

Submission to the Victoria Parliament End of Life Choices Inquiry. I understand that this submission will become a public document.

I ask that the attached Booklet, "I Want the Choice of a Peaceful Death", be considered in its entirety as a submission to the Inquiry. This Booklet clearly documents why Victorians and indeed all Australians would benefit from legislation that will give them assisted dying as an additional compassionate OPTION and part of good palliative care in an "End of Life Choices" situation.

Nancy E Wood OAM, JP(Retired)



C4VE Booklet - I Want The Choice Feb 2013 V3 compressed.pdf



Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Euthanasia

Membership

Our objectives are:

- to demonstrate to Members of Parliament that there is a strong majority of thinking Christians who want Voluntary Euthanasia to be made lawful with appropriate safeguards
- to counter the misinformation so often put forward by many of the religious hierarchy in their opposition to Voluntary Euthanasia.

Becoming a member demonstrates that you support these objectives, as well as your willingness to become a *signatory* together with all other members of our group in our communications with Members of Parliament.

A national body, we support appropriate legislation in all Australian States and Territories. We welcome members joining from across the nation. Non-Christians and ex-Christians endorsing our campaign are also welcome.

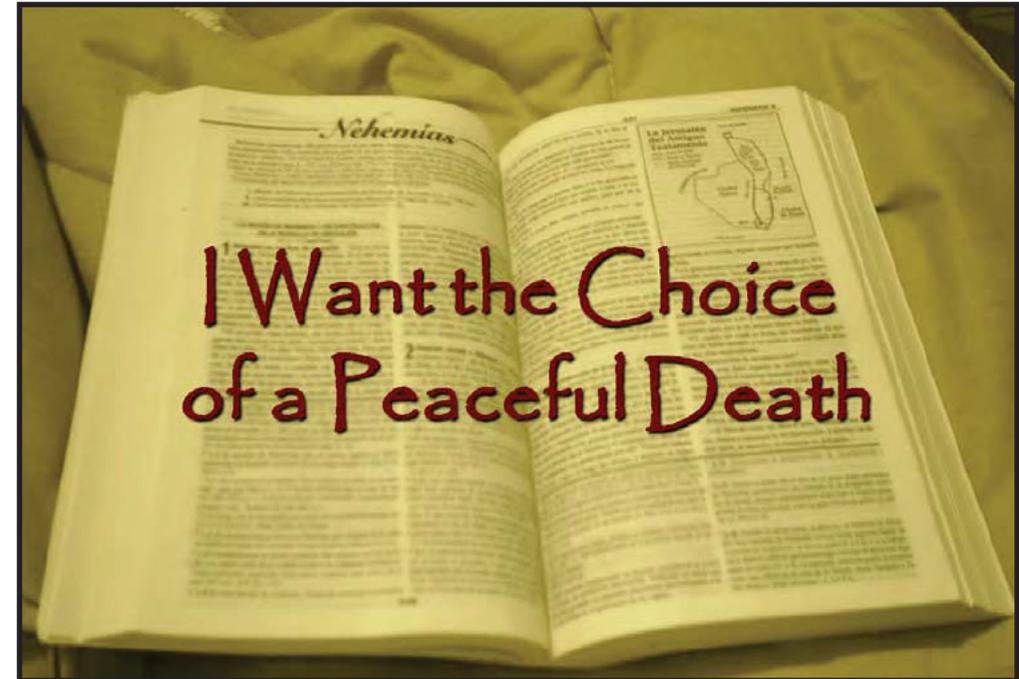
Membership of the group is *free*.

Help us with law reform

We welcome donations to help with our work. Please make any cheque or money order payable to *Christians Supporting Choice for VE*.

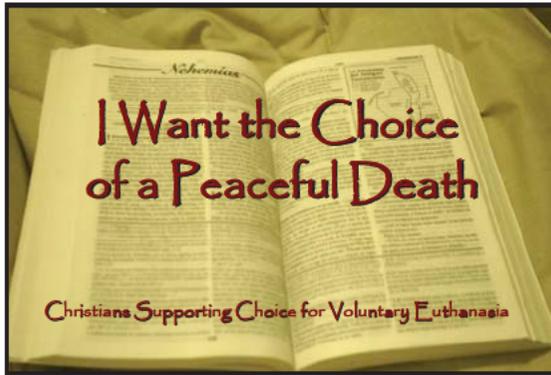
We invite you to contact us for information about becoming a sponsor. See our contact details on page 15.

