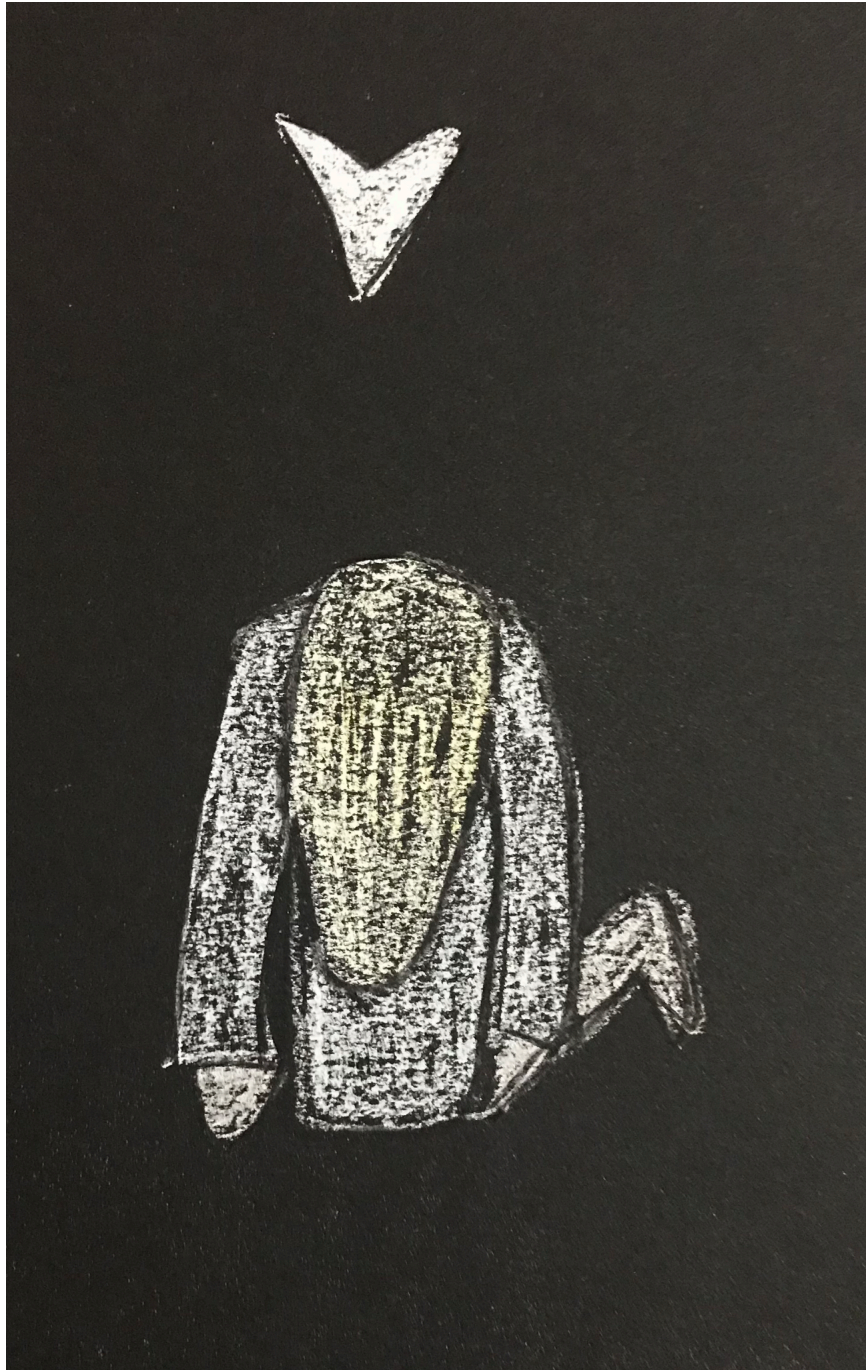


HERE YOU FIND GOD'S
GRACE : A PASSIONATE
PLEA TO REMEMBER THE
VALUE OF ALL LIFE.



Here You Find God's Grace : A Passionate Plea To Remember The Value Of All Life.

