

Mercy Killing



When asked if she still wished to die Joyce said, through her blinking, that actually she wanted to be kept alive.

Mrs Curtis-Thomas lived a further five years in this condition before dying naturally aged 77.

Joyce Curtis-Thomas made a LIVING WILL after she had a stroke. In her living will she said if she had a stroke again and was left paralysed she wanted everything possible done to end her life quickly. This meant being taken off a drip so as not to receive HYDRATION.

When Joyce had her second stroke her daughter asked the doctor to take her off the drip. He refused.

As weeks passed, Joyce's daughter realised her mother was trying to communicate by blinking.



To discuss

- 1 Read the article above. Do you think it is a good idea to give people the right to make living wills?
- 2 Do you think a person can ever be certain about what they would want in a situation like that of Mrs Curtis-Thomas? Or do you think there will always be the risk that people will change their mind?

Euthanasia

Translated literally from Ancient Greek, 'euthanasia' means a gentle and easy death. In the modern world, it refers to when a person chooses to have their life ended, usually as a response to a terminal illness, for example motor neurone disease. Many people believe that our bodies are our own and that people should have the right to do what they want with them, including euthanasia. There are two main types of euthanasia – voluntary and involuntary.

■ Voluntary euthanasia

Voluntary euthanasia is when the person concerned asks someone else to help them die. They may persuade another person to help them to die, or, as Mrs Curtis-Thomas did, write a living will which explains their wishes if they are no longer able to communicate them. They may refuse to have the medical treatment needed to keep them alive.

■ Involuntary euthanasia

Involuntary euthanasia comes into play when a person is no longer able to make a decision, for example by being in a coma or in a PERSISTENT VEGETATIVE STATE. The decision to allow the person to die is therefore taken by relatives or medical experts.

Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 6: 19

You shall not murder.

Exodus 20: 13

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot.

Ecclesiastes 3: 1–2

God has said: 'Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.'

Hebrew, 13: 5

Link it up

Using the bible quotes above, identify and explain those that could be used to support the following Christian beliefs:

- 1 Humans do not and should not possess the right to choose to die.
- 2 It is acceptable to refuse medical treatment to preserve life as it allows nature to take its course, allowing someone to die.
- 3 God cares for each individual and knows the time for each person's death. No one has the right to kill themselves.
- 4 Hospices offer an alternative – they give terminally ill people the opportunity to die naturally, in comfort and dignity.

Christian teachings

The Catholic Church and The Church of England teach that euthanasia is morally wrong. They, along with other Christians, firmly adhere to the sixth commandment, 'You shall not murder'. Catholics and Anglicans apply this belief to all people including the elderly, the disabled and the terminally ill. Pope John Paul II said that people should always choose life over death. For this reason, these two denominations are against any law that legalises euthanasia in any way. Only God owns life – therefore humans do not and should not possess the right to choose to die.

Many Christians believe that suffering and pain are part of life and not a reason to devalue life or to choose death. They believe God should be trusted in all aspects of life, and that God continues to love humans in any condition (Hebrews 13: 5). Only dying naturally is truly dignified, as well as a way of showing complete faith in God.

However, both the Catholic Church and the Church of England believe that it is acceptable to refuse life-preserving medical treatment, as this allows nature to take its course. The Catholic Church also accepts death that occurs as part of what they call 'DOUBLE EFFECT'. This is when medicine is used to relieve pain, but the side-effect is to speed up the moment of death.

Christian denominations support the hospice movement, which developed from the belief that people should be helped to die with dignity. Hospices are places where terminally ill people are cared for and given the opportunity to die naturally, in comfort and dignity. The Church of England has referred to hospices as places of compassion and support for the dying.

EXAM FOCUS...

Describe Christian teachings about euthanasia.

Question d), 6 marks

...HINTS

- It is important to note that the question is asking for 'Christian teachings'. Therefore it is not just a matter of saying that some Christians might agree with euthanasia and some may be against it – you have to explain why using specific teachings from the Churches or the Bible.
- It would be good to refer to the Sanctity of Life and include a Bible teaching in support such as Genesis 1: 27; Psalm 139: 13; or Jeremiah 1: 5.
- You could refer to the sixth commandment: 'You shall not murder'.
- You could mention the alternative to euthanasia – the hospice movement – but you would need to link it to a Christian teaching.
- To help you look at the teachings above.