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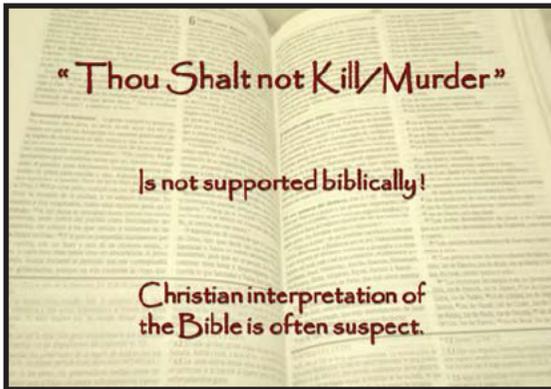
Love and compassion dictate that the legal option of an assisted death should be a right for all Australians with a hopeless or terminal illness.

www.christiansforve.org.au



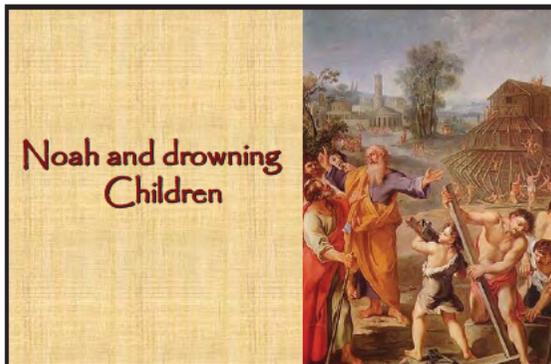
The vast majority of people, when asked what type of death they would prefer, hope for it to be quiet and peaceful. Few would opt for a violent or painful end to life.

Love and compassion call for the legal option of an assisted death to be a right for all hopelessly ill Australians.

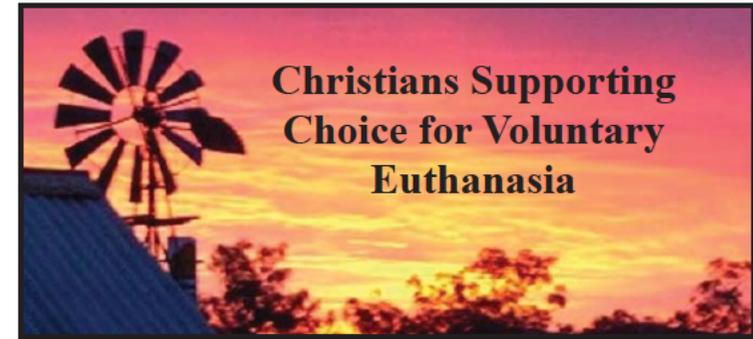


Christian interpretations of the Bible are often suspect. Opposition to Voluntary Euthanasia is often based on the Commandment in the Old Testament “Thou shalt not kill / murder”, which could more accurately be expressed as “Thou shalt not murder (fellow Jews).” That is, “kill with malice.”

As any reader of the Christian Bible would be aware, the Old Testament is awash with bloodshed. We have the genocide of the Canaanites, the Lord drowning every living person except Noah and his family, and the Angel of Death killing the first born in every family in Egypt, to give just three examples.



We all know the cute part of the Noah story, the animals going in two by two, but how many of us think seriously about the fact that we are told every other living person was drowned at this time, including innocent babies!



Christians who believe that, as a demonstration of love and compassion, those with a terminal or hopeless illness should have the option of a pain-free, peaceful and dignified death with legal voluntary euthanasia.

The Right Rev. Dr W. Inge, former Dean of St Paul’s Cathedral, London, when founding the British Voluntary Euthanasia Legalisation Society in 1935, said, “It is not contrary to Christian principles.”

To join our group or for further information please contact:

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Endorsed by Rev. Trevor Bensch, Group co-founder, hospital chaplain and former Minister of North Adelaide Baptist Church, South Australia, who says:
“My call for legal Voluntary Euthanasia is compassionate and thoroughly consistent with the teachings of Jesus.”

