



Life Matters

The Newsletter of the Respect Life Office of the Diocese of Rockford
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Roach Motel

by Paul V. Esposito

Thinking about that next vacation spot? Picture a 1,000-foot billowing sail. That's the Burj Al Arab Hotel in Dubai, yours for \$1,000 per night. The Jumerial Beach Hotel is shaped like a giant wave on the Arabian Gulf, and it's only \$245 nightly. Rather go to Singapore? For \$260 nightly, the 55-story Marina Bay Sands offers a top floor shaped like the deck of a huge cruise ship, with plenty of cruise ship amenities.

Today hotels provide far more than a bed and shower at a destination. Many *are* the destination. There are even hotels for bugs. They, too, provide a destination, a final destination at that. Black Flag advertises its world-famous "Roach Motel" as a place where "bugs check in but they don't check out." The name has become synonymous with fleabag hotels. And with death.

Now Oregon psychiatrist Stuart Weisberg wants to combine the luxury of the Burj Al Arab with the finality of the Roach Motel. "The Dignity House" will help people commit suicide. The events will be videotaped. Weisberg offers optional amenities like music and food, fresh garden flowers, even make-up. Friends, family, and yes, pets may attend. All that for \$5,000, a price that makes the Burj seem like a bargain.

The tragedy of legalized abortion reaches far beyond the millions of dead babies, wounded mothers, and destroyed relationships. It distorts our mindset as individuals and a culture. It tells us that we may measure human life based on its value to us at the moment. That we may take

control over decisions best left to God. It has turned death into a growth industry.

Assisted suicide, legal in several countries and in three states, was born out of a desire to die. Medical personnel give patients the medical means to kill themselves. The procedure is intended to give terminally ill patients control over their own lives, to allow them to end suffering and die with "dignity." It's "pro-choice" to the final degree.

We use euphemisms for what we dare not admit, and "assisted suicide" is one. Advocates romanticize it as an act of compassion to a dying person. In truth, it is helping to kill, and sometimes more than merely helping. Michigan pathologist Jack Kevorkian admitted that he did more than "assist" in at least one case. His victims were often not dying and sometimes not even sick. His motive was not compassion but an expressed desire to study brains. He once wanted to study the *living* brains of death-row inmates. He's not called Dr. Death for nothing.

Kevorkian aside, a Netherlands official study shows that patients often lose autonomy. In 1990, doctors there actively killed 1,040 patients *without their knowledge or consent*. Of those patients, 14% were fully competent and 72% never expressed an interest in dying. Doctors acted in 8% of those cases despite believing that other options were available. In 8,100 other cases, doctors deliberately over-prescribed pain medication, not to relieve pain but to hasten death, 61% of the cases being *without patient consent*. In thousands of cases, life-sustaining measures were withheld or withdrawn *without patient consent*. In all cases the most frequently given reasons were "low quality of life," "no prospect for improvement," and "the family couldn't take it anymore."

Won't happen here? Oregonian Barbara Wagner sought approval for a chemotherapy drug. The Oregon state-run health plan refused her request as too expensive. It instead authorized payment for comfort care, including "physician aid in dying." Wanting to live, Wagner was told she could die. Given the rationing that will be demanded by our new health care system, there will plenty more like her.

But what of those people who want control over their deaths, those who choose to die with dignity? They are misguided. Death is not a choice. Assisted suicide is a choice, a tragic choice to kill. Like abortion, it flows from the mistaken belief that death is a valid solution to life's difficulties. Like abortion, it flows from the death of hope.

In truth, our lives are not our own. That is both reality and blessing. We belong to God. We did not choose to be born. He made us. Our lives should be lived for Him. That may entail suffering and will certainly entail death. But He didn't spare His Son of either. And so our hope is in Christ. His brutal death was not the end. It was the doorway to eternal life for all of us. As His suffering was redemptive, our suffering can be, too. This does not mean that all pain must be endured. Palliative care is perfectly moral and should be made available. And it does not mean that the dying should suffer alone. True compassion is sharing in another's cross, not helping him end his life.

Equating assisted suicide to death with dignity confuses *how* we die for *why* we die. Dignity is a state of being worthy of honor and respect. We die with dignity when we die for a reason greater than ourselves. We die with dignity when we die for Christ. We surrender our control to Him.

Just as He was the reason for our first breath, we let Him be the reason for our last. And He will take us to His home, where we will never see death again. A place filled with far, far more than 1,000-foot billowing sails. A place where we will finally see the One Who gave us life. To live is Christ, to die is gain.

We'll leave the roach motels to the bugs.

Paul V. Esposito is a Catholic lawyer who writes on a variety of pro-life topics. He and his wife Kathy live in Elmhurst, Illinois, where they raise their six kids.

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For additional commentary on life issues, check out "Life Lines" on the first Friday of each month in *The Observer*.

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