

## Euthanasia: We must promote solidarity

*by Georges Liénard on behalf of the EHF – October 1995*

Albert Jacquard insisted recently, like many biologists, on the continuum of life. Life is a natural and continuous process which continues without a break. It is only in our perception, with our wish to distinguish stages in this process, that we talk about the life of a bacterium, a plant, animal or a man. The death of each of these entities, which is the end of his own existence, is not the cessation of life.

Life thus understood as a continuous process may not be “given”. To assert the contrary displays a serious disregard of nature or a doctrinaire blindness.

Even parents who, as we commonly say, decide to give life, are in no way responsible for the biochemical process that will later bring about the birth of a child. One parent provides an egg, the other sperm. The meeting of these two cells, in a supportive environment, triggers a series of biological phenomena that neither parent controls.

Let us be wise enough to admit, as we are urged by biologists, that our lives are not “given”. We cannot have received them either from God or from our parents, even though they gave us their love and all their care. Believing the reverse is not only contrary to the scientific evidence, but maintains dangerous taboos that themselves generate prohibitions.

### Overcoming taboos

Many of the issues related to euthanasia have their roots in prohibitions. Obstacles we meet in the debate about the end of life have, often without us realising it, such prohibitions as their background. Gradually, more and more people are trying to escape these prohibitions that have nothing to do with religion or with a belief in God.

Many Christians and non-Christians are willing to admit the difficulty of “giving meaning to one’s life” if one cannot equally “give meaning to one’s death”. They want their last moments to unfold in a manner in keeping with their philosophical or religious beliefs. No meaning can be found in any action that is coerced, only in what one does in full responsibility for oneself.

This is obviously a matter of respect for the individual. No one has the right to decide for us how to respect our human existence and our lives. Invoking taboos is a dehumanized way of thinking about the approach of death, denying a human being the dignity of determining his own end.

It is a matter secondly simply of freedom, the freedom of self-determination. The refusal of this ultimate freedom endangers other individual freedoms, under the pretext that “life” is received “as a gift”.

We must take note that, in most countries, the law on euthanasia hallows a hypocrisy which has as its sole basis the taboos and prohibitions of a church that moreover speaks in the name of a so-called natural law of which it alone has knowledge.

The end of life can only unfold sensibly in a context of freedom of thought about human life and a lifting of prohibitions.

Providing palliative care includes keeping company with the patient, keeping company by knowing how to listen. Without careful listening, companionship is an empty word. This listening leads, in some cases, to a request for help in suicide or euthanasia.

Euthanasia – death on request – is a form of solidarity, solidarity that concerns us all, those close to the patient, the doctor or doctors, the paramedical staff and eventually the whole of society that expresses its views in the laws passed in Parliament.

It is not a characteristic of the secular approach – contrary to what some opponents are trying to make out – to establish new – secular – restrictive rules, to thwart the prohibitions of religious doctrine.

Secularists demand that the law, which must apply to all, permits respect for the clearly expressed wishes of persons reaching the end of their life. Is it necessary to repeat that this provision requires no-one to act contrary to their conscience?