. . . Then Pilate asked him, ‘Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?’ But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.”

13. “Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me” (Psalm 41:9).

Fulfilled in John 13:18: “I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: ‘He who shared my bread has turned against me.’”

15. “They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst” (Psalm 69:21).

Fulfilled in Matthew 27:34: “There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it.”

16. “I will not die but live and will proclaim what the Lord has done. The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death” (Psalm 118:17–18).

Fulfilled in Luke 24:5-7: “. . . Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’”

17. “. . . The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious; I have not turned away. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting” (Isaiah 50:3–6).

Fulfilled in Matthew 27:27–31: “. . . They spit on him and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.”

18. “I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his priestly house, and they will minister before my anointed one always” (1 Samuel 2:35).

Fulfilled in Hebrews 2:17: “For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.”

19. “The Lord reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. He rules the world in righteousness and judges the peoples with equity. The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you” (Psalm 9:7–10).

Fulfilled in Acts 17:31: “For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

20. “The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah” (Jeremiah 31:31).

Fulfilled in John 7:37–41: “On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified. Therefore, many from the crowd when they heard this saying, said, “Truly this is the Prophet.” Others said, “This is the Christ.”

21. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life. (Leviticus 17:11)

Fulfilled in Matthew 26:28. “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” [the crucifixion].

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