

## ASIAN

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**BOOK REVIEW**

**Scaria Kanniyakonil**, *Wait for God's Call: Catholic Perspective on Euthanasia*, Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India Publications, 2011. Pages: 159. ISBN: 978-81-884566-65-9.

Kanniyakonil's work, spread out into 11 short chapters, deals very systematically with the Catholic theological understanding of, and Catholic response to, the issue of euthanasia. The author attempts to convince the readers that all intentional violations of human life, particularly euthanasia and physician assisted suicide, are always morally evil. He has succeeded to treat the issue of euthanasia with convincing arguments based on Scripture, Catholic Tradition, Natural Moral Law and human experiences.

The first two chapters of this book clarify the concept euthanasia, make a historical analysis of the evolution of the understanding and practice of euthanasia and consider the legal aspects of euthanasia. Literally euthanasia means good death. In the original understanding, euthanasia meant competent and affectionate assistance given to the severely sick and dying persons. Later, with the development of medicine, it also involved the use of pain removing drugs to alleviate the pain involved in the critical stage of life. This is evident in the Hippocratic collection that "physician as healer was required to do away with the sufferings of the sick, to lessen the violence of their diseases and to refuse to treat those who are overwhelmed by their diseases, realizing that in such cases medicine is powerless" (p. 19). This understanding and practice of euthanasia never involved intentional violation of life. However, in the contemporary society euthanasia is direct and intentional ending the life of a sick person.

Three nations in the world, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg, have legalized euthanasia and physician assisted-suicide. These euthanasia laws have certain common elements (p. 32). 1) They emphasize the autonomy of the patient for euthanasia. 2) The right to die of the patient is expressed. 3) The patient's decision for euthanasia should be free and informed. 4) Physical suffering is the reason for euthanasia. 5) More than one doctor should be consulted about the condition of the patient. 6) Regional and state committees should evaluate the records of the patients who undergo euthanasia.

In the third chapter, Kanniyakonil presents many arguments put forward by different secular humanists to support euthanasia such as 'the right to die,' 'autonomy and freedom,' 'burden for others,' 'loss of physical health and meaningless suffering,' 'depression, despair and hopelessness,' and 'economic factors.' However, he challenges all these arguments with many

serious ethical questions. The rest of the book is a profound ethical and theological reconsideration of the arguments of the proponents of euthanasia.

In the fourth and fifth chapters, the author claims that every act of euthanasia or physician assisted-suicide involves intentional violation of life and as such it is a violation of divine law and natural moral law. Natural moral law demands respect of natural rights. Every human being is *human* by nature; no human being is by nature a slave of another human being (p. 51). Since human life is a basic good, euthanasia cannot be morally justified because it becomes the destruction of a basic good. Intentional destruction of any basic good is a violation of natural moral law. Thus euthanasia is an intrinsically evil act.

Chapter six convincingly substantiates that euthanasia is a dangerous threat to the sanctity or sacredness of human life. Every human life has a Godgiven sanctity mainly because of the humans' unique relationship with God as they are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). Incarnation reveals further the special dignity and inalienable value of every human being from conception till natural death. Therefore, every human life has value as long as God values it. Every act of euthanasia in this sense is a sin against God.

Chapters seven, eight and nine deal with the right to die and Christian understanding of autonomy, the theology of suffering and the theology of death respectively. According to Kanniyakonil, euthanasia is against the true concept of freedom, and Christian understanding of autonomy respects human dignity and vulnerability (p. 84). In the Christian understanding, human suffering is a participation in the salvific suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in it the person discovers oneself, one's own humanity, one's own dignity and one's own mission (p. 98). Similarly, death is not the ultimate end of human existence but a door to the intimate communion with God (p. 114).

"Ordinary and Extraordinary Treatments," chapter ten, affirms that the extraordinary means of treatments are not morally obligatory especially when they do not offer a reasonable hope of benefit. However, artificial nutrition and hydration should be provided even to the terminally ill patients. The final chapter provides a Christian care model for patients at the end of their life and offer practical norms for overcoming the tendency of euthanasia.

The title of the book, *Wait for God's Call: Catholic Perspective on Euthanasia*, is attractive and fitting as it conveys clearly the inalienable value and dignity of every human life. This book will be a special guideline for those who are engaged in the promotion of pro life activities and value education. This book deserves a special attention of everyone respecting human life and human dignity.

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