

ARTICLE 44

Advisory Committee 11, End-of-Life Issues, Rev. Bert Slofstra reporting, presents the following:

Responsibility and Community at the End of Life

A. *Material*: Report of the Committee for Contact with the Government (Canada) Regarding Responsibility and Community at the End of Life, pp. 425-48

B. *Observations*

The advisory committee's discussion of the Committee for Contact with the Government (CCG) report focused on two areas of concern: its status and its content.

With respect to its status, the advisory committee observes that the report comes to synod in an unusual way. The introduction to the CCG report notes that this report was prepared at the invitation of Synod 1997 as that synod's response to an overture (Overture 12) requesting synod to appoint a study committee to determine a position on the practice of euthanasia. After adopting a recommendation not to accede to the overture, Synod 1997 decided instead to invite "the CCG to broaden [a study it had already made and circulated to the churches in Canada for comment] to include exegetical material and the practical application of biblical principles for persons making decisions about death and dying and that the CCG make available future drafts of these materials to churches in the United States as well as Canada for evaluation and discussion" (*Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 608). The ground given for this decision was that the CCG was already working on a study paper on the relevant issues and that "for synod to set up a new study committee would be duplicative and not timely" (*Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 608). That leads us to the conclusion that the CCG report is not technically the product of a synodically appointed study committee. This conclusion seems to be affirmed by the request of Synod 1997 that the CCG, contrary to regular procedure for study-committee reports, distribute any future drafts of its materials regarding decisions about death and dying only to the churches and not to a future synod for evaluation and discussion. In addition, we note that a regular synodical study committee would probably have had a membership both larger—in terms of numbers—and broader—in terms of nationality and expertise—than that of the committee that brings this report to Synod 2000.

At the same time, however, the language of Synod 1997 in response to Overture 12 was somewhat ambiguous. The ground it gave for its recommendation might be seen as suggesting that synod did not see the need for appointing a synodical study committee since it considered that the CCG was already functioning as such. It is also true that the CCG did, in fact, function as a study committee and that it was treated as such both by virtue of having its costs covered by the denomination and by having its report included in the *Agenda for Synod 2000*. Therefore, in spite of the irregularities noted above, the advisory committee judges that this report is legitimately before synod.

With respect to its content, the advisory committee deeply appreciates the pastoral tone of the CCG report, a tone effectively highlighted by means of the poignant vignettes and personal stories the report relates. We commend the report for its insistence that facing and making decisions about death and

dying are realities that must be addressed by individuals and communities today rather than tomorrow. We also applaud the report for the pastoral principles it provides for the care of the dying, specifically and especially those of community and compassion. Furthermore, we are grateful for the way it reminds us that the only appropriate answer to the question so often raised in our society today, namely, “Whose life is it anyway?,” is that our lives belong to God and that all decisions and actions with respect to care for the dying and end-of-life issues must arise out of that conviction.

We also note, however, that there are many end-of-life issues the CCG report does not address. For example, in encouraging the preparation of advance directives for palliative care, the report does not give any guidelines to what appropriate directives would look like; the report does not define the difference between terminal illness and imminent death nor deal with the different levels of treatment or termination of such appropriate to each stage of the dying process; it does not deal with the limited nature of resources and the justice issues the allocation of resources raises; it does not address management and control issues with respect to medical interventions. In short, the CCG report does not deal with all the issues that need to be addressed for persons facing and/or making decisions about death and dying, nor does it provide the kind of ethical precision and fully developed ethical framework necessary to deal with such matters. We emphasize, however, that this is not a criticism of the CCG report, since it neither intended nor pretends to address all the important end-of-life issues we face today. Rather, it is the basis for some of the advisory-committee recommendations that follow below.

C. Recommendations

1. That synod give the privilege of the floor to designated representatives of the Committee for Contact with the Government.

—*Granted*

(The report of Advisory Committee 11 is continued in Article 59.)

ARTICLE 45

The afternoon session is adjourned; Rev. Stanley Jim leads in closing prayer.

WEDNESDAY EVENING, June 14, 2000

Ninth Session

ARTICLE 46

Rev. Kevin J. Adams announces *Psalter Hymnal* 486, “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” and reads from Luke 15:11-32. He leads in opening prayer, especially remembering Elder Harold C. Anton’s son who is fighting a forest fire in Fort Collins, Colorado. He announces *Psalter Hymnal* 530, “I Love to Tell the Story.”

ARTICLE 68

(The report of Advisory Committee 11 is continued from Article 59.)

Advisory Committee 11, End-of-Life Issues, Rev. Bert Slofstra reporting, presents the following:

Responsibility and Community at the End of Life

A. *Material:* Report of the Committee for Contact with the Government (Canada) Regarding Responsibility and Community at the End of Life, pp. 425-48

B. Recommendation

That synod substitute the following wording for Section IV, B of the report of the committee to study end-of-life issues:

The Bible and suicide

In view of the growing demand for the legalization of assisted suicide, an examination of biblical givens may be helpful. The call to be willing to lose one's life in order to save it is mentioned six times in the four gospels (Matt. 10:39; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 14:26-27; 17:33; John 12:25). These words of our Lord have prompted many acts of courage and compassion in which individuals were willing to sacrifice their own lives in order to serve others in his name. But such selfless acts of sacrificial love and compassion are not to be confused with the conditions that lead a person to attempt suicide.

Interestingly, the instances of suicide that are mentioned in the Bible do not include *explicit* condemnation of the act (see II Sam. 1:24-25 and II Sam. 2:4-7; also II Sam. 17:23; Judg. 9:52-54; I Kings 16:18-19; Matt. 27:5). This must not be taken to mean, however, that the Bible condones suicide. Scripture clearly prohibits *all* wanton destruction of human life, and that includes the willful ending of one's own life. The Heidelberg Catechism affirms this when it says, in its treatment of the Sixth Commandment, ". . . I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself, either."

Although the scriptural narratives referred to do not explicitly condemn those who took their own lives, their desperate actions *are* generally associated with lives of disobedience. Again, however, these examples of suicide must not be understood to suggest that depressed or suicidal persons today have, at some point in their lives, chosen to pursue the way of evil. We now know that depression is a serious illness, one that can have fatal consequences. It is of special comfort, therefore, for believers to know that, although the Bible does not condone suicide, our gracious God is certainly able to forgive it.

—Adopted

ARTICLE 69

A delegate presents the following motion:

That synod instruct the BOT to develop a process that will assist the churches to discuss the issue of women in office and promote understanding that will lead to a more unified insight into this matter. The BOT will report its proposed process to Synod 2001.