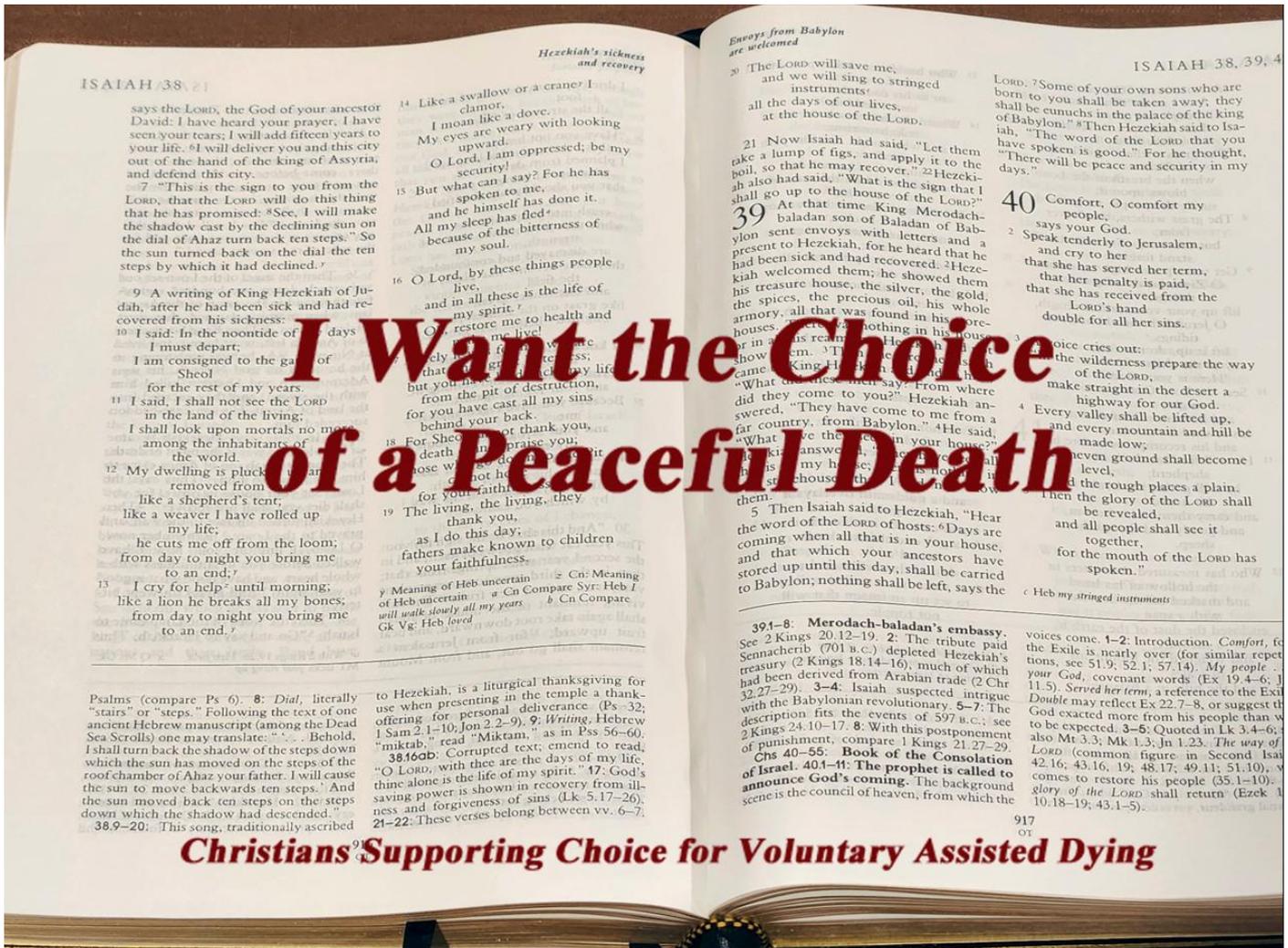


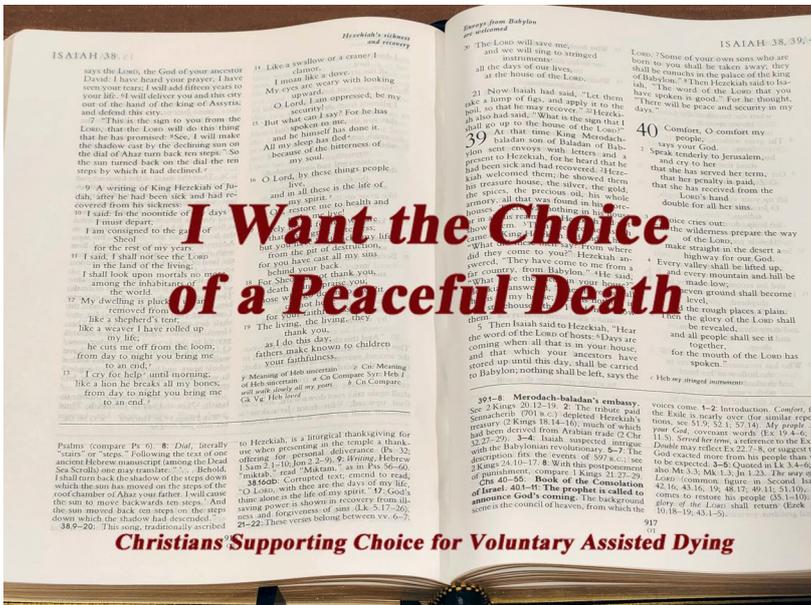
# Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Assisted Dying



**I Want the Choice of a Peaceful Death**

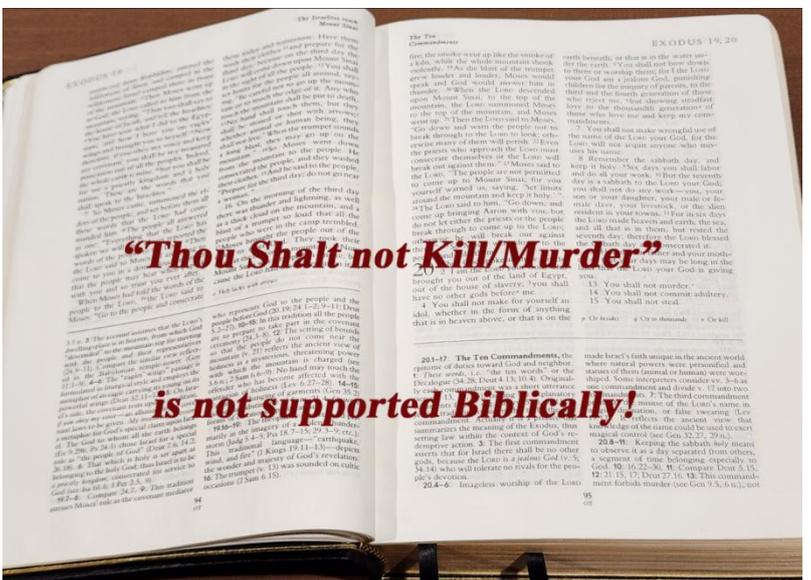
**Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Assisted Dying**

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.



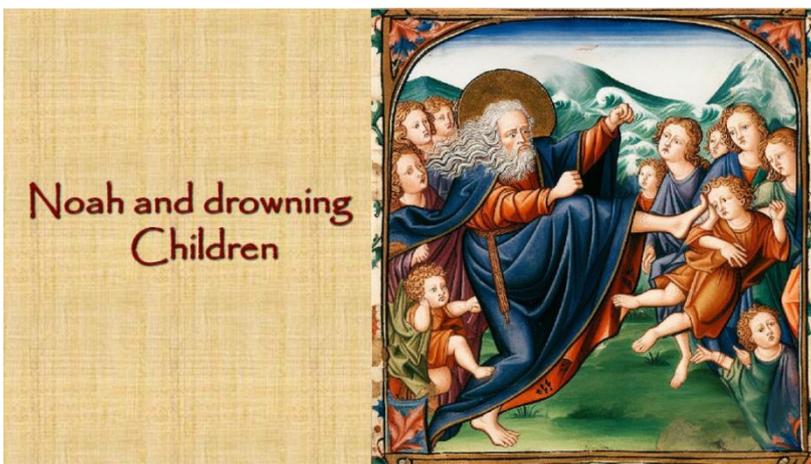
The vast majority of people, when asked what type of death they would prefer, hope for it to be quiet and peaceful. Few would opt for a violent or painful end to life.

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



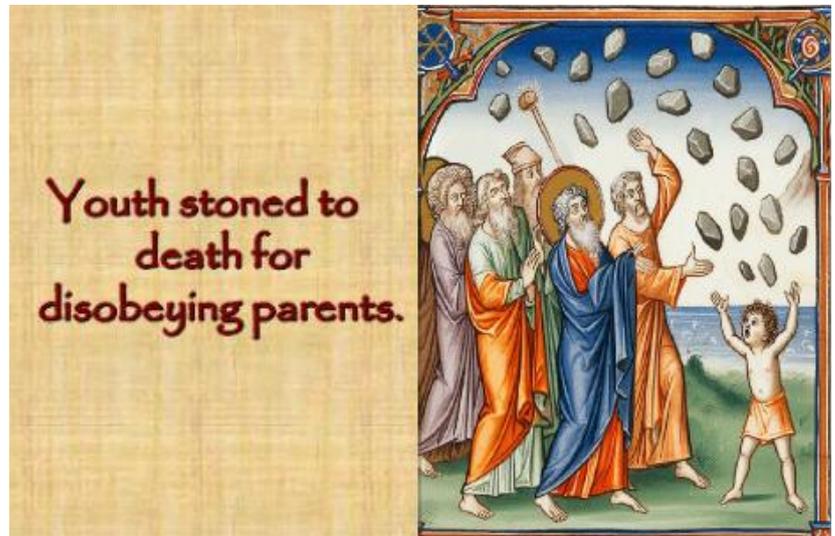
Christian interpretations of the Bible are often suspect. Opposition to Voluntary Assisted Dying is often based on the Commandment in the Old Testament "Thou shalt not kill / murder", which could more accurately be expressed as "Thou shalt not murder (fellow Jews)." That is, "kill with malice."

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 as drowned at this time, including innocent babies!

