

Thoughts on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

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End-Of-Life Issues

It is no exaggeration that end-of-life issues are plagued with great emotion and sentiments that often cloud better judgement. After all, what decent human being would want anyone to suffer? However, decisions based on emotions are often regretted as the bigger picture is often overlooked in the heat of emotions. Yet perhaps the “biggest picture” is to be gained when we see human life from God’s perspective, a unique and sacred gift, created in the image of God. Or do we simply see people as just one of the many forms of life on earth? We kill and eat millions of animals. We euthanize those that are unwanted. Yet this how we are to treat our fellow man? Is this in keeping with God’s command to love our neighbour as ourselves? How we view each other, ultimately rests on how we view God. So why not simply euthanize people when they can no longer contribute? Why not dispose of them as we do unwanted dogs? The threat and temptation to treat others that way is very strong. Only our shared belief in the sacredness of human life will prevent us from sliding down the road to this despotic level that, unfortunately, is not so rare.

The Cost of Living

A utilitarian society that views people only in terms of money will ultimately make decisions based on economics. Surely it is far cheaper to dispense an extra dose of drugs to speed up the dying process than to provide special care for perhaps many years. What will prevent us from putting a price tag on human life? With a commitment to the value of each human life eventually only the rich will be able to pay for their life. The poor will be the first to go. What will prevent our society from reaching those depths? How much money will I need to stay alive?

A Lesson from Capital Punishment

In order to gain some perspective on the end-of-life issues it might be worthwhile to learn a lesson from how our country has dealt with capital punishment. We have banned capital punishment outright, even for those who have committed gross and heinous crimes against our citizens, including children, largely based on a singular idea. We have outlawed capital punishment because of the perceived possibility that an innocent person might be put to death. Thus we have declared to any would-be murderer that regardless of how many innocent people you kill, or how many women you rape, or how many children you molest, your life is protected! We guarantee it in advance! All this based on the fear that one innocent person might die.

Applying this then to end-of-life issues it would seem very appropriate to also decide, that since we cannot guarantee that an innocent person will not be put to death, we must also outlaw euthanasia and assisted-suicide. To do otherwise would be highly hypocritical, for in the former instance we protect all murderers for the sake of one innocent while in the latter we would be willing to put to death many innocent for the sake of the few for whom it might be “justified”.

The Exception Should Not be The Rule

We have become adept at postulating worst case scenarios and trying to establish rules from them. Many have heard of the unlikely situation where a number of people are adrift in a boat at sea but there

is only enough water for a few days. The question is asked as to what each participant would do if they were in that situation.

Unfortunately these exceptions end up becoming precedents for the rule. For example, since we do not want to deny a woman who has become pregnant through rape, access to abortion, we have effectively avoided making any laws regarding abortion and have washed our hands of the matter, regardless of how many innocent lives might be ended. The same situation will undoubtedly happen with regards to euthanasia. The dreaded spectre of failing to end the life of a person in great suffering will lead us, torturously, down the road where we will simply wash our hands with regards to the death of anyone with a life-threatening illness. And rather than being the protector of the unalienable Right to Life the state will turn a blind eye and becomes complicit in the death of the innocent. How can Quebec guarantee that this will not happen?

Hypocrisy

Hunters are taught repeatedly that if they are not sure what they are hunting is a deer they must not fire their weapon to prevent accident death of a fellow human. Why then do we not apply the same logic consistently to other life issues? Let me contrast two controversial issues:

- Capital punishment – banned outright because an innocent person might die
- Abortion – permitted outright even if innocent children die

Why do we go out of our way to protect murderers when we go out of our way NOT to protect our future generation? Is there no double-standard here?

So with regards to euthanasia/Assisted-suicide which will we choose; to protect life or to promote death? If we are not sure that innocent people will die we must ban the practice outright! May God help us!

The Challenge of a Secular Society

Modern Quebec society has declared itself secular. By that I mean that it has decided to exclude God from the paradigm of modern existence. It falls then upon “society” to act as “god” instead. Thus when faced with issues of grave significance, such as end-of-life issues, it must act alone and assume a role that has not turned out too well for societies that took on that burden.

Thomas Jefferson understood well that acting as ‘god’ is fraught with great risk. That is why he included these words in the Declaration of Independence of the new United States of America. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” (One will note especially the right to Life, not death!)

Mr. Jefferson understood full well that it was *not* the State that granted these unalienable rights but that the State’s role was to ensure that the rights conferred by the Creator were protected. Many tragedies have befallen societies, especially in the 20th century, where governments took upon themselves the role of creator and assumed that the State itself was the endower of Rights. It became an easy thing thereafter to believe that since the State had given those rights it could also take those rights away.

The late Nobel Prize winner Alexander Solzhenitsyn, when asked about the millions of people who had perished in Russia during the Soviet era stated, "Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened."¹ It is no small thing to make decisions regarding the lives of people and to leave God out of the equation.

Why God Matters

One of the most fundamental questions humans can ask is summarized as "Did God make man, or did Man make god?" If God did indeed make man then man is accountable to his Creator. If man made god then man can do whatever he wishes as he is accountable to no one save himself. As someone has said "Without God everything is permissible." History is rife with those who believed themselves to be above any accountability. By force of arms, terror and deception these dictators manipulated and massacred millions for as long as they were in power they were untouchable. The lust for power, wealth and prestige has corrupted many a good man and led many, also deluded, to their destruction and great remorse. These, standing in the ashes of destruction, have asked "How did this happen?" The answer is simple, "Man had forgotten God". Is Quebec destined to do likewise? Arrogance and pride are marks of a society on the verge of making great and deadly errors. Instead, learning lessons from so many others, we should humbly seek God for wisdom and direction so that might do what is right in the His eyes. End-of-life questions demand this kind of humble attitude.

Respectfully submitted

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¹ In 1983, Alexander I. Solzhenitsyn, winner of the 1970 Nobel Prize for Literature, gave an address in London in which he attempted to explain why so much evil had befallen his people: "Over a half century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of old people offer the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: 'Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened.' Since then I have spent well-nigh 50 years working on the history of our revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by that upheaval. But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous revolution that swallowed up some 60 million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: 'Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened'.