This booklet is an adaptation of a presentation prepared by Ian Wood and with the assistance of Michael Eustice, 2010. Revised and reprinted Feb 2013.

Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Euthanasia

Conclusion:

Any individual suffering from a terminal or hopeless illness should have the right to choose a quick, peaceful and dignified death, if that is their wish.

To deny this is to deny Christian love and compassion.

The moral case for legalising Voluntary Euthanasia is based on three principles:

1. Respect for individual autonomy, our right to make decisions that are primarily our own concern
2. Compassion for those who are suffering with no prospect of relief
3. Concern for the dignity of the person and his or her quality of life



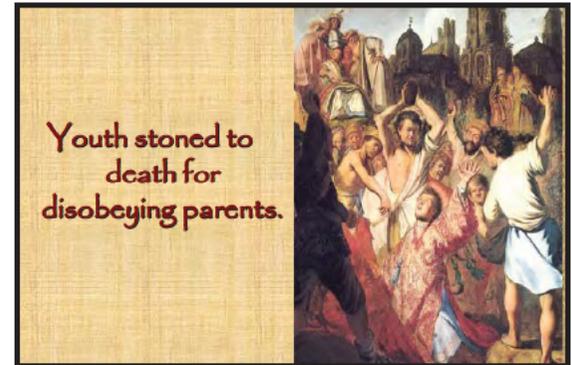
Any individual suffering from a terminal or hopeless illness should have the right to choose a quick, peaceful and pain-free death, if that is their wish.

There is clearly no moral, social or rational justification in the continuing refusal of our politicians to legalise the choice for Voluntary Euthanasia in such circumstances.

“Euthanasia is not a choice between life and death, but a choice between different ways of dying.”

Jacques Pohier, a Catholic priest, excommunicated for his views on Voluntary Euthanasia.

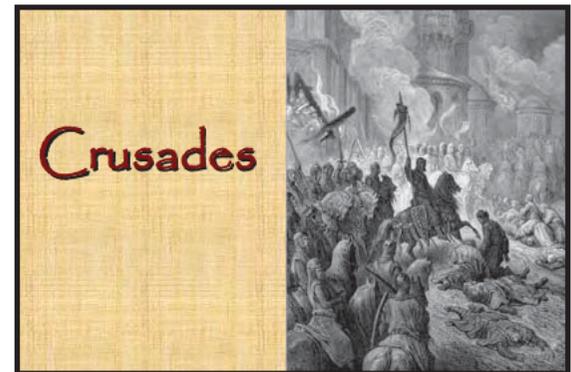
Even the most ardent literalist-advocate for strict adherence to the Bible would agree that stoning to death children who argue with their parents or who overeat (Deuteronomy 21:18-21) is taking parental discipline a little too far.



Youth stoned to death for disobeying parents.

There was little respect for human life as Christians fought Muslims during the Crusades.

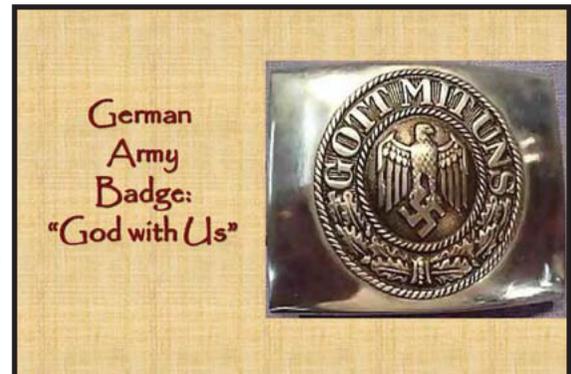
Roman Catholic opposition is also based on the principle of “sanctity of life.” Yet Pope Leo XIII around 1900 endorsed “the death sentence is a necessary and efficacious means for the Church to attain its end when rebels act against it and cannot be restrained by any other penalty.” Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, said it is possible to justify war and capital punishment, but not Voluntary Euthanasia.



