




# Pastoral Therapy on Euthanasia: Christian Humanism and Ubuntu Embracing Openness

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## Abstract

The debate over practices of physician-assisted suicide, euthanasia and other end-of-life questions is still ongoing in many countries around the world. At least, as of 2024, only 15 countries had varyingly legalised it under very specific, regulated conditions, while many more still view it as an extremely complex issue that, amongst other things, conflicts with their deeply held religious beliefs. Premised on their belief in the image of God as the source of human life, most monotheistic religions, but Christians in particular believe in the preservation of human life to its natural end. However, the unquestionable reality of this traditionally-held Christian belief does not preclude the rare reality where terminally ill Christians themselves, upon suffering excruciating pain, begin either to desire some form of a hastened death overtly or covertly. Under such conditions, however, pastoral therapists in particular lack the aptitude to openly initiate practical dialogues with patients, be it in the spirit of Ubuntu or to concretise the Christian position. That being said, the purpose of this article is to prepare Christian pastoral therapists in particular and the counselling profession in general to openly handle cases where agonising human suffering leads to suicidal thoughts or actions. In order to achieve this, the paper, through the use of literature reviews and desktop studies, draws on literature encompassing specific biblical instances in which not only physical suffering, but also mental suffering somehow led to suicidal events. The African concept of Ubuntu is then integrated into Christian humanism to promote pastoral therapeutic dialogue which may enrich Christian self-knowledge about the sacredness of human life, despite the urge of suicide or euthanasia. As per Christian humanism framework, Christian self-knowledge is inspired by the excruciating suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross. All things considered, pastoral therapy is endowed with the ability to present the image of God in human suffering while rejecting the urge for euthanasia or suicide.

**Keywords:** Pastoral therapy, Ubuntu, euthanasia, end suffering, assisted suicide, South Africa

## Introduction

Countries such as the Netherlands, Switzerland, Canada, Colombia, Australia, Spain, Germany, New Zealand, some USA states such as California, Colorado, Hawaii, New Jersey, Oregon, Washington state, Vermont and the District of Columbia allow both Physician Assisted Suicide (PAS) and euthanasia (mercy killing), or either of the two options on condition that physicians act in accordance with the legal criteria of due care. In South Africa the advocate of Ubuntu, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Mpilo Tutu called on lawmakers, religious leaders, politicians and the general public to consider legalising the option(s) of euthanasia and Physician assisted suicide for the suffering and dying people of South Africa. There are debatably several suicide cases in the Bible demonstrating or which accentuate few



euthanasia/assisted suicide-related arguments such as autonomy, unbearable torture, shameful death, etc. The Old Testament has six of these cases (Abimelech – Judges 9:54, Ahithophel – II Samuel 17:23, King Zimri – I Kings 16:18, Samson – Judges 16:25-31, King Saul – I Samuel 31:3-4 and his armor bearer – I Samuel 31:5; I Chronicles 10:5) and that of Judas Iscariot found in the New Testament. This paper seeks theological understanding of humanness that considers the plight of the terminally ill patients and the dying. Theology of humanness in this regard is concerned with human experience illnesses, suffering and human incapacity (Pailin 1992).

The following sections will firstly introduce assisted suicide, euthanasia - its forms and their historical backgrounds. Secondly, it will discuss pastoral therapy and euthanasia. Thirdly, biblical suicide cases consisting of six stories found in the Old Testament and that of Judas Iscariot in the New Testament are discussed. Fourthly, it will outline some arguments by ancient philosophers and churchmen on the question of suicide. Lastly, it discusses the African concept of Ubuntu and Christian humanism and how it relates to euthanasia and suicide, as well as its impact on pastoral therapy.

### **(Physician) Assisted Suicide**

The word suicide is from the Latin word '*Suicidium*, from *Sui Caedere*' which means to kill oneself. Physician-assisted suicide (PAS) refers to the practice whereby a physician provides the terminally ill patient with the required assistance to end their own life. Goligher et al (2017) uses the term PAS to refer to a practice whereby the prescription of lethal medication is provided by a physician to be voluntarily self-administered by the patient (Goligher et al., 2017:2). This is in accordance with Brinkman-Stopplenburg et al. (2020) stating that: 'In physician-assisted suicide, the patient self-administers medication that was prescribed intentionally by a physician' (Brinkman-Stopplenburg et al., 2020:2319).

The next section will focus on forms of euthanasia, even though euthanasia and PAS share some traits, the difference between the two is determined by who is performing the act.

### **Euthanasia**

The word euthanasia comes from a combination of two Greek words: *eu* (good) and *thanatos* (death). The idea behind this word is that while death is undesirable, human beings must be allowed to relatively experience good death if they select to. This means the act of euthanasia whenever considered must benefit the patient since their well-being is at the centre of "good". Euthanasia can be classified into active, passive, voluntary, involuntary euthanasia, and physician-assisted suicide (Brinkman-Stopplenburg et al., 2020:2319).