By Greg and Linda Crowhurst

"MY BODY IS SCREAMING . I am caught in a permanent long silent scream that goes on and on seemingly forever. My body is burning. The pain tightens like it has me in a vice. Each turn of the screw tightens the pain till I cannot endure it. My muscles scream constantly that the pain is hurting: hurting and hurting with no relief. There is nothing to be done to comfort this unending agony. I have burned nonstop for thirty one years. Can you begin to imagine how much torment that is? How much torment without physical relief?"

Linda Crowhurst

This is the context in which I write this article. I have cared day and night for more than thirty years for my severely disabled wife. Her suffering lies far beyond comprehension by the ordinary person, her struggle is unimaginable, there is no relief ever for her, from the constant pain and recurring paralysis.

We have learned a great deal about suffering in the situation of chronic illness and extreme torment, living on the edge of healthcare with very little understanding.

In this place , my wife says:

" Here you find God's grace, touching you in the formless void of inexpressible agony. For only One who has suffered depths of indescribable, annihilating torment, yet been sustained by love and remained loving still in His heart, can reach out to you and touch you and bless you in that moment that you most need it, whether through the caring of others or through the grain of hope that remains or is found in the depths of emptiness."

When intense physical, emotional, spiritual or mental suffering comes to you, you have a stark choice. Either you enter more deeply into the meaning of suffering, where you find Christ, not just as a theological idea or someone somewhere else, but living, alive with you, a pure and loving energy, more deeply than you could ever

have imagined before this suffering came upon you; or you choose a path of fear and despair.

We have experienced "God with us", in the most profound, isolated suffering, which is surely the true message of the Cross. Christ held every moment's pain for everyone, for all of time and space and sent out love for everyone that we might be touched and saved. This we have known to be true in our circumstances.

We have prayed for and we have have been given enormous strength, light in the darkness and such hope in the desert of despair, that we have never given into fear.

We are always moving forward with courage.

It is God in the centre of our being who enables us to cope and my wife to endure the unendurable and much more than that, to love.

We have known others who have died horribly in tremendous agony, yet with courage, dignity and an inspiring passion to live. To the very end of their ability they were still reaching out and caring for others. In fact the bulk of our support comes from the isolated, the ill, the largely abandoned, with whom we have formed virtual communities. We receive little or no support, sadly, from the institutional Church.

We have also known some take their life. We have experienced a shock and terrible void after their death, that feels somehow different, due to the nature of the act of suicide, from the incredibly sad loss of those who have remained to the end. There will always be grief that requires attention and love to touch it, but with suicide there is a particularly specific sort of trauma that needs addressing and healing, because it brings up such complex emotions.

There is something different about a life that ends and a life that is chosen to end.

You cannot get away from the grief, sadness and bereavement of any death, but equally you cannot get away from the shock, horror and trauma of suicide even if it is neatly packaged as giving a sense of control and dignity to the person who is dying.

We believe that every breath is precious and every life is of equal value, as we proclaim on our website, Stonebird:

"Even if you cannot move, even if you cannot communicate, even if you cannot think, still you are precious and your presence matters."

It is from this perspective that we issue a passionate plea to remember the value of life and how precious every moment is.

We can understand many of the reasons why people, particularly with really frightening prospects, might want to have the reassurance that they can end their life.

Our thoughts, however, are that if you legislate for assisted dying for people with terminal illness, ultimately, even though unintentionally and not immediately, you put many other's lives, including that of my wife potentially, in danger of death.

This is because if you change from a universal, absolute principle regarding the sanctity of life, to a completely relative view on the value of life and when it can end, the recommendation for assisted suicide will most likely expand, over time, beyond its original parameters because there is no longer an absolute marker that protects life itself and more and more groups of people will, unfortunately, be drawn in. This unfortunately has happened all around the world where assisted dying has been legalised.

What if assisted dying had been legalised thirty one years ago when my wife first became ill? I wonder what might have been the pressures or expectations upon her, to "spare" herself and others the "burden" of her intolerable suffering by taking her life?