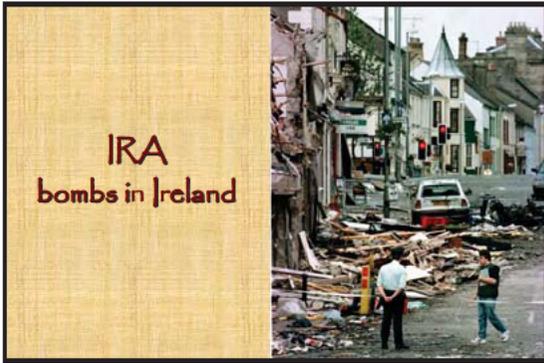
Crusades

The Nazis are justly criticized for atrocities committed during WWII and opponents of VE bring up the elimination of the innocent in extermination camps. This cannot be compared in the context of easing the death of a terminally ill person with voluntary euthanasia.

The irony is that a majority of the German army were Christians, and the motto on their buckle – Gott mit Uns – means *God with Us*.



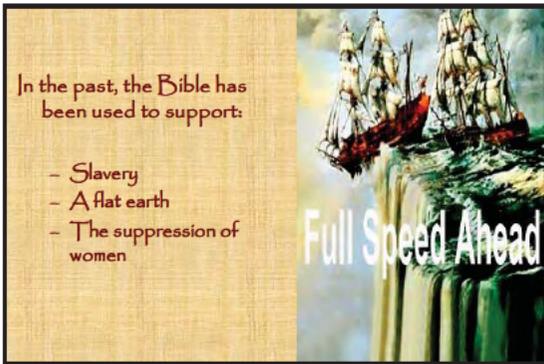
German Army Badge: “God with Us”



can be justified, yet it is an immoral act to assist a person who is in the dying process, suffering unrelievable pain, with Voluntary Euthanasia!

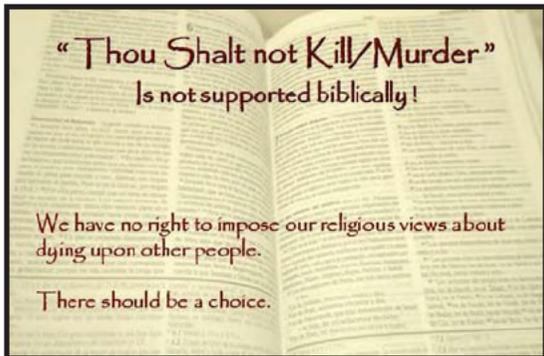
We have Christians committing murder and atrocities against fellow Christians. So much for their concept of the *sanctity of life!*

This leads to the curious moral position where some Christians state that to kill someone in an act of war, or as punishment for a crime,



of thinking, and publishing the "heresy" that the earth was not the centre of the universe. Galileo nearly suffered a similar fate.

The Christian Bible is often used to support opposition to change, just as it was used in the past to resist the abolition of slavery, as proof that Earth was flat, to resist university education for women, and resist the vote for women. Giordano Bruno was burned to death in Rome in 1600 for the crime

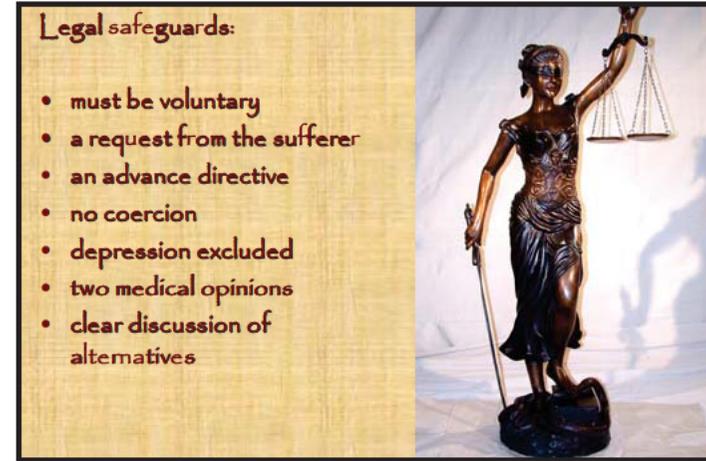


We must all respect the diversity of opinions on Voluntary Euthanasia, but no religious group should seek to impose their dogma, their interpretation, on other people.

There should be a choice.

The absence of legal VE means that organisations such as Exit are seen by many as the only alternative. This approach has the potential to create uncertainty and conflict for the terminally ill, as well as for those who support them.

In Western Australia the Supreme Court gave quadriplegic Christian Rossiter the right to starve himself to death and not be force fed by his carers. This clearly shows that Parliaments should update law on assisted dying. What an indictment of our society: death by starvation!