**Active euthanasia** refers to a medical practice whereby the patient's death is caused through deliberate and active means such as the use of lethal substance, lethal injection. Here, deliberate steps are taken to induce death (Wainey, 1989:651). A further definition provided by Brinkman-Stopplenburg et al., (2020) describes it as the situation which occurs when the physician administers the lethal drug with the explicit intention to end a person's life on their explicit request (Brinkman-Stopplenburg et al., 2020:2320). Differentiating between active and passive euthanasia, McQuoid-Mason (2015) makes use of two words, 'actual and eventual', associating active euthanasia with 'actual' and passive euthanasia with 'eventual', suggesting that in active euthanasia the administering doctor has the actual intention end life (McQuoid-Mason, 2015:527).

**Passive euthanasia** refers to a medical practice whereby the patient is allowed to die by withdrawing or omission of means that are keeping the patient alive (life support), such as feeding tube, ventilator, or respirator. This practice is generally known as "pulling the plug" after the means of keeping the patient alive have proven to be futile (Alpert, 2007:191). While



in active euthanasia there are steps taken to induce death, here nothing is done resulting in “letting nature take its course” (Wainey, n.d.). According to Rachels (1979), the passive method leads to more suffering as the patient is forced to die a slow and often painful death, and thus contrary to the very humanitarian impulse that prompted the decision to end life (Rachels, 1979:512). McQuoid-Mason (2015) emphasised the word ‘eventual’ indicating that in passive euthanasia a doctor foresees the eventual intention resulting in the death of the patient. This means that a physician will know that the withdrawal of treatment or increase of a particular medication will result in death of the patient (McQuoid-Mason, 2015:527).

**Voluntary euthanasia** refers to a practice whereby a patient makes a conscious decision or takes active steps to request help with ending of their life. This practice requires the patient’s expressed participation, meaning it can only be done in accordance with the patient’s will. This means any patient opting for this practice must be competent to give such consent and voluntarily express the wish to die (Bogaert, 2011:65).

**Involuntary euthanasia** refers to a practice whereby another person (usually family or proxy member) decides to have someone’s life ended, unlike in voluntary euthanasia, this practice does not necessarily require patient’s participation, meaning this can be done in accordance or without the patient’s will. To put this bluntly, Wolhadler (1984) stated that: “Involuntary euthanasia occurs when a second party makes the decision to terminate an incompetent or un-consenting competent, person’s life (Wolhadler, 1984:365-366).

### **Pastoral Therapy and Euthanasia**

Religion, faith, belief, and more generally, ideology and world view, entail more than just participation in rituals or the acceptance of certain doctrines. Gielen, et al., (2009) note that as religion and world view are expected to have repercussions on every aspect of life, it can be assumed that religious and ideological convictions will influence the professional attitudes and practices of professionals (Gielen, et al., 2009:303). They further mention and rightly so, that professional experience, insights provided by training in palliative care, and personal religious or ideological convictions, can conflict when professional caregivers must decide which attitude to adopt or what should be done in a particular situation. Different religions will have different views when it comes to the issue of euthanasia, mostly depending on beliefs about death and life post-death. Larue (1985) emphasises that it is important to recognise that behind each position lies a belief system that in traditional religions is based on a mythology, a sacred story, a religious fiction, and that this belief system condition responses (Larue, 1985:50). He further mentions that the guiding principles are believed to have been supernaturally revealed and to represent the divine will for humans (Larue, 1985:50).

Sabriseilabi and Williams (2020) argue that religious beliefs have always been an important determinant of opposition to euthanasia. This is supported by Grove, et al., (2022) particularly relating to the legalisation of euthanasia by mentioning that many studies have confirmed religiosity to be one of the critical factors associated with people’s opposition to the legalisation of Euthanasia and Physician Assisted Suicide (Grove, et al., 2022:4795). This, according to Sabriseilabi and Williams, (2020), is because of most religions in the world’s emphasis on the sanctity of human life and consequently rejecting any kind of human intervention in the death process (Sabriseilabi & Williams, 2020:1149). Larue (1985) argues that almost all religious groups oppose active euthanasia, sometimes based on the commandment “Thou shalt not kill”. The latter is also central to the Christian belief and is the lens through which this subject is also tackled.

