

'Good death' a topic that is alive and kicking

25.03.2004 - JULIE MIDDLETON searches the web for background to a controversial debate

Euthanasia has been in the news this week - and not just because nurse Lesley Martin is on trial in Wanganui, facing two counts of attempted murder of her mother.

The Google search gives you some idea of the size of the debate in general - the keyword "euthanasia" throws up 579,000 items.

And the latest news: Last Sunday, reports online newspaper [CalgarySun](#), Pope John Paul II told a Vatican conference that removing feeding tubes from people in vegetative states was immoral. No judgment on their quality of life, he said, could justify such "euthanasia by omission".

The word euthanasia, originating from the Greek terms eu (happy or good) and thanatos (death), means literally happy death or good death, according to [The Ethics of Euthanasia](#).

The search also sends me to [The Death Clock](#), which asks some basic health questions (body mass index, whether you smoke and the likes), to forecast your date of death.

Apparently, I will die on Wednesday, April 18, 2068. Given that I was born in 1969, I find this a tad over optimistic. But the site's tagline - "the internet's friendly reminder that life is slipping away" - is not a bad prompt for some self-examination of the way you live.

The Netherlands became the first country in the world to legalise euthanasia in 2001. But according to [Dutch Euthanasia Policy](#), which is part of Radio Netherlands, "euthanasia and assisted suicide continue to be criminal offences".

"Euthanasia carries a maximum penalty of 12 years in prison, and assistance with suicide is punishable by a three-year sentence. But doctors will not be prosecuted if they fulfil the requirements of due care."

[The site](#) has some interesting American research on attitudes to euthanasia, cross-sectioned by age, religious orientation, political leanings, education and the like. It is part of a thoughtful and interesting academic site on the sociology of death and dying.

For an idea of how different cultures regard the subject, check out [Islamicity](#). Here you learn that in Islam, "since we did not create ourselves, we do not own our bodies".

"We are entrusted with them for care, nurture and safekeeping. God is the owner and giver of life and His rights in giving and in taking are not to be violated."

Frank A. Pavone, national director of the US-based [Catholic Priests for Life organisation](#), says "we do not decide when our life will end, any more than we decided when it began. Much less does someone else - a relative, a doctor or a legislator - decide when our life will end."

An apparently serious yet bizarre [Church of Euthanasia](#), based in Massachusetts, aims to promote a voluntary reduction in the world's population by encouraging suicide, abortion, cannibalism and sodomy.

Some people just have too much spare time on their hands.