

21 October 2017

Dear Members of the Joint Select Committee on End of Life Choices,

I would like to plead with you against the introduction of legislation allowing medical practitioners to actively terminate or assist in terminating the lives of other people at their request.

First I wish to make it clear that I can fully sympathise with those who experience the suffering of loved ones in their last phase of life. It is terrible to see your loved ones suffering such pain. Yet I am convinced that legislating end of life choices is not the way to address that painful problem.

One of the most fundamental principles of our human society is the rule that human life is sacred and murder is forbidden. Authorities have been established to maintain law and order and to protect the lives and well-being of the citizens. If we choose for active voluntary euthanasia we are busy destroying this foundation of society and turning the corner in the direction of the law of the jungle, where it is a matter of survival of the fittest. The lives of certain people will no longer be safe. In practice they will no longer receive the protection of the authorities, even though the laws will still appear to protect them. Legalised euthanasia will lead to a society that is more and more selfish, loveless and uncaring. Allow me to explain.

First of all the point of people's lives becoming unsafe. Advocates of euthanasia speak of voluntary euthanasia. Your terms of reference speak of "End of life choices" by which is clearly meant the choice of the person who is experiencing chronic and/or terminal illness. The question is, however, how voluntary will that end of life choice be once it is a legalised option. Chronic and terminally ill patients are psychologically vulnerable. They very easily feel that they are a burden to others. They sense the mixed feelings of many family members and friends, who struggle with the desire to care but also with a simultaneous desire to have it all over, with. They also sense the attitude and feelings of the professionals with their own struggles. Under such pressure they may feel obliged to request euthanasia. Yes, in a society where euthanasia is legalised the situation can arise that it is seen as being anti-social for the chronic and terminally ill not to request euthanasia. Thus the most vulnerable in society would feel pressured to request an early death. Experience from the Netherlands shows that voluntary euthanasia leads to non-voluntary euthanasia. This is not surprising. Euthanasia sends the message that certain lives are not worth living. Well, if the basic reason for advocating euthanasia is that people do not have a worthwhile life, on what grounds could you deny it to those who are incapable of asking for it, for example, the mentally disabled, the demented, the unconscious and the fragile elderly. Thus the legislation of euthanasia changes society. It takes away the protection of the most vulnerable.

Legislated euthanasia also leads to a less loving and caring society. Euthanasia at request is considered to be a compassionate deed. Yet is immediate death really in the interest of the patient? Specialists working in the field comment that a request for euthanasia is generally a request for help. When the cry for help has been addressed, patients no longer express the wish to end their life. There is no

alternative to good care. Through such care many people have experienced the last phase of their life as an enriching time, despite all the suffering and grief. People have been drawn closer to each other. Had they pursued the request for euthanasia then they would have missed out on that valuable time together. We all struggle with the purpose of suffering and pain. At times it seems so senseless and most of us would have times that we think that euthanasia wouldn't be such a bad solution after all. Then I am thankful that that option is not yet there. I can't oversee the future. Had we all immediately acted on our feelings then we would have robbed many people of the love and care they longed for and the sense of security. There is a dark side to our human nature, a capacity for despising "unproductive burdens", a selfishness that thinks of only our immediate pleasure and comfort. We may be thankful for the fact that we are continually trained in love and care. Even though we don't understand a lot of the suffering in this life, one thing we do know about it is that it serves as a challenge to grow in love and care. It is a time of reflection and preparation.

Suffering builds up character. In our assertive age we are taught to stand up for ourselves, but we do not learn to be considerate and to care for others. Often people care for others because they expect something in return. Then it becomes very difficult to care for patients who are unable even to show gratitude. By being confronted with suffering we are forced to show unselfish love and care. It is for the good of us individually and for the good of society at large. Once euthanasia has been legalised there is likely to be a decline in care from relatives, friends and professionals. There is likely to be a decline in the interest in palliative care and in the care of the elderly. This will in turn make the suffering of the vulnerable less bearable, almost forcing them to request euthanasia. And those who refuse to request that, may run the risk of being denied the right to palliative care.

In conclusion I repeat that legislated euthanasia would destroy the foundation of our society. It would lead us away from the blessed rule that human life is sacred and murder is forbidden, in the direction of the law of the jungle. It would put the lives of the vulnerable at risk and would make society less loving and caring. Instead of legislating end of life choices we should make it our aim to grow in self-denying love and care. Effective palliative care alleviates much pain associated with the dying process. It provides dignity during death. It would be very unwise to legalise euthanasia and thereby destroy one of the foundations of society for the sake of those for whom the palliative care does not sufficiently alleviate pain. Let us rather show ourselves to be a caring society and invest more in improving our palliative care for those who need it.

I wish you much wisdom to work through all the material you have received and to formulate proposals that will benefit society as a whole and in the long-term.

Yours sincerely,

Cornelis Kleijn,