The Sixth Commandment of the Ten Commandments states that *‘thou shall not kill’* (Exodus 20:13, Deuteronomy 5:17). This on its own does not in any way provide any exceptions to the rule. This command further implies that even you as an individual cannot decide to kill your own body. Głodowska and Krawczyk-Wasielewska (2011) argue that these biblical verses prohibit any form of euthanasia as it infringes upon God’s power and is an act of usurping



God's right to decide on life and death (Głodowska and Krawczyk-Wasielewska, 2011:153). This assertion, according to Grove, et al., (2022) is based on the notion that the ability of life to be self-sustaining, of the heart to beat and the lungs to breathe, is not merely a natural phenomenon in Biblical terms; rather, this is under God's control. As such, according to them, any human interference with hastening the end of life must be very carefully considered and cautiously approached (Grove, et al., 2022:4768). Additionally, Campbell (1992) notes that God is understood to be the origin of human life and the source of human flourishing; our lives, therefore, assume the character of a "gift" or "trust" rather than "private property" (Campbell, 2019:269). In accordance with the Catholic Catechism, Głodowska and Krawczyk-Wasielewska (2011) assert that "an act or an act of omission which, of itself or by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator" (Głodowska & Krawczyk-Wasielewska, 2011:154). This is because according to Larue (1985) when suffering comes to believers during a terminal illness, it can be explained as an opportunity to come into touch with the sufferings of Christ, or perhaps be argued that there is some spiritual merit in suffering (Larue, 1985:50).

Similarly, according to Grove, et al., (2022) the Bible explains that this life, with its associated suffering and death, occurs along the path to a better future of eternal life without suffering, thus living right in this life, following the path set out by God and being obedient to his rules, is of more importance than avoiding temporary suffering (Grove et al., 2022: 4769-4770). In addition, Grove, et al., (2022) states that man is not alone in his or her suffering as God cares about human suffering and desires to comfort them (Isaiah 66:13) in their time of pain as the mother comforts their child (Grove et al., 2022: 4769).

### **Pastoral Therapy**

Pastoral therapy by its very nature, employing trained pastors or chaplains, provides comfort, hope as well as assurance during a time of uncertainty, and especially during sickness and grief. These men and women are expected to provide answers, and most importantly be there for those who may be facing excruciating pain and are considering ending their suffering through euthanasia. Faneye (2019) indicates that just as the medical profession seeks to restore health and wellness to the individual, which, in other words, is the physiological healing, spiritual care is provided to patients for their wholistic healing. He further notes importantly that such healing is neither quantifiable for it to be measured in hours of visits by Chaplains, nor could be measured simply by spiritual care providers' encounters with patients despite all attempts being made to do just this (Faneye, 2019:722). Campbell (1992) adds that when the suffering of some terminally ill patients is experienced as beyond medical management, instead of solving the problem through taking the life of the sufferer, providing compassionate human presence to the sufferer, to express by word and deed a willingness to share in the burden of a problem of a quite different kind, a problem of meaning or ultimacy should be the alternative (Campbell, 1992:269).

According to Faneye (2019), that comforting presence of the other who supports and helps lifts so much burden off the patient who finally experiences love in the bond that is formed with the other helping him or her (Faneye, 2019:723). For the pastoral therapist to enable the believer to navigate this time and to afford them the necessary care, which is in line with their belief, Dein et al., (2013) note that for the practitioner, the issue is to ensure that they have enough knowledge of the particularities of theodicy to enable them to recognise and support the wrestling of the patient. Through a deeper understanding of the meaning of patients' theodical beliefs, empathy, compassion, and understanding will be increased and patient care enhanced at a fundamental level (Dein et al., 2013: 195).



The importance of this understanding relates to the fact that “theodicies are designed to provide explanations for evil and to enable people to hold on to the possibility of God in the midst of pain and suffering and seek to provide complex philosophical and theological arguments to justify and sustain the idea that there is logic in believing in a God who is perfectly good, all loving, and an all-powerful God, even in the face of the reality of the world’s pain” (Dein et al., 2013: 195). Pastoral therapy is best placed to provide hope and support; and the presence of the pastoral carer at this critical moment, according to Faneye (2019), is often what many lack in the afflictions brought on by the pain and suffering that tend to want to make them end life (Faneye, 2019:722).

## **Biblical Stories On Suicide**

There are arguably several instances of suicide in the Bible demonstrating or underscoring few main arguments on human autonomy, unbearable torture, shameful death, etc. These stories include six suicide or induced death cases in the Old Testament (Abimelech – Judges 9:54, Ahithophel – II Samuel 17:23, King Zimri – I Kings 16:18, Samson – Judges 16:25-31, King Saul – I Samuel 31:3-4 and his armor bearer – I Samuel 31:5; I Chronicles 10:5) and Judas Iscariot in the New Testament.

### **Old Testament Suicide Cases**

#### ***Abimelech:*** *The king of Shechem and a son of biblical judge Gideon*

The Bible (KJ21) story in Judges 9:22-54 supported by 2 Samuel 11:21 gives an account to the effect that - during the war between the people of Shechem and Abimelech after his capturing of the city of Thebez, (9:22-51) a woman from this city dropped a millstone from the tower upon Abimelech’s head crushing his skull (9:53). Upon realising that death was fast approaching him, Abimelech instructed his armor-bearer to kill him saying: ‘Draw your dagger and finish me off, that they may not say of me, a woman killed him’. Leading to his armor-bearer wasting no time but stabbing him to death immediately (9:54). According to Shemesh (2009) Abimelech made this request out of pride, shame, or humiliation of being killed by a woman and concern for his image. And since he could not kill himself due to his injury, he instructed his armor-bearer to draw his sword have him killed (Shemesh, 2009:158). Bluedorn (1999) suggests that the armor-bearer killed or obeyed his master without hesitation just after one command (Bluedorn, 1999:195). The shame he feared was of being remembered to have disgracefully died in the hands of a woman. Ben-Nun (2015) puts it bluntly that: ‘Abimelech committed assisted suicide, rather than having it said that he died at the hands of a woman’ (Ben-Nun, 2015:31).

#### ***Ahithophel:*** *A counselor of King David*

The Bible (KJ21) in 2 Samuel 17:21-23 gives an account to the effect that after Ahithophel realised that his advice was rejected, he went to his house in the city and put his household in order, and hung himself to death afterward. What is evident in Ahithophel’s reaction to this rejection is understanding of the implications or results that would arise from the rejection of what he could have considered to be a good advice in favour of Hushi’s bad advice or as Shemesh (2009) suggests that Ahithophel anticipated the future events beyond the rejection of his advice as it was earlier explained in (17:14) that the Lord allowed the defeat of Ahithophel counsel is consisted with David’s prayer (15:31) so that evil will come upon Absalom (Shemesh, 2009:164-165). Firstly, Ahithophel felt very disappointed that Absalom rejected seniority worthy advice, and secondly foresaw the adversity that will follow such rejection since he understood that his honour was suddenly at stake (Whelan, 1993:506-507), and that the defeat of Absalom will have adverse effects to himself and his family. Ben-Nun (2015) is spot on in suggesting that Ahithophel was so depressed and haunted by thoughts of David’s hostility and vengeance upon Absalom’s death (Ben-Nun, 2015:27). As the result,



Ahithophel selects to rather die with honour than the possibility of living in shame (Whelan, 1993:507).

**King Zimri:** *The fifth king of Israel*

The Bible (KJ21) in 1 Kings 16:18-20 gives an account of how King Zimri introduced as an 'ebed - עֶבֶד' – Hebrew term for slave burnt himself in the citadel of the king's house. As a captain of half the king's chariots, Zimri conspired against him while King Elah was in Tirzah drinking himself to stupor (16:9) and he killed him so that he may reign in his stead (16:10). After seeing that he had lost or lacked popular support needed to retain his kingship, and that he sinned against the Lord by achieving the throne of Israel by assassination (16:19), he then resolved to take his own life by burning himself with fire (Witztum & Stein, 2012:727). With merely his seven days' reign, King Zimri became too depressed after the city was taken and in his despair he could not cope with the thoughts of defeat, thus selecting to end his own life (Ben-Nun, 2015:30). Just as in the cases of Ahithophel and Saul, King Zimri upon realising that the battle was lost or that there were no prospects of winning, King Zimri opted for suicidal action (Shemesh, 2009:165). Zimri decided to die (own choice) instead of waiting for nature to take its own course which might lead into him being killed by his opponents.

**Samson:** *The last of the judges of the ancient Israelites*

The Bible (KJ21) in Judges 16:25-31 narrates the story of how Samson lost his strength after Delilah shaved his head. The Philistines had conspired with Delilah to persuade Samson into disclosing the secret of his strength, after she had continued to press upon him daily to take her into his confidence begging: 'Hitherto thou hast mocked me and told me lies. Tell me wherewith thou mightiest be bound' (16:13). Ultimately Samson relented and disclosed that his extraordinary strength is in his hair saying: 'If I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man' (16:17). Delilah then conspired with the Philistines to have Samson's head shaved. Once he was shaved the Philistines captured him, brought him into the temple of their god, chained him in the middle pillars that the temple rested on, put his eyes out resulting in him being blind and living in captivity. Once his hair had gradually grown again, he resolved to use his last might to push the pillars apart and died along with those around him. Ben-Nun (2015) suggests that the reason Samson selected to kill himself since: 'he no longer wanted to live blind in captivity', and that his continued living would bring him unnecessary suffering and humiliation since his ego was suddenly damaged (Ben-Nun, 2015:18-20). He could not continue listening to the Philistines as they laughed at his misery while he helplessly fumbled around seeking assistance. At this juncture, Bar (2020) pointed that the situation that Samson found himself in was a complete contradiction of his own immediate past wherein he could still fight his battles without any assistance, but instead he suddenly found himself in a mercy of a boy assigned to lead him around by hand even for simple acts like feeling the pillars (Bar, 2020:168). Once by the pillars, he then asked God to strengthen him just this once again (16:28) saying: 'Let me die with the Philistines' (16:30) and at once grasped the pillars and pushed them apart. Even though this is the only biblical story where suicide is motivated by revenge or where one kills himself along with others, Samson's desire to end his own life to avoid humiliation, misery, and helplessness due to loss of eyesight cannot be ruled out of the equation.

**King Saul:** *The first king of the United Kingdom of Israel*

The Bible (KJ21) in I Samuel 31:3-4 gives an account of how after losing the battle and witnessing the death of his three sons (Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua) in the hands of Philistines did King Saul commit suicide. Similar to the account of Abimelech, the battle had become heavy upon King Saul, and he was badly wounded by the archers (31:3), leading to him instructing his armor bearer saying: 'Draw thy sword and thrust me through therewith, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through and abuse me' (31:4). According to Ben-Nun (2015), committing suicide was the only way for King Saul to send a message to the Philistines that their attempts to kill him would not succeed (Ben-Nun, 2015:22). Parallel to the



case of Abimelech who could not stand the thoughts of being killed by a woman, King Saul could not stand the thought of being killed by Philistines (whom he considered weak) hence he uttered the words: 'lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through and abuse me' (31:4). Middleton (2018) puts it: 'Rather than risk being made sport by his enemies' (Middleton, 2018:7). King Saul understood his position and refused to surrender in the likelihood of captivity and torture in the hands of Philistines. Unlike in the case of Abimelech, Saul's armor-bearer refuses to kill him, leading to Saul taking matters into his own hands by forcefully falling upon his own sword.

#### **Saul's Squire: *The shield- or armor-bearer of a knight***

The Bible (KJ21) in I Samuel 31:5 records that as soon as King Saul's squire saw that his king was dead, similar to how Saul killed himself, the squire too fell upon his own sword and died (31:5). According to Shemesh (2009), this narrative reinforces the idea of solidarity between King Saul and his servant both in life and in death (Shemesh, 2009:162). The squire understood that the death of his master meant death. The sudden loss of his master meant the loss of his purpose to live. Shemesh (2009) paralleled this with the ancient Japan retainers who killed themselves upon the death of their Lords to reinforce their loyalty or devotion to their masters (Shemesh, 2009:163-164). Thus, it can be concluded that Saul's squire killed himself after witnessing that his only reason to live diminished in front of his own eyes and in fear that the Philistines will have him tortured before they could kill him.

#### **New Testament Suicide Cases**

##### **Judas Iscariot: *One of the original Twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ***

The Bible (KJ21) in Matthew 27:5 and Acts 1:18 though with differing interpretations, records how Judas Iscariot died. Matthew's account is different from that of Acts in that Judas is said to have hanged himself while in Acts it is said that he fell headlong bursting his body open and all his bowels gushing out. However, the focus of this paper as it relates to this story is more inclined to entertaining the impression that he committed suicide. After Judas had betrayed Jesus Christ, seeing his errors and that he was condemned, he: 'repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders' (Matthew 27:3). Expressing his regrets he said to them: 'I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood' (27:4), but they could not want to sympathise with his position, leading to him going away and hanging himself (27:5). With Jesus being arrested at that time, Judas though saddened by the realisation that he betrayed an innocent person he then selected to return to the chief priests to seek some form of absolution from his sins (Middleton, 2018:23), and once rejected he felt more depressed and decided to end his own life. If the integration of Acts 1:18 into Matthew 27:5 could be anything to go by, then the result of such reconciliation would suggest that Divine will governed or compelled Judas into committing suicide since by then he could have fulfilled his total role in betraying Jesus. This point is emphasised by Whelan (1993) who juxtaposed Peter and Judas as they both betrayed Jesus and felt sorry for their conduct immediately.

#### **Ancient Philosophers and Churchmen on Suicide**

The problematic question of suicide is not a recent phenomenon, but rather it dates as far back as during the ancient times wherein ancient philosophers and churchmen formed opinions on it. While the ancient Greeks accepted that life is sacred, at the same time they understood that there were limits beyond which life could not be enjoyed. Wolhandler (1984) outlined a question by the Roman Seneca asking: 'If I can choose between a death of torture and one that is simple and easy, why should I not select the latter? Why should I endure the agonies of disease when I can emancipate myself from all my torments?' (Wolhandler, 1984:363). Ancient figures such as Aristotle, St Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Donne, and David Hume opinions on the question of suicide is recorded in the following manner:



### ***Aristotle And Suicide (384-322 BC)***

Being the student of Plato, Aristotle shared his teacher's firm opposition of suicide (Obasola, 2014:54). Their rejection of suicide became the basis upon which generations of philosophers and theologians opposed it too. As Aristotle was challenged to form an opinion about suicide amid the discussion on whether or not a person can treat him/herself unjustly, to which he opined that suicide does not constitute unjust treatment towards oneself so long as it is done voluntarily (Obasola, 2014:55). However, he took it further to argue that while suicide may seem morally permissible or justified to the actor, it is against the law since it is an injustice committed against the political community as such community's existence is owed to one's own well-being (Uhlmann, 1998:18-19). His understanding was that everyone is indebted to the society in which they live, and that since the society prohibits suicide, everyone within such society ought to obey the law of that society (Obasola, 2014:55). Essentially, this means Aristotle's sympathy was more with the societal position than with the plight of an individual.

