
Germany: Bishops' Conference, respect for freedom of thought, but "assisted suicide is not an ethically acceptable option"

"A person's freedom to live every stage of their life according to their own ideas is of fundamental importance also from a Christian point of view", and a legal system that respects and protects self-determination even in relation to death "is a precious resource". "However, this does not make assisted suicide an ethically acceptable option", according to the Permanent Council of the German Bishops' Conference. In a statement released today, the Bishops once again express their stance in the ongoing debate on assisted suicide in Germany, following the judgement delivered by the Federal Constitutional Court in February 2020 which declared the criminalisation of assisted suicide "unconstitutional". "There might be situations in life where people develop suicidal thoughts or even feel compelled to commit suicide", the Bishops wrote. These situations, that "ultimately cannot be morally judged from the outside", are often the consequence of "fears, anxiety, and despair in extreme situations, and thus cannot be an expression of self-determination". Respect for self-determination in these situations cannot mean "accepting the desire or the decision to commit suicide without questioning it". Instead, "efforts must be directed at creating better opportunities for a tolerable end of life": palliative care, hospices, and professional help against depression are the alternatives to ensure "the dignity of life is preserved even in despair".

According to the Bishops, there is a need to "develop prospects of life, not to help people commit suicide" so that people who see themselves as a burden to others are not "pressured" into taking their lives. The statement ends with a clarification: "Doctors, nurses and workers of ecclesial and charitable institutions are committed to promoting life according to these principles"; "allowing assisted suicide in these structures would not be compatible with the essence of our commitment to life".

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