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**Persistent Vegetative State
and
Artificial Nutrition and Hydration**

Comparative Analysis

Below is a chart that compares the current understanding of many in Catholic health care of church teaching with what an initial and tentative reading of the papal allocution delivered at the Vatican March 20, 2004, contains. As with any papal allocution, the Holy Father's presentation requires careful study that could result in slight or substantive revision of this preliminary analysis. This summary is presented in order to encourage study and dialogue, and is presented in response to many requests for assistance in understanding the allocution.

| Church Teaching Until Now | Papal Allocution |
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| While care is always required, nutrition and hydration are not. | Nutrition and hydration, even medically administered, are defined as basic care (in contrast to medical treatment) and ordinary, and, therefore, morally obligatory. |
| Means basic to preserving life, including nutrition and hydration, can be either ordinary or extraordinary and, hence, either morally obligatory or not morally obligatory. | Means basic to preserving life are ordinary and, therefore, morally obligatory. |
| Food and water are ordinary to the extent that they provide reasonable hope of benefit and do not entail excessive burden. | Food and water are ordinary in that they provide nourishment and relieve suffering. |
| "Benefit" is understood in a broad sense. | "Benefit" is understood in a more narrow sense. |
| Appropriateness of particular means, including nutrition and hydration, are judged primarily by the patient in relationship to his/her overall condition (i.e., physical, psychological, spiritual, and social). | Appropriateness of nutrition and hydration appears less dependent on the overall condition/situation of the patient and the patient's judgment. |
| Financial costs can and do factor into treatment decisions. | Cost should not determine the moral equation. |

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| There is no declaration of a treatment being "a priori" ordinary. | Usually, artificial nutrition and hydration (ANH) are "a priori" ordinary. |
| Withdrawal of ANH is intended to avoid prolonging the dying process, to forgo disproportionate means, and/or to alleviate excessive burdens. | Withdrawal of ANH results in death by starvation or thirst and, if done knowingly and willingly, is euthanasia by omission. |
| The "object of the act" can be ceasing what no longer offers reasonable hope of benefit, or what imposes excessive burden. | Ordinarily, the "object of the act" can only be euthanasia by omission. |

| Other Assumptions Until Now | Papal Allocution |
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| Persistent vegetative state (PVS) is a relevant factor in determining whether a means is proportionate or disproportionate. | Ordinarily, PVS is not relevant in determining whether a means is proportionate or disproportionate. |
| The person dies of the underlying pathology, i.e., brain injury and the inability to swallow. | The person dies of starvation and thirst. |
| Forgoing ANH could be a recognition of the finiteness of human life. | Ordinarily, forgoing ANH constitutes suicide or euthanasia. |