### ***Saint Augustine And Suicide (354-430 AD)***

In his principal work: "The City of God" (413-426), the early Christian Bishop and Philosopher, Augustine of Hippo basing his argument on the absence of suicide permission in the holy canonical books and one of the Ten Commandments law which prohibits human being from killing. He argues that the omission of "thy neighbor" from "Thou shalt not kill" means cannot kill others including themselves. He explicitly writes: "Thou shalt not kill man therefore neither another nor yourself, for he who kills himself still kills nothing else than man" (Walsh, 1958:44-45). In his opinion, there can never be a just cause of suicide and thus not permitted under any conditions be it sin, hardship of fortune, illness, and pain (Ünver, 2003:68-69). In Uhlmann (1998) he is quoted arguing that the scripture is not at all ambiguous in its teachings about killing, that regardless of who is killed, any killing is prohibited unless sanctioned by divine command as in exceptional instances such as when Abraham was commanded to slay Isaac his son and when Samson was commanded to pull down the temple which resulted in his own death. Augustine's argument against suicide goes as far as warning that anyone who kills him/herself violates God's command, and such person should not expect a better life after such death (Uhlmann, 1998:24-25).

### ***Thomas Aquinas And Suicide (1225-1274)***

Thomas Aquinas being greatly influenced by the works of Aristotle, he too argued against the legitimacy of suicide. Similar to St Augustine substantiates his position by making use of the Biblical commandment instructing: "Thou shalt not kill" arguing that this prohibition is against killing of human beings in totality, and that when one kills him/herself has committed a sin of killing a human being. He further argues that life as a gift from God cannot be rejected through killing of oneself, but rather should be treated as a precious gift that is ought to be (McCloskey, 1975:404-405). Further, he conclusively gives or makes three arguments against suicide, namely, firstly, that is unlawful to kill oneself since every human being is born with the natural inclination to live and charity to love oneself. Thus, since suicide contradict these inclinations, it is therefore unnatural and sin. Secondly, that since every human being belongs to a community, by committing suicide the actor violates the wholeness of his/her community. Thirdly, that since life is from God, he alone can pronounce a death sentence and not the actor (Beauchamp, 1976:75).

### ***John Donne And Suicide (1572-1631)***

In his 1608 work called "Biathanatos" (Greek term for life and death"), the radical English writer and clergyman, John Donne (1572-1631), defends the act of suicide backing his arguments by citing Biblical examples of suicide which include King Saul and Judas Iscariot among others argues that it is important for Christians to see death as a stepping-stone to a better life or a heavenly afterlife. He further emphasises that while it is true that suicide might injure the wholeness of a society, at the same time it is important for such society to appreciate that a person who commits suicide might have good reasons or intentions. Thus, on that basis he





concludes that the only way to determine as to whether or not suicide can be justified, is through the assessment of the actor's motive and intentions (Uhlmann, 1998:30-31). Upon dealing with his own temptation to commit suicide or induced death, Donne is quoted in Roberts (1947) as saying: "whosoever any affliction assails me, methinks I have the keys of my prison in mine own hand, and no remedy presents itself so soon to my heart, as mine own sword" (Roberts, 1947:959). Furthermore, or at least as equally testified by Kitzes (2001), Donne did not take suicide as an irregular or unusual form of death, but more of a sign that human life is characterised by irregular conducts. Thus, for a person to desire suicide, he/she responds to the angelic message which promises that there is better form of life in the after-death than any person can imagine. Actually, Kitzes further indicates that Donne endeavoured to highlight frequent martyrdom as the best example that naturally human beings have the inclination for freedom that comes as the result of death (Kitzes, 2001:7).

### ***David Hume And Suicide (1711-1776)***

The Scottish Enlightenment philosopher and father of modern skepticism, David Hume conceded that while there might be some element of truth in the argument that seeks to emphasise that suicide is an offence against God and natural order, but such inclination to disturb is the characteristic of human beings hence natural order is always disturbed by human beings for the benefit of the greater good. He then asks: "where is the crime of turning a few ounces of blood from their natural channel" to effect suicide? (Uhlmann, 1998:35). Hume is quoted in Beauchamp (1976) having begun the argument on suicide by writing: "Let us here endeavor to restore men to their native liberty, by examining all the common arguments against suicide, and showing that that action may be free from every imputation of guilt or blame" (Beauchamp, 1976:74). More than anything, what is contained in this statement is the suggestion that somehow human beings are imprisoned by mere inaccurate arguments hence the endeavour to restore their native liberty. Beauchamp further opined that Hume's argument for suicide is characterised by his protests towards Aquinas' three key arguments on suicide, namely: 1. The Divine ownership argument – which Hume counters by arguing that since human beings are perceived to have died of natural causes whenever they are swept away by a flood or being poisoned, it can be maintained that there is an additional, non-natural divine course which might come in a form of a human being to him/herself; 2. The natural law argument - which Hume mocked as absurd and disappointing theology since it is humanly impossible to always resist natural occurrences by counteractions, and further that if it is at all thinkable for human being to disturb natural courses, then it will equally be thinkable and morally permissible to change the course of life by diverting blood from its natural course within human vessel; and 3. The divine appointment argument – to which Hume employed the Divine providence arguing that if God as the creator of heaven and earth is truly responsible for everything that occurs under the sun, then suicide is equally covered by special divine intervention wherein God controls the thoughts and actions of the suicide actor (Beauchamp, 1976:82).

### **Christian Humanism and Ubuntu**

Humanism in general has a long history which dates as far back to ancient Greek and Roman philosophy (Celenza, 2008:25-49). A central tenet of humanism's philosophical stance is that moral behaviour, whether it be on an individual or group level within a social structure, is something that every human population is capable of doing, even in the absence of religious belief nor teachings (Schiller, 1912). It conveys dedication to social justice and human rights in addition to encouraging critical thinking and scientific investigation (Nussbaum, 1997; Douzinas, 2008). Consequently, one can perhaps say that humanists, amongst others, typically advocate for the human rights and well-being of all people in efforts to creating a more humane, rationality-based society. According to Shipton (2020), the central concern of humanism, ancient and modern, has been to assist humans in reaching their full potential and experiencing happiness (Shipton et al., 2020:226). In the same light, Cunningham (1984)



notes that the heart of humanism is its emphasis upon the dignity and worth of human beings and the moral equivalence of individual persons (Cunningham, 1984:276).

Although humanism in general, or at least in the form presented so far, has a somewhat secular origin and character, it still arguably appears to have been largely influenced by theistic worldview and their beliefs emphasising morality. A key aspect of theistic-humanistic moral ideals, which derive from transcendental nature and even characterise the transcendental approach to human creation, articulates humanism as a deep belief in the human inclination to be and do good (Young, 1977, 341-351). Although it has been argued that humanism is primarily associated with non-religious leanings or has a secular origin, religious scholars have argued that it is nevertheless influenced by humanistic approaches from monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Hobson, 2017; Pfeffer, 1987; Nicolaides, 2022). This seems particularly true given the humanistic ideals that characterise the accounts of the Hebrew Bible in general, but also the humanistic principles that encompass Christ's earthly ministry in the New Testament in particular (Hamilton, 1996). It is to this very end that scholars such as in Shipton et al., (2020) argue convincingly that secular humanism not only has origins in Christian thoughts, but also find a more solid articulation or finds true expression in Christianity far than in an atheistic setting (Shipton et al., 2020:227). For example, they provide the distinction between secular and Christian ethical understanding as follows:

For secular humanists, ethical understanding comes from within a person's concern for others rather than via divine authorization. On the other hand, for the Christian, ethical understandings are based on the character of God, as revealed through the teachings of Jesus, especially as expressed in Matthew 22 (Shipton et al., 2020:228).

As if expressing the sentiments above, Seitschek, (2016) equally points that Christians and secular humanists react to the same reality, but in a different way. He further submits that to the extent that Christians believers in particular consider everything in the light of faith and in the presence of God, consequently its humanism is similarly aligns with and express total belief in Christ's transcendental mediation (Seitschek, 2016:96). According to Shipton et al., (2020) human dignity is connected with loved individuals being created in the image of God and the fact that Christ died for all (Shipton et al., 2020:229). Thus, human dignity is best captured in the idea that humans distinctively embody the image of God (Cunningham, 1984:282). The choices made concerning life and death can never be just about the individual, but more about God's creation who is also part of the universe.

The word Ubuntu comes from the aphorism of (isiZulu) '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*', (isiXhosa) '*Umuntu ngumtu gabantu*', (Sotho and Tswana) '*Motho ke motho ka batho*' (Tutu, 2004:25-26; Moloketi, 2009:243) (English probability) 'a person is a person because of others', the English version of this aphorism has no precision as noted by Tutu (1999) simply translating it as: 'my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in what is yours' (Tutu, 1999:29-30). This simply means the humanness of each person is carried by other people. Thus, no individual can claim to be human in the absence of other people, but rather individuals become human when in support of other people. Nolte and Downing (2019) observed that while most caring theories come from European and American theorists, Ubuntu prides itself of being born in Africa hence it remains compatible with most African cultures (Nolte & Downing, 2019:9). Ubuntu is a credible African moral theory and is well-matched with numerous ethical theories including the common good approach, the utilitarian approach, the rights ethical or deontological approach, the justice or fairness approach and the virtue approach. "The greatest parallel is with the common good approach which is endorsed collectively in a range of common values and moral or ethical principles that exist in virtually all societies" (Nicolaides, 2022).



The concept of Ubuntu can further easily be understood as pointing to the essence or art of being human and a call for people to exhibit humanness (Metz, 2011:537; Buqa, 2015:4). To clarify further, Tutu (2004) say it means: 'I am human because I belong. It speaks about wholeness. It speaks about compassion' (Tutu, 2004:31). Elsewhere as noted by Buqa (2015), Tutu (2011) indicates that the concept of Ubuntu is centred on spiritual attributes such as hospitality, compassion, sharing, caring and generosity (Buqa, 2015:4). This means that Ubuntu pursues values of humanness through compassion, sharing, caring, hospitality and generosity. Here Nolte and Downing (2019) speaks of the foundational gesture of Ubuntu as a reciprocal act of human deep connectedness and solidarity (Nolte & Downing, 2019:9). These two elements (connectedness and solidarity) are principles upon which African societies are built.

Consequently, the principles of Ubuntu, which, like monotheistic morality, require extraordinary human compassion for others, collectively call for humanism in general and Christian humanism in particular. To this end, Christian-Ubuntu humanism considers the sense of humanity and compassion well beyond the discourse that encompasses the rights and wrongs of euthanasia and assisted suicide. Furthermore, Christian-Ubuntu humanism will not only speak of humanity without first premising its origin within the image of God. As though equally reflecting such sentiments, Fransen (1963) indicates that through the sincere dedication to all people we shall then meet the face of the living God (Fransen, 1963: 275). This is because scripture notes that "we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18). Welsh (1994) notes that as we learn by grace to love God and love our neighbour, we express the glory-image of God (Welch, 1994:33). This ties very well with Ubuntu and its emphasis on communal living and treating others with love and seeing good in them and realising that we are stronger together.

In support of this statement, Welsh (1994) argues that we need others in all the ways that we help "one another" grow in the image of God. In addition, he asserts that God's glory is displayed in a corporate body more fully than it is in individuals (Welsh, 1994:34). Okoro (2015) mentions that Ubuntu stands tall amongst the people of South Africa as its philosophy and foundation of community living (Okoro, 2015:2). Because I am because you are - it stands to reason that your suffering is my suffering and together we can overcome especially as a corporate. In addition, as mentioned by Fransen (1963) the truth that Jesus Christ became the cause of our salvation in that by what he did he merited us that we should have the same grace of accepting our life, whatever it is and shall be, in the same spirit of obedience and love, through him and by him in the power of the Holy Ghost (Fransen, 1963: 274). In the same light, Fransen (1963) notes that the value of our life in the eyes of God depends on the deep sense of obedience and love in which we accept our actual destiny, whatever it may be, in sickness and in health (Fransen, 1963: 275). This is not in vain as, according to Cunningham, (1984) Christianity holds a hope for a life beyond, which places human life and death in a penultimate perspective and offers hope for an eschatological setting right of the balances between good and evil (Cunningham, 1984:283)

## **Conclusion**

This paper introduced the issue of assisted suicide, euthanasia - its forms and their historical backgrounds with the aim of discussing them within the context of pastoral therapy. Correspondingly, or at least within the same vicinity, it then highlighted biblical suicide cases consisting of six stories found in the Old Testament and that of Judas Iscariot in the New Testament. To that end, it also contextualised the broad understanding of this questions within the premised views of ancient figures such as Aristotle, St Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Donne, and David Hume on suicide.



Additionally, the African concept of Ubuntu has been aligned with Christian humanism within pastoral therapy to provide philosophical and ethical perspectives that compassionately address the issues of euthanasia and assisted suicide. Although euthanasia and suicide are not encouraged in the least, it is argued here that since man was created in the image of God (imago Dei) as per Genesis 1:27, even unconventional options sought by the dying should be countered with the reflection of God Compassion and love in preserving the sanctity of life.

Consequently, this article has highlighted that, taking into account all opposing arguments, pastoral therapy should embrace Ubuntu-Christian humanism and express the image of God in dealing with Christian believers who suffer so unbearably that they seek euthanasia and assisted suicide. In other words, pastoral therapy has been identified primarily as uniquely positioned not only to uphold principles of Ubuntu Christian humanism, but also competently express God's compassionate love for the plight of those enduring unbearable suffering, often to the point of seeking accelerated end to their life.

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