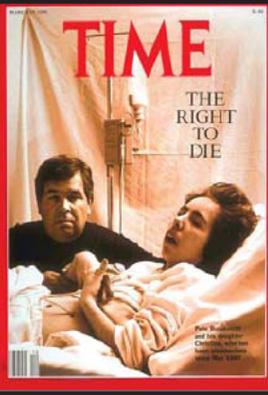
Strong legal safeguards for parliamentary law reform include that:

- there must be a spontaneous request from the patient
- there is no coercion
- the patient is fully informed about treatment and palliative care alternatives and their likely outcomes
- two medical opinions are required, at least one a specialist in the patient's diagnosed illness
- participation is voluntary for all parties including doctors, nurses and others
- there is a formal documentary process for recording and reporting requests and assistance in dying
- there is formal recognition for Advance Healthcare Directives

The completion of a Life Values Statement, though not legally binding, also provides great assistance to carers and those with Guardianship or Enduring Medical Power of Attorney.

The Oregon experience:

- No abuse
- No 'slippery slope'
- Best palliative care in USA



The Oregon USA experience is one of the best documented, with assisted dying legal since 1997. There is no abuse of the disabled or the supposed “vulnerable,” an argument often used by opponents of assisted dying—no so-called “slippery slope.”

Many patients who

request and are accepted for assisted dying *live longer* and have a *better quality of life* than those who do not ask for assistance. It provides great peace of mind. Palliative care in Oregon has continued to improve since 1997 and is amongst the best in the USA. Washington state now has a similar law.

Public Opinion

“Thinking now about Voluntary Euthanasia: If a hopelessly ill patient, experiencing unrelievable suffering, with absolutely no chance of recovering asks for a lethal dose, should a doctor be allowed to provide a lethal dose, or not?”

Year	'62	'83	'87	'90	'92	'95	'02*	'07	'09
Yes	47%	67%	75%	77%	76%	78%	73%	80%	85%
No	39%	21%	18%	17%	18%	15%	22%	14%	10%
??	14%	12%	7%	6%	6%	7%	5%	6%	5%

* Only three states polled (not national)

Since the Morgan Gallup poll of 1962, support for VE has continued to grow. Today, more than 80% of Australians support assisted dying under certain circumstances. Support includes three out of four Catholics and four out of five Anglicans (Newspoll 2007, 2009).

Our laws are not working:

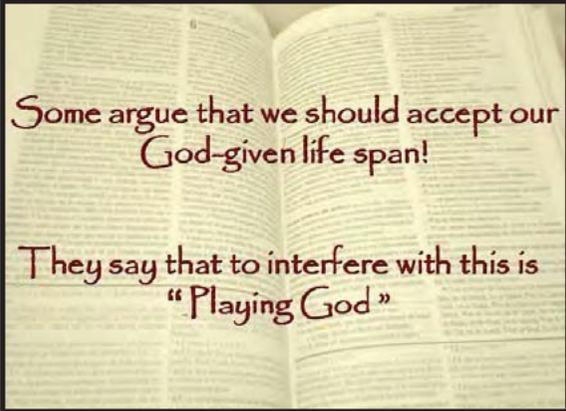
- covert assistance
- terminal sedation



The laws here are not working: there is covert assistance to die but only if you know the right doctor. Assistance imposes a heavy burden on the doctor. The use of terminal sedation to assist death is currently unmonitored and unreported.

Another argument often used against the option of Voluntary Euthanasia is that “God has allocated each of us a time span for life on earth.”

To interfere with this is criticised as “playing God.”



Some argue that we should accept our God-given life span!

They say that to interfere with this is “Playing God”

But to be consistent we should also refuse antibiotics, refuse surgical operations, refuse insulin, refuse dialysis, refuse blood transfusions, and so on. The list is almost endless: each of these are *human interventions* deliberately designed to alter our life span.

