

Euthanasia - New Light On An Old Problem

Whilst there has been a recent round of publicity about it, for years now controversy has raged over the subject of Euthanasia. Put in simple terms, 'Euthanasia' means 'mercy killing', or actively taking steps to bring about death in cases of incurable and painful sicknesses; and there are now admitted cases of it, the most recently publicised of these being in Britain. Not too long ago the English journalist Derek Humphray, in a book he wrote called '*Jean's Way*', described how he assisted his wife's suicide, she being then terminally ill and wanting to die. More recently still, the controversy surrounding Euthanasia flared up again in Britain, when a Court there over ruled the wishes of the parents of a baby suffering from Down's Syndrome, they having declined further surgery for her so that she might die naturally. A new cause for concern, reported at length in an article which appeared in The Sydney Morning Herald on August 31st 1981, is that some 800 nurses in Britain, the majority of them working with terminally ill and senile patients, have joined a voluntary euthanasia Society, "Exit". It seems that theirs is a strong reaction lest they should, themselves, ever arrive at such a situation like the people they are working amongst are in.

I must point out that it is not my desire to wade into controversy. Even less do I want to seem to be treading loftily and insensitively on the emotions of people weighed down with the care of someone severely handicapped, terminally ill or senile. At the same time, it has to be said that discussion about Euthanasia tends to be within too narrow limits. We are inclined, for example, to judge too narrowly of the use the person is serving, as if it has always to be something we can see and assess. And much that is taught us, by the Lord, about the human situation generally, and about our relationship with Him, is rarely mentioned, as if it doesn't matter. But it does.

And it is this I am concentrating on tonight. My hope is that in drawing upon teaching given both in the Bible and in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, things will be said which will cast a different and helpful light on a subject which at one time or another is bound to be of concern to us all.

What then of our relationship with God, and of His relationship with us, which is going to influence our attitude towards, and conclusions about, Euthanasia?

To be sure, it doesn't always seem this way, but time and time again we are assured that the life of every person, at whatever age or in whatever circumstances they find themselves, is under the constant, watchful care of the Lord. I repeat: it does not always seem this way, but this is the testimony of Scripture and of the Lord's revelations to us. You will remember best of all, perhaps, and in this regard, the words of Jesus in Matthew Chapter 10, verses 29 to 31: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." When you think about it there is no better way Jesus could have reassured us that every least detail of our life is known to God. Nothing escapes His attention.

There is also much said in the Psalms, particularly Psalm 139, the first four verses of which are all highly significant and well worth quoting here:

"O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up; Thou discernest my thoughts from afar. Thou searchest out my path and my lying down; and art acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether."

Here, then, we have God 'acquainted with all our ways'. It bears stopping over and

thinking about, doesn't it?

Finally, and from the teaching given in Swedenborg's writings:

"The Divine Providence of the Lord is in all things, and in the smallest details, yea, in the very least details of all things." (*Arcana Caelesta* 8478).

If we acknowledge God at all (and it's true, many people don't), we tend to think of Him as remote and impersonal. We also tend to think of Him as concerned only with the big issues and broad currents of life. But this is not what He tells us about Himself. Every development in our life and every changed circumstance is known to Him. What we are doing, where we are going, just where and at what point our thoughts have reached at a given point of time. This is all known to Him. As is made abundantly clear, if we could in fact see no more than a fraction of just how detailed His care over us is, we would be amazed. Just think of it. Every thought, every feeling; whether we are in the heights or down in the depths of despair or depression; who we meet and how that affects us; nothing escapes His attention. There is not a thing that is not known to Him. Every person everywhere, whether 9 hours old, 9 days, 9 months, 9 years or 90 years, every person is the object of the Lord's loving, detailed, care.

I can hear you asking, 'Why is it then that misfortunes and accidents overtake people if the Lord is so caring and so much in control?' And important and legitimate as the question is, I on my part, have got to take care not to get side tracked. I did a series of talks virtually on that one question several months ago ([Refer to talks 5, 6 and 7](#)). We saw then how the Lord, for all His most detailed care over us, has to permit undesirable, unwanted and unhappy things to happen when the alternative available to Him would be far, far more detrimental to us. Because He cares the Lord is all the time bending, guiding, appealing to our conscience, even to our fears, to keep us from things that can only lead to sadness and unhappiness. But where we are determined He will not intrude upon, or break our freedom to prevent us doing those things.

However, let's pick up this point presently before us and with which we are chiefly concerned here: whether in the case of the young and healthy, or whether it is someone old and senile, awesomely handicapped or terminally ill, the Lord is there working with that person, watching every development, anticipating and providing for changed circumstances, as they occur, all the time (He) having in mind their eternal happiness and well being. No one is forgotten by the Lord. No one is over looked, least of all abandoned by Him. Everyone matters. And we do well to reassure ourselves on this point.

At the beginning of tonight's talk I spoke of matters taught us bearing on our relationship with God which are rarely mentioned, as if they don't matter. And this is one of them. He cares. He is watching. He is providing. So that whatever eventuates is turned by Him to some good purpose in the life of the person concerned. The important thing to remember is that they are not alone. The Lord is with them. And something of benefit is being achieved by their continued existence here. If it wasn't they wouldn't be here.

The question arises, naturally enough, what can that be? How can something of benefit be achieved, for example, in the case of an old lady who has completely forgotten who she was and is totally dependant on others? It doesn't seem to make sense, you say. And there is that famous case, isn't there, of the girl in a coma in America whose parents eventually won an exhaustive round of court battles to have her taken off life support systems and though they did this she continues to live, still

in a coma.

As important as it is that we be reminded of the detailed care of the Lord who in His Divine Providence watches over the life of every person, so it is important that we be reminded that we were created for a purpose, to live in heaven in the spiritual world after we die and to eternity. Our life in this world is primarily intended to be a time of preparation where we learn the skills and develop the kind of character that will be necessary. And this, in a very real sense, is why this world is so full of contrasts. There are continual opportunities to make decisions; to do good and to refuse evil, to build up or to tear down, to be selfish or unselfish. What was it the Lord said? "Except a man be born again (or 'anew') he cannot see the kingdom of God" (*John 3:3*). In other words, utterly fundamental and far reaching changes have got to take place. And those changes are only brought about gradually, over a long period of time, the Lord using the different circumstances and changed and unexpected conditions that come upon us to this great purpose.

When we die we pass into the spiritual world to the life that awaits us there. And up to the point a person passes over preparation of one kind or another is taking place. A use is being served somewhere. We may not be able to say how or in what way. But something is being accomplished which will stand that person in good stead for their life in the spiritual world when they die.

It's easy for us to walk around the ward of a geriatric nursing home and to see only senile old people 'uselessly' (we might foolishly think) idling their time away. The truth is, however, that we don't know what uses are being accomplished. We don't know what preparation is taking place with them. We can't say, as only the Lord can, what can yet be achieved which will be of great use and value to them in the spiritual world later on. Perhaps they need yet, even in their disorganised state and though unconsciously, to absorb love and caring and gentleness from those who attend them. Who knows? We cannot accurately say. But let's be prepared to acknowledge the activity of the Lord in these circumstances, working in ways beyond our comprehension in the interests of the eternal well-being and happiness of those concerned.

So long as life continues in this world, a use is being served. That's what we have got to remember and hold on to.

If we're not careful we leave God out of the discussion about Euthanasia altogether. I hope I have adequately made the point of His providential care over the least details of every person's life, for all that we might question it or discount it; and how it is that much that is useful can be accomplished in what we might regard as useless and purposeless existence.

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