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# Death Stalks the Innocent: The Terri Schiavo Case

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Writing in National Review, bio-ethicist Wesley J. Smith described the dilemma: “Thirty-nine year old Terri Schiavo may not live to see her 40th birthday. She is not terminally ill. She is not engaged in inherently dangerous activities. She is not on Death Row.” So, why is she about to die?

This sad story begins in 1990, when Terri suffered a heart failure at her home in St. Petersburg, Florida, and this led to a massive loss of oxygen to her brain. This oxygen deprivation led to severe brain damage, and she has been listed as suffering in a “persistent vegetative state” for several years.

Of course, the story is far more complicated than this. Immediately after her collapse, her husband, Michael Schiavo, cared for her and promised to be faithful to his marriage vows: “I believe in the vows I took with my wife, through sickness, in health, for richer or poor. I married my wife because I love her and I want to spend the rest of my life with her. I am going to do that.”

Then again, maybe not. According to press reports, Schiavo now has a girlfriend and wants to remarry. Wesley J. Smith documents the salient points of Terri Schiavo’s case: Michael Schiavo had filed a medical-malpractice lawsuit in which he claimed to be committed to care for Terri for the rest of her life. He also pledged to use the funds to provide support for Terri’s treatment. A jury awarded Michael \$1.3 million in the malpractice case, designating \$750,000 for this advanced care. According to Wesley Smith, the funds were not used for this purpose. Instead, Michael Schiavo ordered a “do-not-resuscitate” order placed on Terri’s medical chart. He has denied other forms of medical treatment—even medication for infections.

Wesley J. Smith is one of the nation’s prominent bio-medical ethicists. His interest in this case has everything to do with the sanctity of human life. That cannot be said for Michael Schiavo, who upon Terri’s death, would receive full control of her assets and trust fund.

Michael is now engaged to be married and is living with his girl friend, they already have one child and report that another is on the way. Plans for marriage are soon to follow Terri Schiavo’s death.

As Smith comments: “Despite the clear financial and personal conflicts of interest, Judge Greer repeatedly sides with Michael and against Terri’s father, mother, and siblings, who want to care for her for the rest of her life. This means that the man who might benefit financially from his wife’s death and who has clear personal reasons for wanting Terri to die continues to have almost sole say over how she is treated and cared for—or denied care—on a daily basis.” In spite of all of this, Judge George W. Greer, of the Sixth Judicial Circuit in Clearwater, Florida, ordered medical personnel to remove Terri’s feeding tube until her death.

Keep in mind that Terri’s mother and father want to care for her themselves and to take care of all that she will need, if only her husband will allow her to live. Mary and Bob Schindler have been fighting for years to keep their daughter alive.

Speaking of their son-in-law, Bob Schindler said this: "He is going to live with this a lot longer than we will. That is his conscience, and his girlfriend's conscience."

There is more than adequate reason to doubt the diagnosis that Terri is at a persistent vegetative state [PVS] at all. Legal documents filed by nurses who have cared for Terri report that she has responded, spoken, and even swallowed food. Videotapes of Terri posted on the Schindler's website show her responding to requests, opening and closing her eyes upon demand, and smiling. The videos can be seen by visiting [www.terrisfight.org](http://www.terrisfight.org).

Furthermore, Dr. William Hammesfahr, recognized as an expert in cases of PVS, testified that Terri is not really in a persistent vegetative state. Dr. Hammesfahr has also stated his belief that Terri's situation can improve through treatment.

As Smith explains, "If Michael Schiavo dehydrated a horse, he could go to jail. But getting a judge to order medical personnel to do the same thing to a human being is perfectly legal."

James A. Smith, Sr., Editor of the Florida Baptist Witness, reports that Michael Schiavo's attorney, George Felos, is "a noted euthanasia advocate." It is only fitting that Michael Schiavo's attorney should be the legal equivalent of Dr. Jack Kevorkian—the famous Dr. Death now serving time in a Michigan prison. [see Jim Smith's article at Baptist Press]

The euthanasia movement is fast gaining ground. The Terri Schiavo case is absolute proof that what has been styled as "voluntary" euthanasia is now turning into involuntary euthanasia. Terri's parents would assume full responsibility for her, but Michael is left as her legal guardian, and he has decided that she must die.

This tragic case reveals severe problems with our courts and prevailing laws. Death by starvation and dehydration is a form of cruelty we would not accept in the case of animals. How can the people of Florida allow Terri Schiavo to be treated with less dignity than an animal in the state shelter? The Culture of Death is about to claim a new victory.

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