



Continued Concerns for Terri Schiavo

February 28, 2005

Terri Schindler Schiavo has been the center of national media attention, and the focus of a debate that touches all three branches of government. Mrs. Schiavo is not "brain dead" or comatose. She has lived in a nursing home for years, presently a hospice facility, generally needing only nursing care and assistance in receiving nourishment. Some experts say she is in a "persistent vegetative state;" others say she is not. Her husband wants to remove her feeding tube, insisting she expressed clearly this would be her wish; her parents and siblings vigorously disagree, and have offered to care for her as long as she lives. Questions about her prognosis and wishes persist, raising doubt as to what she would truly want.

No longer able to speak on her own behalf, Mrs. Schiavo is a defenseless human being with inherent dignity, deserving of our respect, care and concern. Her plight dramatizes one of the most critical questions we face: To be a truly human society, how should we care for those we may not be able to cure?

In our past statements concerning Terri Schiavo, as well as those by [Bishop Robert N. Lynch](#) of the Diocese of St. Petersburg, we have made it clear that there should be a presumption in favor of providing nutrition and hydration even by artificial means as long as it is of sufficient benefit to outweigh the burdens involved to the patient. We reiterate our plea that Mrs. Schiavo continues to receive all treatments and care that will be of benefit to her.

In a statement provided in March 2004, Pope John Paul II urges us to see every patient in a so-called "vegetative" state as a fellow human being, retaining his or her full dignity despite diminished abilities. Regarding nourishment for such patients, he said:

I should like particularly to underline how the administration of water and food, even when provided by artificial means, always represents a *natural means* of preserving life, not a *medical act*. Its use, furthermore, should be considered, *in principle, ordinary and proportionate*, and as such morally obligatory, insofar as and *until it is seen to have attained its proper finality*, which in the present case consists in providing nourishment to the patient and alleviation of his suffering.

Simply put, we are called to provide basic means of sustenance such as food and water unless they are doing more harm than good to the patient, or are useless because the patient's death is imminent. As long as they effectively provide nourishment and help provide comfort, we should see them as part of what we owe to all who are helpless and

in our care. In certain situations a patient may morally refuse medical treatment and such decisions may properly be seen as an expression of our hope of union with God in the life to come.

We pray that Terri Schindler Schiavo's family and friends, and all who hold power over her fate, will see that she continues to receive nourishment, comfort and loving care.

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