



CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

***RESPONSES TO CERTAIN QUESTIONS
OF THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS
CONCERNING ARTIFICIAL NUTRITION AND HYDRATION***

First question: *Is the administration of food and water (whether by natural or artificial means) to a patient in a “vegetative state” morally obligatory except when they cannot be assimilated by the patient’s body or cannot be administered to the patient without causing significant physical discomfort?*

Response: Yes. The administration of food and water even by artificial means is, in principle, an ordinary and proportionate means of preserving life. It is therefore obligatory to the extent to which, and for as long as, it is shown to accomplish its proper finality, which is the hydration and nourishment of the patient. In this way suffering and death by starvation and dehydration are prevented.

Second question: *When nutrition and hydration are being supplied by artificial means to a patient in a “permanent vegetative state”, may they be discontinued when competent physicians judge with moral certainty that the patient will never recover consciousness?*

Response: No. A patient in a “permanent vegetative state” is a person with fundamental human dignity and must, therefore, receive ordinary and proportionate care which includes, in principle, the administration of water and food even by artificial means.

The Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI, at the Audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, approved these Responses, adopted in the Ordinary Session of the Congregation, and ordered their publication.

Rome, from the Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, August 1, 2007.

William Cardinal Levada
Prefect

Angelo Amato, S.D.B.
Titular Archbishop of Sila
Secretary