Medical intervention already alters life spans:

- Vaccines
- Operations
- Antibiotics
- Simply seeking treatment

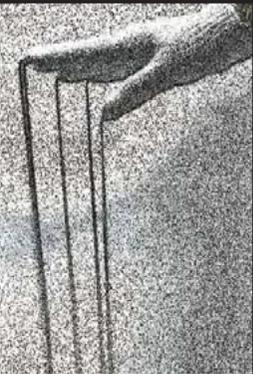


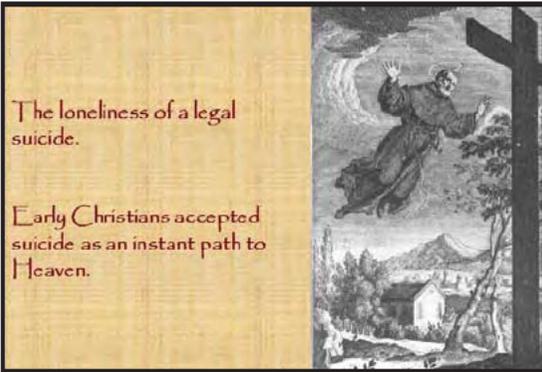
It is said that life is a “gift from God.”

If life is a gift, then humans must also have the right to exercise that freedom when their own death is imminent.

Otherwise, life is more of a “loan”...with strings attached, not a gift.

Is life a gift or are there strings attached?





Jumping from a building, drowning, drinking weed killer or shooting oneself are all means of suicide, none illegal!

The potential suicide of a depressed person, who has their whole life before them is a tragedy that must be recognised, and treated with all possible resources. But

in the context of VE legislation, why should such a suicide be necessary for a person with a hopeless illness? The inhumanity of our existing laws force some suffering people to a possibly ill-conceived, lonely and violent suicide. Suicide was well accepted by early Christians as an instant path to Heaven, until Saint Augustine decided around 400 AD that too many Christians were dying needlessly.

The Principle of Double Effect

An action can have two effects:

- A good effect and a bad effect
- If you intend the 'good' effect (relief), the 'bad' effect (hastened death) can be justified.

Are we prolonging life
or
prolonging death?

The principle of “double effect” is a very grey area where what is considered a dose of pain relievers sufficient enough to relieve pain and suffering may also have a toxicity that could lead to shortening of life. Use of the “double effect” is ad hoc and widespread. A doctor engaging in this conduct could be subject to a murder charge instead of thanks for providing relief from intolerable suffering.

Double effect can include terminal sedation, where a coma is induced, and

the patient dies over time from starvation or dehydration. There are no established rules or guidelines for this practice, and no reporting is involved. The patient need not be asked. Compare that to the stringent safeguards in formalised Voluntary Euthanasia legislation.

Death by starvation or dehydration: is that the best we can come up with in our enlightened, civilised society?



Our belief is that Jesus would have healed the sick, though of course they must still die eventually.

For us mere mortals such healing is not always possible.

And we are endowed with a brain with which to think—to be used to help a terminally ill person who asks for help to die peacefully.



What would Jesus have done?

Doctors have a duty of care, and this care should provide the maximum possible assistance to maintain the health and wellbeing of every person, yet should also extend to making their death pain-free and quick, if that is the wish of the patient with a hopeless illness, and their doctor is in agreement.

Medicine has progressed since about 400BC, when doctors swore the Hippocratic Oath to the Greek god Apollo, a doctrine that forbade surgery, and women from becoming doctors, amongst other things.

Medical schools today do not require their graduates to take anything like the Hippocratic Oath.

The Facts

- * Doctors and a duty of care.
- * The Oregon experience.
- * Our laws are not working.
- * Legal and ethical safeguards.

The Hippocratic Oath and what Hippocrates really said. Doctors and a Duty of Care.

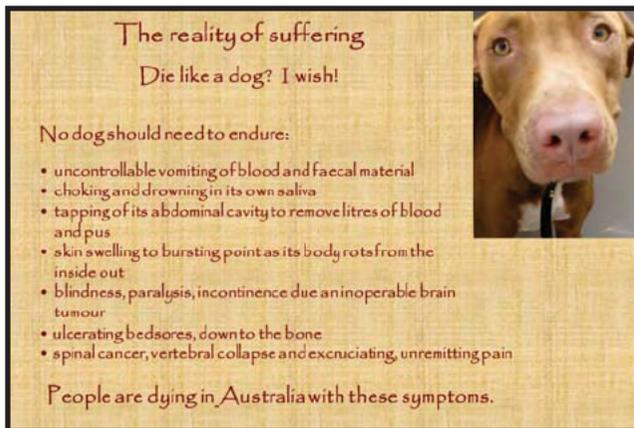




How could any person with a shred of compassion not feel for Chantal?

