

BULLETIN -- SEPTEMBER 13

The leopard changes its spots. Compassion. Choices. Don't those words sound nice and smooth and comforting? Who can argue with compassion? It's so merciful, so non-judgmental. And who can argue with choices? After all, we live in a free society. Shouldn't it be up to each one to decide what's best for him or her? Aren't these the necessary components of a kinder, gentler society and world?

Better wake up if you think so. Compassion and Choices, since 2003, has been the new name for the Hemlock Society, that 1980 creation of euthanasia advocate Derek Humphry (1930-). The Hemlock Society was named after the cup of poison which the philosopher Socrates was condemned to drink in ancient Athens. Perhaps because the name became too closely associated with the "dark side" of euthanasia (as if there is a "light side"!), Humphry and his associates decided to adopt a name with more appeal to the millennial generations. Humphry has survived his first two wives, both of whom committed suicide; but at age 85 he goes on with his advocacy, apparently figuring he has too much to live for to take a dose of his own medicine. Not that we would encourage him, or anyone else, to do that. Rather, we hope and pray he finds life in Jesus Christ, unlikely as that might seem. Stranger things have happened.

Four states in the U.S. have legalized physician-assisted suicide: Washington, Oregon, Montana, and Vermont. No surprises there. These four are world-renowned as habitats of free-thinkers and agnostics, perhaps on a par with the Netherlands and the Scandinavian nations. But as with other recent benchmarks of sweeping social change, we can count on their poison flowing through the veins and arteries of the rest of the country, convincing even believers that what is bad is good and what is good is bad. After all, when one of the most popular questions asked of religious authorities is, "Why does God allow suffering, especially of the innocent?" you can be sure that the fields are ripe for the harvest of ways to put an end to "senseless, meaningless" suffering, whether in one's own case or in the case of those we love.

Actor Robin Williams committed suicide, but it was considered by most to be tragic and sad. Although a deeply troubled man, he was a gifted, talented entertainer, and even members of Compassion and Choices would probably have voted to keep him around for a longer time. But it won't be long before some other gifted, talented notable is diagnosed with something that could result in pain and confinement, and chooses to end his or her own life in a state that allows it to be done legally. The media will have a feeding frenzy, eager to portray opponents of assisted suicide as cruel, heartless, indifferent to others' pain, and on the "wrong side of history"; while all who support the right to choose are enlightened, caring, champions of "fundamental rights." When the deed is done, I suspect the White House will be eager to place a phone call congratulating the notable on making such an heroic decision, but alas! The intended recipient of the call will have to receive it posthumously. No matter. Flags can be ordered to half-mast, politicians eager to court voters can speak of the "bravery" of the deceased at the funeral, and another line can be crossed in the relentless transformation of America from a nation which once feared breaking God's commandments to one in which the commandments cannot even be displayed in public places.

Some will argue, "What's the use? That's the way it's going and there's no way we're going to stop it." That's like the man holding the "Bridge Out" sign to warn cars

of a washout and ravine up ahead, picking up his stuff and going home, saying, “What’s the use? People are going to make their own decisions, anyway.” IT’S OUR JOB to come up with cogent and forceful arguments based on both revelation and reason (the two go hand-in-hand) to show our fellow citizens why these bad moral choices are bad for EVERYBODY, not just for believers. Are you equipped to make such an argument? Here are some handy talking points:

1. Those promoting assisted suicide rely heavily upon **deceit**. First, they claim that no one should have to suffer excruciating pain. Well, of course they shouldn’t. If you’ve ever had a major earache or toothache, you might have temporarily entertained the thought that you wouldn’t mind at all if someone just put you out of your misery. But you were treated for it, and you got better. And when it comes to people dying in severe pain, there are doctors who specialize in alleviating it. The challenge is to improve our medications and treatments, not to just give up and choose death.

Secondly, they will claim that vast majorities of people agree with them. The phony-numbers argument is used to wear down resistance. We’ve seen it employed with abortion, with stem-cell research, and with same-sex unions. Quote the inflated figures often enough, make fun of “religious” arguments often enough, and poorly-instructed believers will fall right in line. After all, this is America, it’s a free country, we’re supposed to be “fair” and “equal,” etc., etc.

Finally, they will claim that their goal is legal, physician-assisted, highly-regulated, out-in-the-open availability of a very limited procedure, carefully tailored to each patient’s / victim’s need. “Safe, legal, and rare.” Behold, the same people support abortion on demand, and squeal bloody murder (how appropriate!) when the slightest hint of regulating legislation is introduced for their “clinics” to ensure their patients’ / victims’ safety. We can expect the identical reaction when any question is raised about whether physicians, who once had to swear the Hippocratic oath against performing abortion and euthanasia, are actually adhering to genuinely legal procedures.

2. If you think all the paperwork surrounding HIPAA and the ACA (Obamacare) is something, just wait! Patients and their families are already given so many reams of paper to read and sign (patients’ *rights*, we’re told) in critical moments that they are sure to have no clue as to what it all is that they’re signing. This **confusion** is a primary tool of those who want to pull something over on the unsuspecting public. Remember Rep. Pelosi’s famous comment on the ACA: “We have to pass the bill so you can find out what is in it, away from the fog of the controversy”? Just sign here, please. Don’t bother reading it. We know what’s best for you. Trust us. Right. Step to the showers, please, and never mind the fog.

3. Why do we have suicide hotlines? Why is there a team of officers ready to try to rescue people who want to jump from the Golden Gate Bridge? Because we are a **community**, a human family, and we *do* have a responsibility for each other. The advocates of physician-assisted suicide argue, “Whose life is it, anyway?” We could make the same argument when a distraught teenager or any beloved family member threatens to take his or her own life. But we intervene, because that action will profoundly affect all of us. “No man is an island,” said the poet John Donne, “. . . if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less.” Those who make a false god out of human autonomy are worshipping at the altar of loneliness and depression – things we should be looking to cure, not to promote.

4. We are all in grave **danger** when a single human life is devalued or deemed to be “without quality.” The danger is not coming from ISIS. It doesn’t have to. People are our world’s greatest asset. More of them than ever need to be reclaimed for Christ from ignorance, apathy, and lethargy. When we start treating any one of them as a liability, we are telling our Creator his beautiful words about each one of us are mistaken: “You knit me in my mother’s womb. . . I am fearfully, wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:13-14). God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: Faith is not intended to create a world of harmony where wishes suddenly come true. It is, and it implies, hard work.