



The Anscombe Bioethics Centre
Press Release (12 Jan 2021)
For immediate release

Catholic bioethics centre gravely concerned over Court judgement to withdraw food and water from committed Catholic patient.

The Anscombe Bioethics Centre expresses grave concern over a recent court judgment¹ which would withdraw nutrition and hydration from a committed, practising Catholic patient ('RS'). Despite his well-attested views, on the 7th January the Court declared it legally permissible to withdraw food and fluids from the patient, who had once previously stated that "every life is precious and that you must hold onto life, and also that if anything happened to him, he would want all steps to be taken to save him but that if he was beyond saving, he did not want to be kept alive."² At the time of writing provision of food and water has been restored until an appeal can be made to the European Court of Human Rights.

In a statement on the moral reasoning shown by judges in this case, Anscombe Bioethics Centre Director, Prof. David Albert Jones, voices his strong regret that "expert opinion on the view of the Catholic Church was not thought appropriate [by the Court]."

Prof. Jones explains: "When, as in the RS case, a Catholic [...] is not known to dissent from the Church's teaching, then this should guide the interpretation of the person's previous statements. In this context, rejection of being "kept alive" when "beyond saving" most naturally refers to rejection of intensive medical treatment and ventilation where there is no hope of recovery, not to rejection of nutrition and hydration where they are effective in sustaining life."

He adds: "from a Catholic perspective, to provide food and drink to those who are hungry and thirsty is a corporal work of mercy. Patients should not be abandoned to die from lack of nutrition or hydration, however that is best provided."

Had evidence of this teaching been presented, it might have helped the interpretation of the remarks made. Prof. Jones goes on: "Rejection of life sustaining treatment by a Catholic patient should not be presumed to include clinically assisted nutrition and hydration unless explicitly stated."

The thoughts of the staff of the Anscombe Bioethics Centre are with RS and with his family at this time and we assure them of our prayers for him and for all those close to him.

ENDS

About the Centre

The Anscombe Bioethics Centre is the national Catholic bioethics centre for the United Kingdom and Ireland, and is based in Oxford. The Centre engages in research and scholarly debate, runs educational programmes for healthcare professionals, and contributes to public policy debates.

¹ B v University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust & Anor (Rev 1) [2020] EWCA Civ 1772 (23 December 2020)

² [2020] EWCA Civ 1772, 7.

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