She endured eight years of hell on earth as inoperable nasal cancer ate into her sinuses and eyes, as she lost her senses of taste and smell, and as she lost the ability to eat as her jaw disintegrated. Yet she was denied by

law an assisted, peaceful death.



No dog should need to endure:

- uncontrollable vomiting of blood and faecal material
- choking and drowning in its own saliva
- tapping of its abdominal cavity to remove litres of blood and pus
- skin swelling to bursting point as its body rots from the inside out
- blindness, paralysis, incontinence due an inoperable brain tumour
- ulcerating bedsores, down to the bone
- spinal cancer, vertebral collapse and excruciating, unremitting pain

People are dying in Australia with these symptoms.

Die like a Dog?

I wish!

When the time comes for an animal to die, its pain-free death is enshrined in law—against cruelty. But not for humans.

By law, no dog should need to endure, when there is no realistic chance of cure or relief:

- Uncontrollable vomiting of blood and faecal material
- Choking and drowning in its own saliva
- Ongoing tapping of the abdominal cavity to remove litres of blood and pus
- Skin swelling to bursting point as its body rots from the inside out
- Blindness, paralysis, incontinence due to an inoperable brain tumour
- Ulcerating bed sores, down to the bone

If it is acceptable to pray to God for a quick peaceful death, it is surely equally acceptable to pray for a doctor to assist.

Jesus died on the Cross in six hours. The pain would be horrific, but six hours is markedly better than the normal two or three days, sometimes extending up to seven days, usually taken to die by crucifixion. No need for the usual crucifixion leg breaking to increase pain and hasten death.

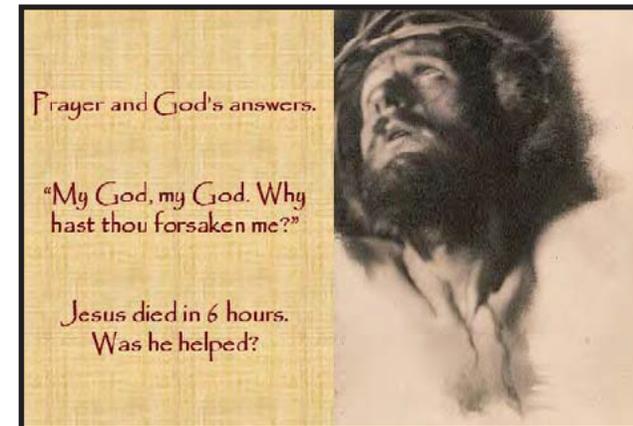
On the cross Jesus said, lucidly, “I thirst.” Sour wine was passed up. He sipped and died soon after. (John 19:29,30)

Pontius Pilate marvelled that Jesus was dead so soon.

Was Jesus helped to die? Put yourself in that position — either on the cross or at the foot of it. Apply “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Love and compassion for a fellow human should surely be one of the basic tenets of any community, Christian or otherwise.

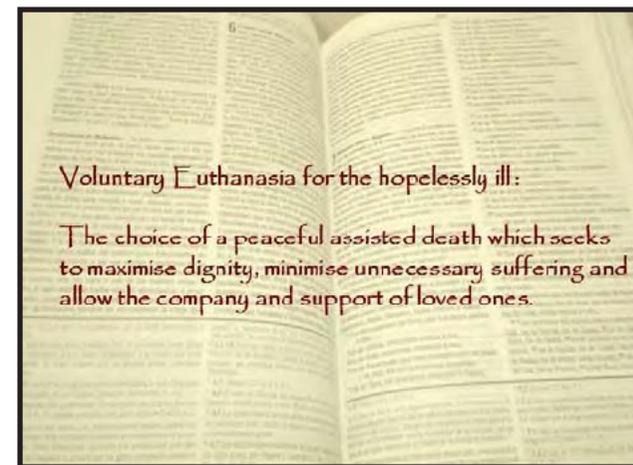
Where suffering is profound and cannot be relieved despite the best available medical and palliative care, this love and compassion helps maximize dignity in dying and allows the lawful company and support of loved ones during the process.