**E**ven 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.

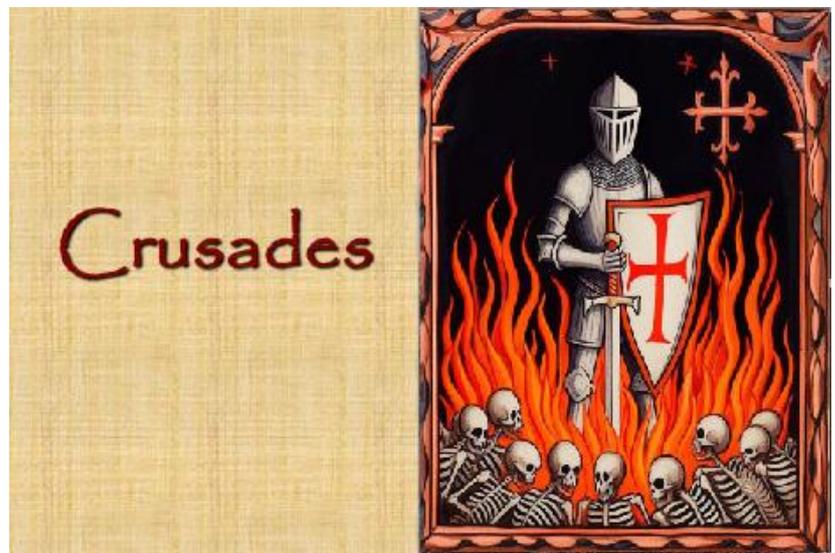


**T**

**T**here was little respect for human life as Christians fought Muslims during the Crusades.

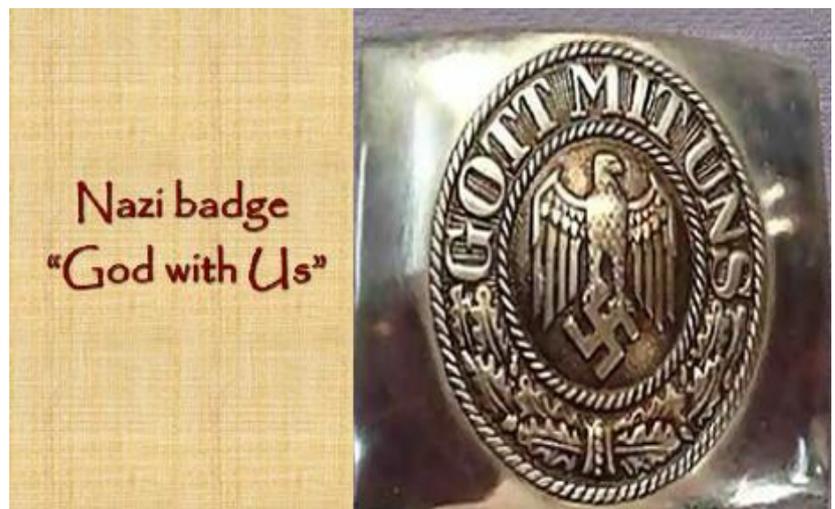
Roman Catholic opposition is also based on the principle of “sanctity of life.” Yet Pope Leo XIII around 1900 endorsed “the death sentence is a necessary and efficacious means for the Church to attain its end when rebels act against it and cannot be

restrained by other penalty.” Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, said it is possible to justify war and capital punishment, but not Voluntary Euthanasia.

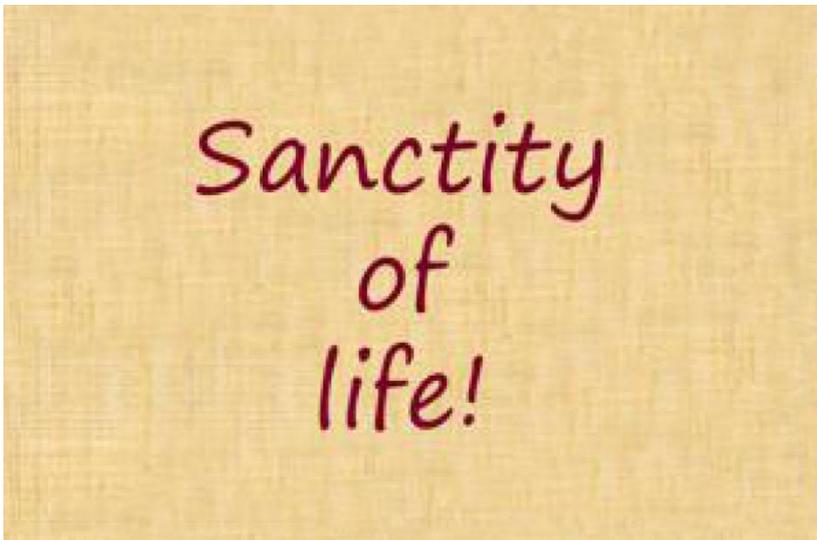


**T**he Nazis are justly criticised for the atrocities committed during WWII and opponents of VAD bring up the elimination of the innocent in extermination camps.

This cannot be compared in the context of easing the death of a terminally ill person with Voluntary Assisted Dying.



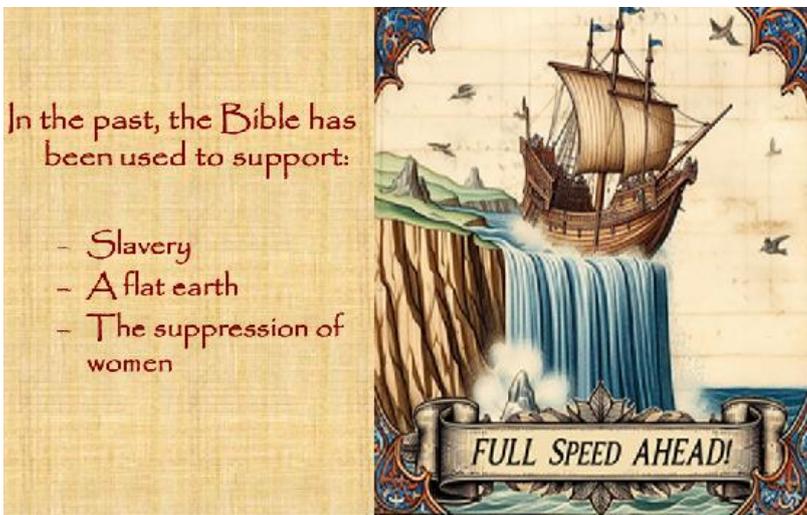
The irony is that a majority of the German army were Christians, and the motto on their buckle - Gott mit Uns - means *God with Us*.