I wonder how many reading this, deep down, might be thinking to themselves, "well, maybe she might be better off dead", "well maybe it would be a mercy to put an end to her awful suffering", "I know I couldn't bear to live like this" or even, in the grim face of NHS underfunding, the dire state of social care and increasingly bankrupt local councils, that "someone like this, really is too much of a burden on scarce resources".

I would like to introduce the concept of "death-making", which has had a profound, life long influence on us both. It is call to wake up to the subtlety of values and messages that influence institutions and the danger of the abuse of power that potentially flows from them.

Developed by the late Professor Wolf Wolfensberger, who was hugely influential in bringing about the closure of the large mental handicap asylums here in the UK in the 1980's and was behind the impetus for community care, death-making is concerned with society's historic potential, down through the ages, to bring death not life to those it does not value.

Globally this includes the unwanted unborn, unwanted children, people with a

disability, the poor, prisoners, street people, native populations, elderly people, the contagious, the chronically ill, the terminally ill or any group of people that is perceived as a threat or that has been demonised, such as desperate refugees seeking asylum by any means. (Wolfensberger 2005)

Just look into your own heart.

One has only to open any daily newspaper to find countless examples of death-making. In today's paper for example, I find yet another article labelling benefit claimants as making "lifestyle choices", yet another article on how the Government is prosecuting unpaid carers, the disproportionate targeting of black men in police stop and searches, the growing threat from the right to International Law, a Dutch woman, aged 29 who has been granted euthanasia on the basis of mental suffering, and a review of a BBC programme by the actor Liz Carr "Better Off Dead", exposing the huge risks that the right to die poses for the disabled.

Any stance or policy with a negative, skewed connotation, spinning the truth to suit a vested interest or any ideology, is potentially death-making, for it is not bringing truth or integrity to the fore.

Any practice, action or thought that considers a person to be less than valid, less than equal, less than human, is potentially a death-making one and is not congruent with the Church's teaching, for it is not based on equality and those people are not equally respected in the way that they are treated. Their lives are not equally valued or seen as equally valuable.

As Pope Francis (2024) warns : "You don't play with life, neither at the beginning nor at the end. It is not played with!"

You cannot congruently belong to an organisation that values life yet subtly and unawarely supports a death-making stance. You need to understand the mechanisms by which death-making encroaches ordinary life and thought and becomes a normality.

It is a call to closer alignment between the values you profess and the way you live your life.

It is important then to be vigilant and ask for God's discernment to see clearly the truth in all your views and attitudes and all those of others you come upon in the

world, so that you can walk a true path of life and light.

We need to be watchful in our understanding and recognise our own fears and prejudices that might block us from valuing everyone equally.

Although supporting assisted suicide for people with a terminal illness might seem a compassionate and kind way forward, it needs to be understood in the wider context of death-making and the danger of moving the goalposts ever wider to include more and more, seemingly not so valued people, who might be perceived as a burden on the family, the society and the state.

Once you agree to the acceptability of killing one group of people you erode the value of life for everyone.

We have learned how to love more deeply, we have gained enormous insight and wisdom that we have shared, despite interminable suffering that many would not want to endure and might not be able to see the beauty and the love that has flowed out from that place of suffering.

As you seek God more fully in any circumstance that you find yourself in, surely unexpected graces will flow to you, that you could not have imagined. This is our own experience.

We have learned that as we enter into love so we also reach out with that love to help others, to bring life bringing hope, not death making despair and fear.

Every life lost is a devastation, every life lost early is a shock and an inexpressible pain for those left behind. Surely we can find better ways to care for people than offering them a quick way out? Surely we can focus on the value and meaning of life, even a life that is seemingly limited and diminished in worldly terms?

What valuable moments of life will never come into being or be experienced with assisted suicide? Who else's life will be put at risk, as a consequence, if by your actions you do anything to undermine the most holy and precious principle of the sanctity of life?

BBC (2024) Better Off Dead? <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001z8wc>

CNA (2024) You don't play with life': Pope Francis condemns euthanasia, abortion on papal plane

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/255459/you-don-t-play-with-life-pope-francis-condemns-euthanasia-abortion-on-papal-plane>

Stonebird <https://stonebird.co.uk/>

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