

CALIFORNIA ASSISTED-SUICIDE BILL DIES; BIGOTRY MARKS DEBATE

Realizing they didn't have the votes to win, California lawmakers who wanted to legalize assisted suicide withdrew their bill on June 7. The bill would have allowed doctors to provide a lethal drug dose to patients who have less than six months to live, are mentally competent and have requested the drug; the patients would have administered the drug themselves.

The bill's demise was good news for everyone, save the advocates of a culture of death. The Catholic League not only objected to the bill, it also blasted the anti-Catholic bigots associated with its promotion. In the course of the debate over this bill, anti-Catholic bigotry flared.

Those who believe in the ethics of assisted suicide should make their case without engaging in unethical conduct. In California, they did not do so. On radio shows throughout the state, commercials placed by an activist group called Californians for Compassionate Choices called into question the constitutional right of Catholic clergymen to speak to this issue. These spots mirrored the invective employed against Los Angeles Archbishop Roger Cardinal Mahony that appeared in the group's press releases.

On May 7, Compassionate Choices said, "How can lawmakers follow the dictates of the Catholic Church rather than legislate on behalf of ALL Californians?" So when Catholic leaders speak out, they're dictating to lawmakers, but when others speak out, they're engaging in dialogue. Do even those who voice such nonsense believe what they say? Even worse was the lie, found on the group's website, that said there is "a

well-funded pressure campaign to force Vatican dogma on all terminally ill Californians.” This is pure unadulterated demagoguery, and they know it.

There is one Catholic who Compassionate Choices likes, and that’s Daniel C. Maguire, the embittered ex-priest theologian from Marquette University. In his letter to the lawmakers, Maguire did what he always does—spin the truth. “Catholic theology is broader and more nuanced than Vatican theology,” he said. So if Vatican theology is not Catholic theology, is it Buddhist? And if the Vatican is not the source of Catholic theology, what is? The musings of Maguire?

Lawmakers are free to decide what to do with regard to any public policy issue, but they also have a moral obligation to denounce bigotry. They should always do so without delay.