Christians have been 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, can be justified, yet it is an immoral act to assist a person

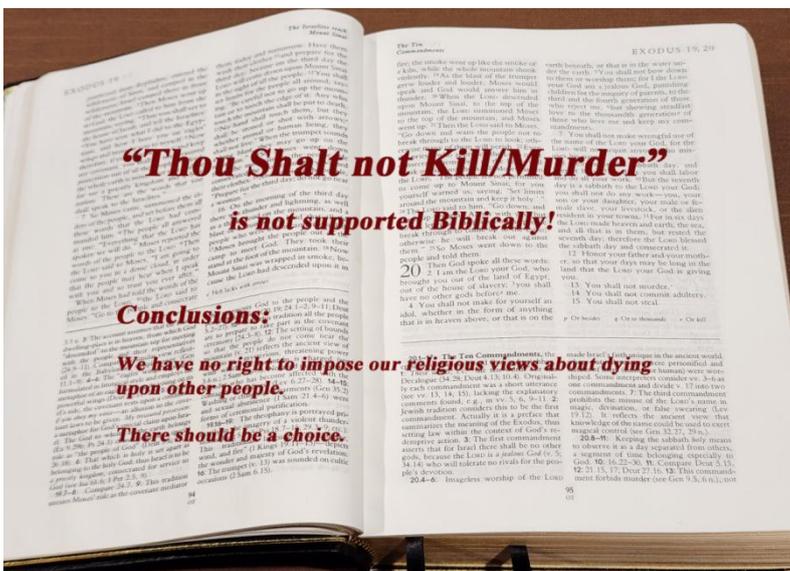
who is in the dying process, suffering unrelievable pain, with Voluntary Assisted Dying.



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 the Earth was flat, to resist university education for women.

Giordano Bruno was burned to death in Rome in 1600 for the

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

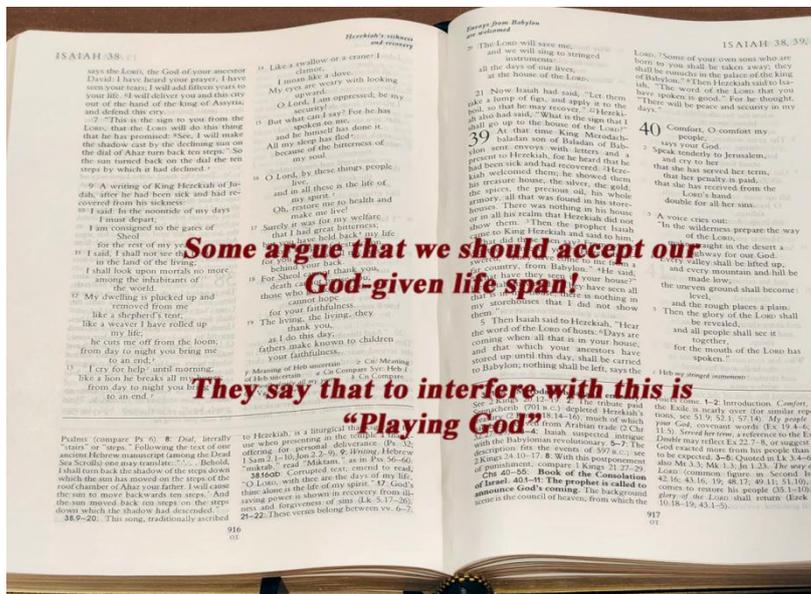


We must all respect the diversity of opinions on Voluntary Assisted Dying, but no religious group should seek to impose their dogma, their interpretation, on other people.

There should be a choice!

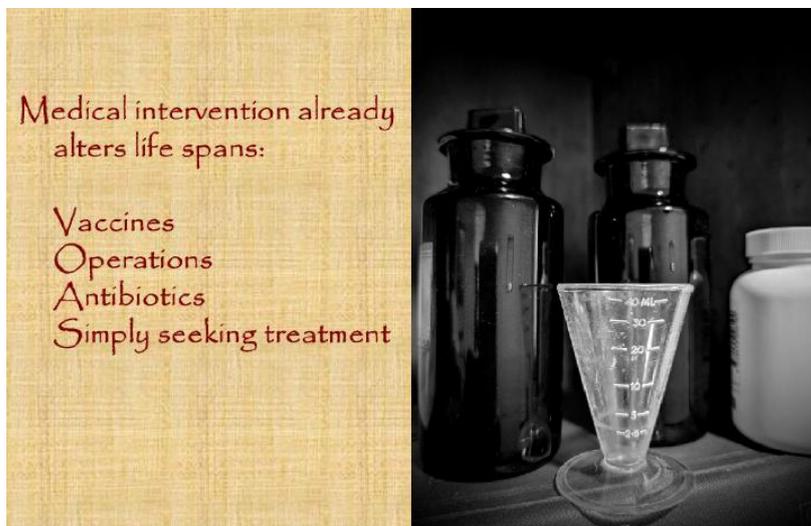
Another argument often used against the option of Voluntary Assisted Dying is that “God has allocated each of us a time span for life on earth.”

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



But to be consistent, we should also refuse antibiotics, refuse surgical operations, refuse insulin, refuse dialysis, refuse blood transfusions, and so on.

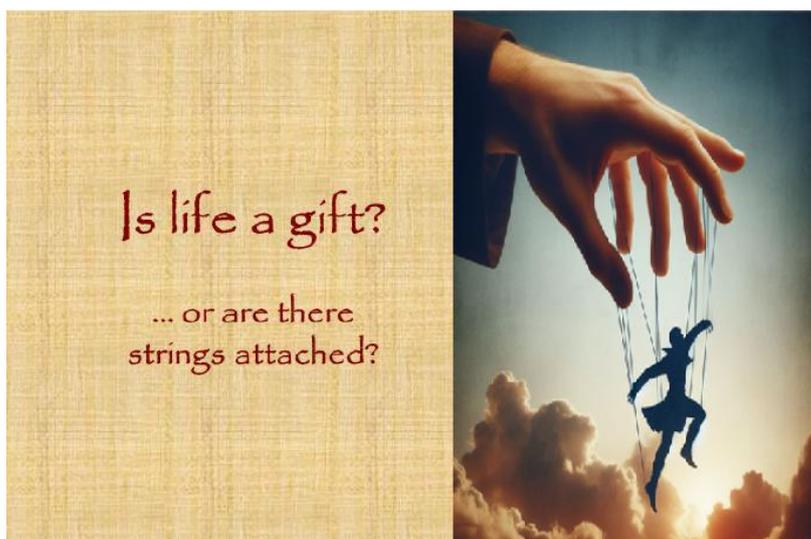
The list is almost endless: each of these human interventions are deliberately designed to alter our life span.

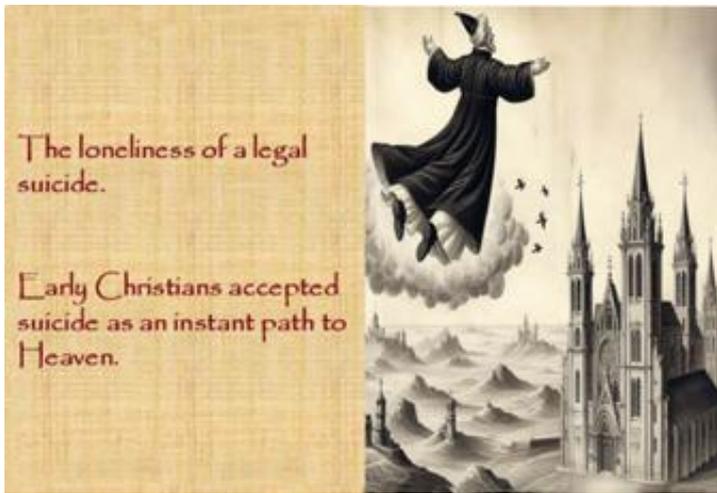


It is said that life is a “gift from God.”

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.





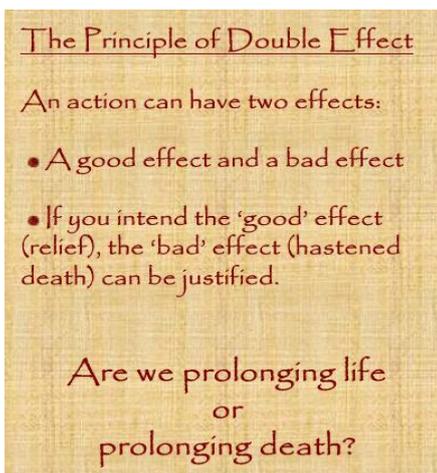
**J**umping from a building, drowning, drinking weed killer or shooting oneself are all means of suicide, none illegal!

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.

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.

It is important to recognise that the use of VAD is not suicide, it is a choice between two ways of dying. In addition the option of VAD provides great peace of mind and is palliative in its own right. Thankfully now, every Australian State has a VAD law, albeit under restricted circumstances. This should reduce the number of possibly ill-conceived, lonely and violent suicides.

**T**he principle of “double effect” is a very grey area where what is considered a dose of pain relievers/sedatives 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.

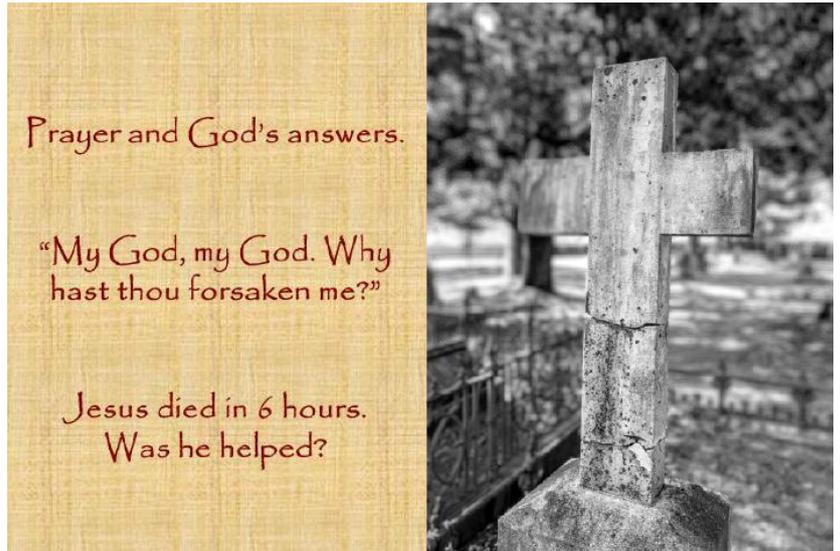
Double effect can include terminal sedation, where a coma is induced, and the patient dies over time from starvation or dehydration!



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

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.

