

“Medical-aid-in-dying”

It is time to act before euthanasia becomes “appropriate care” within Quebec’s health system.

The Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF) duly notes the filing of the Ménard Report, which a committee of legal experts presented to Véronique Hivon, Québec Minister responsible for the Dying with dignity portfolio, on 15 January 2013, regarding the implementation of the recommendations of the Select Committee on Dying with Dignity.

While supporting the proposal of the Ménard Report to generalize palliative care –which is the only truly humane and respectful answer to the needs of the dying and their families – COLF strongly objects to the idea of “medical-aid-in-dying” and is deeply concerned about the legal, ethical and social ramifications such a practice would have.

The Report perpetuates the confused language of the Select Committee, repeatedly playing with words in such a way as to disguise the reality under discussion. The truth is that “medical-aid-in dying” is synonymous with *euthanasia* – a deadly practice that goes hand in hand with assisted suicide. Make no mistake: this is about killing voluntarily, thus ending a person’s life.

In the name of an incomplete concept of “personal autonomy”, the Ménard Report confirms the recommendations of the Select Committee and clearly opens the door to euthanasia. However, the Belgian experience represents a sobering warning. Visiting Quebec last November, Dr. Catherine Dopchie, a Belgian oncologist responsible for a palliative care unit, stated that she did not believe in the effectiveness of proposed safeguards. She argues that the practice of euthanasia, which Belgians now consider “an ethical and quite defensible option”, “cannot be governed.”

The tenors of “medical-aid-in-dying” also want us to believe that there is a strong social consensus in favor of “assisted dying”. However, this is not so: 60% of the individuals and groups that made submissions to the Select Committee on Dying with Dignity opposed euthanasia and assisted suicide.

Nevertheless, in as much as the Government of Québec intends to bring in a bill on “medical-aid-in-dying” by June of this year, anyone who still believes in the first of all human rights — the right to life — has the responsibility to take action. As citizens of a country that claims to be civilized, all people of good have the right and the duty to counter any attempt to legalize euthanasia and assisted suicide, and, instead, to promote palliative care and true compassion.

The media, together with every member of Québec's National Assembly, need to hear from constituents who are opposed to the bill soon to be tabled by the Marois Government. If passed, this bill will bypass the Criminal Code of Canada, which clearly prohibits both euthanasia and assisted suicide.

COLF recommends that concerned individuals consult three organizations involved in end of life issues whose perspectives respect the inalienable dignity of every human person: the physicians alliance, "Total Refusal of Euthanasia" (www.totalrefusal.blogspot.ca) whose manifesto can be signed; "Vivre dans le Dignité" (www.vivredignite.com and www.vivredignite.blogspot.ca) whose manifesto can also be signed; and the "Euthanasia Prevention Coalition" (www.epcc.ca). COLF also offers a series of documents to guide reflection on this theme (www.colf.ca).

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The Catholic Organization for Life and Family is co-sponsored by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus.