



The English Speaking Catholic Council

Le conseil catholique d'expression anglaise

The recent report of the National Assembly's Select Committee on Dying With Dignity recommended opening the door to doctor-abetted killing in Quebec hospitals even if that means flouting federal laws against euthanasia and assisted suicide. On the positive side, the report calls for the state to develop palliative care facilities throughout Quebec, something that virtually all citizens welcome. The recommendation to introduce euthanasia and assisted suicide is much more controversial and is opposed by a large segment of the Quebec population. This was clear to the Select Committee. Both in its news conference and in its report, the Select Committee discussed palliative care recommendations first and only afterwards moved to the more contentious issues. Even more tellingly, euthanasia and assisted suicide were shrouded in euphemisms. Quebecers should not be lulled into a false sense of security and wellbeing by soothing language.

Until recently, what is now styled "dying with dignity" was openly called "mercy killing". The stark truth of the phrase caused it to be replaced by an invention called the "right to die". When the absurdity of calling death a "right" became too obvious, the phraseology of "dying with dignity" was rushed into use. The crass implication that people at the end of life lack human dignity has forced further yet another slippery soap neologism: medical aid in dying.

It is the chosen phrase of the Select Committee because it manages to be simultaneously devoid of real meaning yet sound like something any decent person would support. As Montreal geriatric specialist Dr. Catherine Ferrier argued in a recent debate on the committee report, physicians always assist patients at the hour of death.

"What we don't want to do," Dr. Ferrier said, "is kill them."

There is a world of difference, she noted, between comforting the dying and getting comfortable with deliberately administering death. Dr. Ferrier asked bluntly why her opponent in the debate, an accountant named Wanda Morris who directs the organization Dying with Dignity, is so squeamish about using the terms assisted suicide, euthanasia and killing.

"If it's not killing what is it? How else can you accurately and clearly describe the act of injecting a lethal substance into someone's bloodstream with the intent of causing death?" Dr. Ferrier demanded.

Issue avoidance is essential to the advancement of euthanasia, and abounds in the Select Committee report, for the same reason it is beloved of all propagandists. You can't confuse

people by telling them plainly what you are proposing. Incrementalism works only by draining meaning from language so that what is said takes on the quality of its opposite.

Killing the suffering sounds so, well, murderous and morally reprehensible. Medically aiding the dying sounds so much more, well, soft. It is. It's soft soap, which is exactly what is being peddled in the Select Committee report.

What's critical is that Quebecers themselves saw through this strategy during the committee's public hearing phase. Nearly two-thirds of those who presented briefs spoke out vehemently against any opening for euthanasia in Quebec. Indeed, 98 per cent rejected assisted suicide.

So what did the committee do? It ignored the voices of the Quebecers it was commissioned to hear, and relied on an anonymous web poll done before public consultations even began. The poll was so flawed that one question was withdrawn because of public complaints. Yet this "research" – not the public hearings - formed the evidentiary basis for the committee report.

With such duplicity in the air, no wonder so many of our citizens, journalists and politicians are either confused or misguided on the question of euthanasia, or upset with our political representatives for their dishonesty. One also has the feeling that the Select Committee spent one million dollars of taxpayers' money to fund a junket to Europe for some of its members, hearings across the province, and a severely flawed online poll, knowing all along that they were going to recommend doctor-assisted suicide in any case.

The English Speaking Catholic Council and the community it represents adamantly oppose any effort to introduce policies aimed at terminating the lives of our citizens under the guise of a gesture of mercy. Let's call a spade a spade.

Such policies and practices would be utterly dangerous for our democracy and especially for the lives of the men and women, and eventually the children as well, of Quebec.

Mary McDaid, President

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