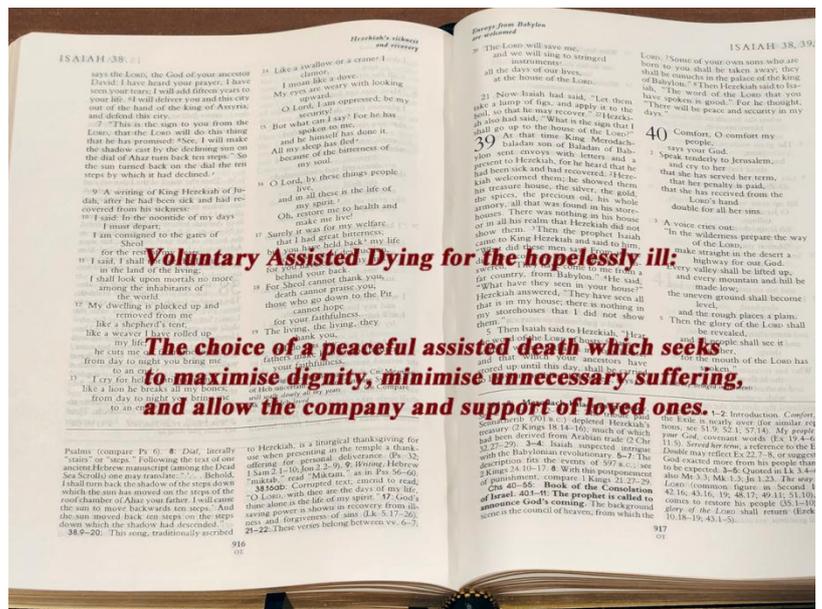


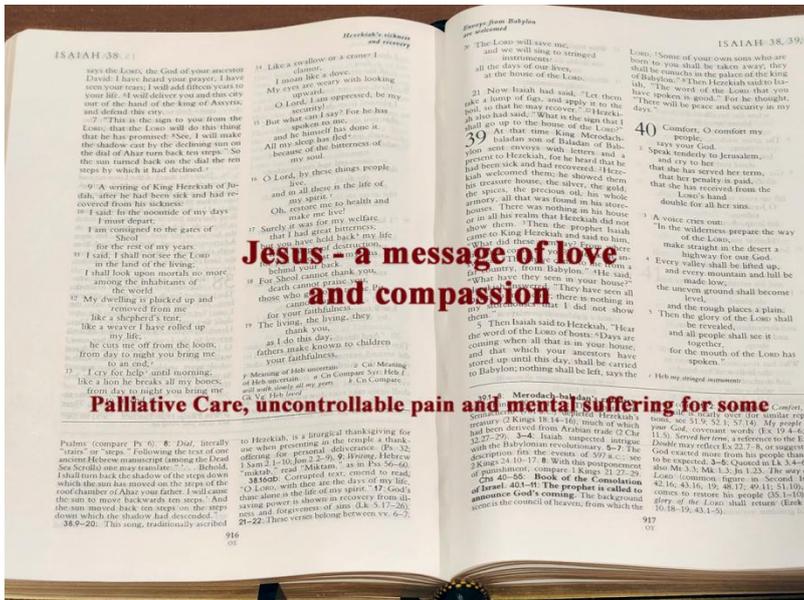
On the cross Jesus said, lucidly, "I thirst." Sour wine was passed up. He sipped and died soon after (John 19:29,30). Pontius Pilate marveled that Jesus was dead so soon.

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 for the lawful company and support of loved ones during the process.





**Jesus: a message of love and compassion**

**Palliative Care, uncontrollable pain and mental suffering for some**

“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 VAD. 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 this need for Voluntary Assisted Dying.**

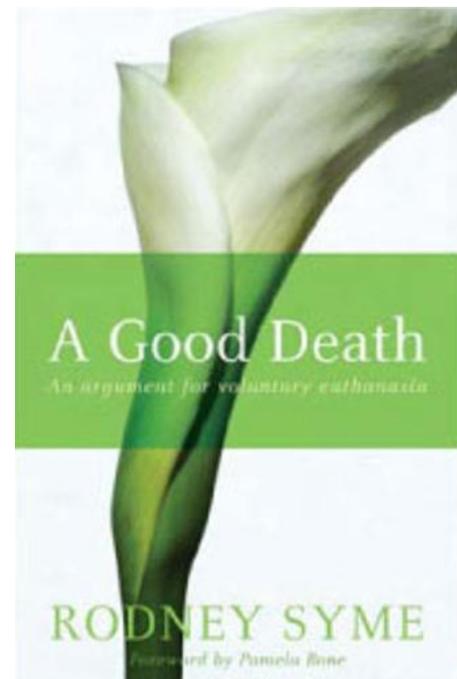
**A** Good Death: A 75 year old woman, Anna, previously healthy, developed a bladder infection. Investigation revealed that ovarian cancer had spread to her bowel. A palliative hysterectomy was performed.

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 her plea for assistance to die was considered, Anna received a prescription for Soneryl, a barbiturate.

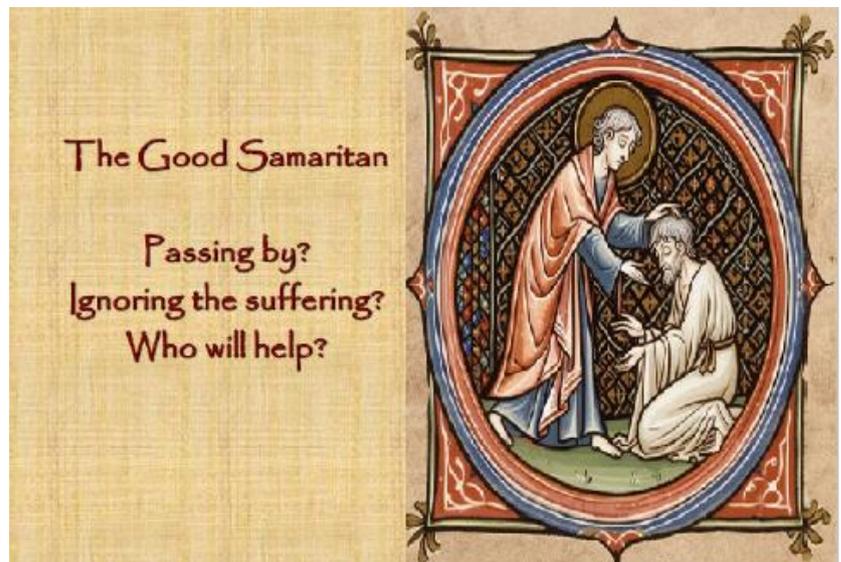
Importantly, she then decided to go ahead with chemotherapy, which was not successful. She eventually died peacefully, not alone, using the prescription. (Précis from 'A Good Death' by Dr Rodney Syme.)



**O**ur challenge to all MPs who still oppose VAD is to visit a person such as Anna. Try to comfort them. Look them in the eye and contemplate their suffering.

The majority of our Members of Parliament have ignored the scaremongering of the vocal opposition to assisted dying by conservative groups such as the Australian Christian Lobby and many Church hierarchies.

These groups do not represent the broad spectrum of Christian opinion, nor the majority of Christian support for this issue.



Chantal Sebire 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 in France.

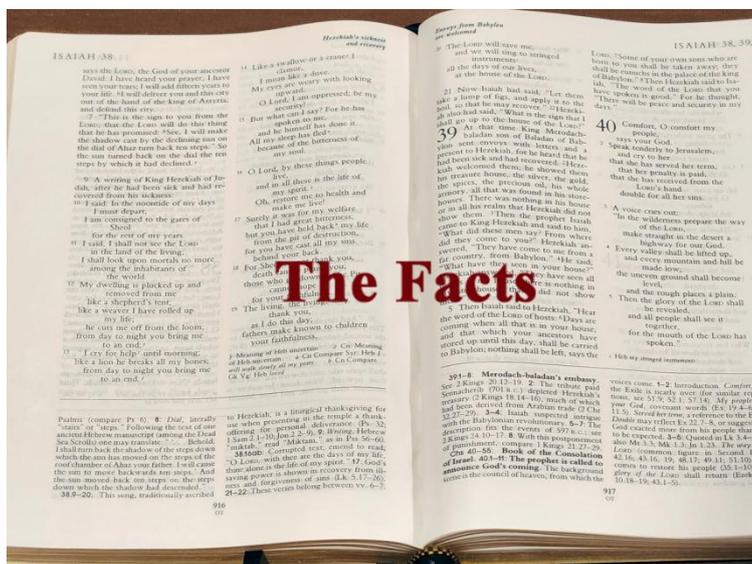
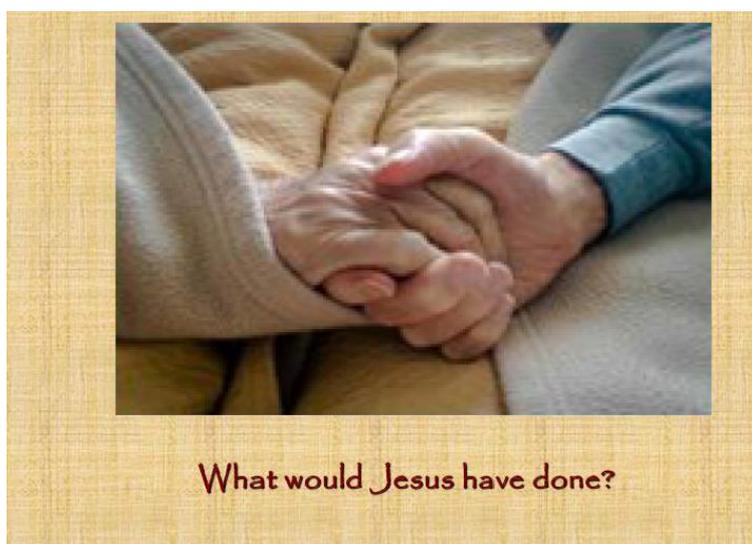
How could any person with a shred of compassion not feel for Chantal, and want her suffering to end?!

Chantal developed an allergy to Morphine and was unable to get adequate pain relief. It was a photo from Getty Images of this severely disfigured 53yo that motivated Ian Wood to be public in support of VAD legislation in Australia. He became a Co-founder of the group now known as Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Assisted Dying in 2009.

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.

Doctors have a duty of care, and this care should provide the maximum possible assistance to maintain the health and wellbeing of every person. A duty of care should also extend to making their patients’ 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, yet it is still being used as an argument by those opposing VAD choice.

The Hippocratic Oath and what Hippocrates really said.

Doctors and a Duty of Care.



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. A number of USA states now have a similar law giving about a quarter of Americans the choice.

## 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). Similar proportions were reported in the Vote Compass 2019 results.



**S**trong legal safeguards in each state VAD law include that:

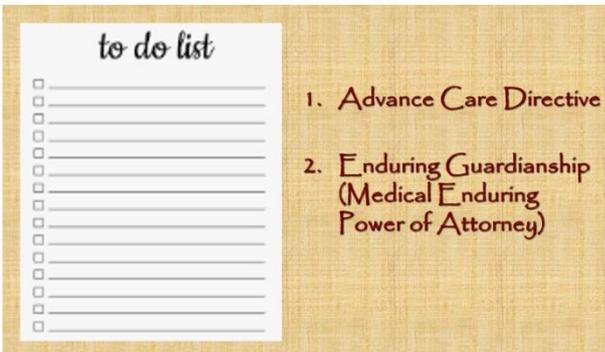
- ✓ the patient must make the initial VAD request and be mentally competent when making the final request for administration
- ✓ there is no coercion
- ✓ the patient is fully informed about treatment and palliative care alternatives and their likely outcomes
- ✓ two medical opinions are required
- ✓ participation is voluntary for all parties including doctors, nurses and others
- ✓ there is a formal documentary process for recording and reporting requests for assistance in dying and these are analysed by a review board or the equivalent in each Australian State.