Prayer and God's answers.

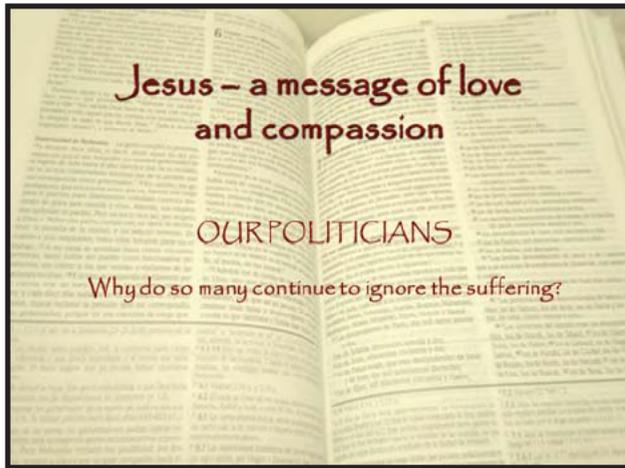
“My God, my God. Why hast thou forsaken me?”

Jesus died in 6 hours. Was he helped?



Voluntary Euthanasia for the hopelessly ill:

The choice of a peaceful assisted death which seeks to maximise dignity, minimise unnecessary suffering and allow the company and support of loved ones.



So the question must be asked! Why have our politicians continued to ignore the suffering of the 5% - 10% of those dying with symptoms that cannot be relieved regardless of the best available care?

It is hard to believe that politicians are in fear of God's judgement.

What we *do know* is they are often influenced by people who claim to know what God thinks: a paternalistic God of wrath, judgement and discrimination.

"Just about all dying patients experience suffering and the extent to which it can be relieved is difficult to quantify.

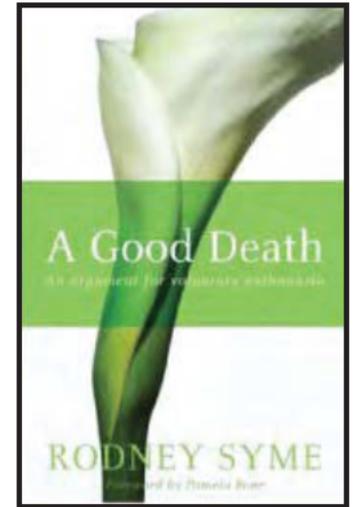
Certainly the suffering is such that between 5 and 10% of dying cancer patients request VE. The last resort in palliative care is to provide 'pharmacological oblivion'."

Dr Roger Hunt,
Director
Western Adelaide Palliative Care
(23.9.2009)

Dr Roger Hunt, a respected senior Palliative Care Specialist in South Australia, has strongly and consistently advocated the need for the legal option of Voluntary Euthanasia.

A Good Death: A 75 year old woman, Anna, previously healthy, developed a bladder infection. Investigation revealed that ovarian cancer had spread to her bowel. A palliative hysterectomy was performed. She developed a bowel obstruction and part of her colon was removed. The bowel join leaked, and a fistula lead to faeces leaking uncontrollably through to the vagina. She was given a permanent colostomy, which she hated, but mucus with pus was still discharging through to her vagina. Three major operations in three months, to someone with almost certainly incurable cancer. After considering her plea for assistance to die, Dr Syme gave Anna a prescription for Soneryl, a barbiturate. Importantly, she then decided to go ahead with chemotherapy, which was not successful. She eventually died peacefully, not alone, using the prescription.

(Précis from *A Good Death* by Dr Rodney Syme.)



Our challenge to all MPs who oppose VE is to visit a person such as Anna. Try to comfort them. Look them in the eye and contemplate their suffering.

Our MPs have the power to legislate to give people a choice to obtain quick and peaceful relief. It is an intolerable burden on doctors to have to risk a charge of murder if they accede to a request to assist the dying in this way, while denial of a request for assistance to die places an intolerable burden on the hopelessly ill patient.

Members of Parliament need to be made aware that the vocal opposition to assisted dying by conservative groups such as the Australian Christian Lobby does not represent the broad spectrum of Christian opinion, nor the majority of Christian support for this issue.

The Good Samaritan

Passing by?
Ignoring the suffering?
Who will help?