The above is a summary and a patient should fully check the requirements to access VAD in their particular State. One area where there is variation in the law with each state is that an expectation that the patient will die within the next six months from their illness or 12 months in the case of neurodegenerative disease is required. Queensland has a 12 month limit for all categories.

Patients with a Dementia diagnosis are not eligible to access VAD under the current State laws due to the above time restrictions.

**I**n 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 Court precedent clarifies the rights of the patient by deciding that the inclusion of a clause for the refusal of food or force feeding can successfully be included in an Advance Care Directive (ACD).



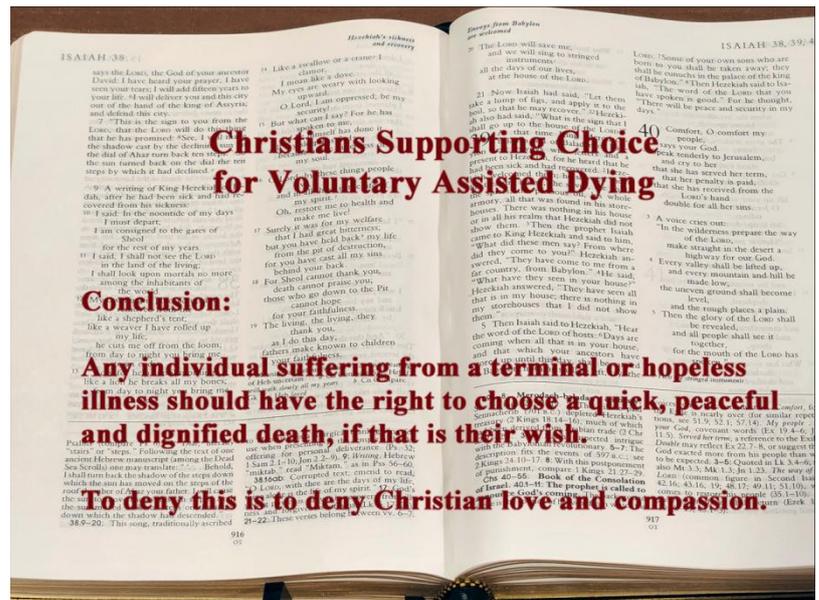
While VAD cannot be requested in an Advance Care Directive (ACD), it is strongly recommended that every person completes an ACD outlining their wishes for medical treatment should they no longer be able to speak for themselves. Everyone should also appoint an Enduring Guardian / Enduring Medical Power of Attorney to advocate on their behalf should the ACD come into effect.



While we now have the right to choose VAD in Australia, the residents in countries such as Great Britain are still waiting for their wish to be granted and are still waiting for their MP's to give them the choice.

The moral case for legalising Voluntary Assisted Dying 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.

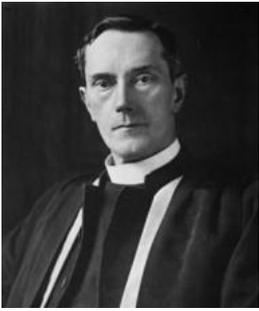


Any individual suffering from a terminal or hopeless illness should have the right to choose a quick, peaceful and pain-free death, if that is their wish.

As previously noted our State politicians have finally recognised the importance of these three principles in passing their VAD laws.

It is hoped that the politicians in both Territories will now follow the States' lead.





Very 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."

## Former archbishop lends his support to campaign to legalise right to die

Carey says assisted dying proposal is way of preventing 'needless suffering' and helping terminally ill 'not anti-Christian'



Lord Carey former Archbishop of Canterbury and head of the world wide Anglican church, speaking in support of the Falconer Assisted Dying Bill before the House of Lords, UK, said:

"It would not be 'anti-Christian' to ensure that terminally ill patients avoid 'unbearable' pain", and

"One of the key themes of the gospels is love for our fellow human beings ... Today we face a terrible paradox. In strictly observing accepted teaching about the sanctity of life, the church could actually be sanctioning anguish and pain – the very opposite of the Christian message."



Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu

Hello, dear sisters and brothers.

Archbishop Emeritus of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu gave his blessing and support to our Christian campaign for legislation in Australia. In a video message he stated "People who are terminally ill should have the option of dignified and compassionate assisted dying alongside the wonderful palliative care that already exists". "I pray that politicians, lawmakers

and religious leaders have the courage to support the choices terminally ill citizens make in departing Mother Earth with dignity and love."

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

- Fr Jacques Pohier, a Catholic priest who was excommunicated in 1979 for his views on Voluntary Assisted Dying. (This again demonstrates how out of touch the church hierarchy are from their flocks.)



**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 Assisted Dying.**

**To join our group, or for further information, please contact:**

**Email: [contactus@christiansforvad.org.au](mailto:contactus@christiansforvad.org.au)**

**Website: [www.christiansforvad.org.au](http://www.christiansforvad.org.au)**

Endorsed by Rev. Trevor Bensch, Group co-founder, hospital chaplain and former Minister of North Adelaide Baptist Church, South Australia, who said:

*“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 with the assistance of Michael Eustice in 2010. Revised and reprinted February, 2013, and further updated in November, 2023 and May, 2024.



## Membership

Our objectives are:

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

Becoming a member demonstrates that you support these objectives.

A national body, we have supported appropriate legislation in all Australian States, however work continues in ACT and NT.

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.

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

See our contact details on page 15.