

November 6, 2020

To whom it may concern

Bill C-7 is a disservice to the people of Canada, especially to those most vulnerable to believing that their life has no more meaning. One responsibility in being part of the human family is that we help each other recognize our inherent and intrinsic worth and value regardless of our lack of productivity or potential burden (financial or otherwise) that we might feel that we have become to our society.

I would like to affirm that I fully support the following statement from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops concerning Bill C-7 (all underlining is mine, for emphasis):

Statement by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to the re-tabling of Bill C-7: “An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)”

The Catholic Bishops of Canada remain steadfastly opposed to Bill C-7, which further expands euthanasia and assisted suicide in Canada, which the government and courts have euphemistically called “medical assistance in dying” (“MAID”). We also remain deeply troubled that the Federal Government chose not to appeal the Quebec Superior Court “*Truchon v. Attorney General of Canada*” ruling which requires the eligibility criteria for euthanasia and assisted suicide to be expanded by removing the “reasonable foreseeability of natural death” criterion. This decision not to appeal prompted Bill C-7 and bypassed the “parliamentary review of ...provisions [for “MAID”] and of the state of palliative care in Canada to commence at the start of the fifth year following the day on which [the Act] receives Royal Assent,” as provided in the original 2016 Act to amend the Criminal Code. This review, which the government had agreed to before introducing new amendments, has yet to occur.

Bill C-7 goes far beyond the *Truchon* ruling by relinquishing and broadening some of the remaining “safeguards.” As we have previously noted, one example of this involves allowing patients whose death is “reasonably foreseeable” to waive their final consent to receiving euthanasia by allowing such a decision to be made through an advance directive. This reckless expansion and that of other eligibility criteria has been justified by the Government on the basis of an online consultation which took place over a mere two weeks between 13 and 27 January 2020, which the Bishops of Canada have denounced as questionable, biased and rushed. The Government, in its own “What We Heard Report”, mentions that it received “thousands” of “form responses” that “were opposed to MAID in general” as well as other responses “opposed to MAID”, even though the question of whether Canadians agreed with euthanasia and assisted suicide in the form of “MAID” was never explicitly asked.¹ It

¹ Department of Justice, “What We Heard Report: A Public Consultation on Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID)”, March 2020. “Summary of comments: Theme 5 - Opposition to MAID”.
<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/ad-am/wwh-cqnae/p2.html#s2-6-5>

is hoped that in a democratic country, a much more wide-ranging, objective and fair consultation of Canadians would be enacted without further delay.

In 2019, the World Medical Association reaffirmed its long-standing policy of opposition to euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. Over 70 of Canada's leading disability rights organizations and advocate stated they were "deeply troubled" with the expansion of "MAID", and that the Quebec Superior Court's decision would "entrench stereotypes and exacerbate stigma for Canadians with disabilities". With even further disregard, the Government of Canada sidelined and ignored the stark apprehensions brought forward by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities concerning the implementation of "Medical Assistance in Dying" in Canada from a disability perspective. And most recently here in Canada, more than 50 religious leaders, including Jewish, Muslim and Christians, released an open letter to all Canadians in opposition to Bill C-7.

The pastoral experience of the Bishops has shown that patients are more likely to request euthanasia/assisted suicide when their pain is not properly managed by good quality palliative care, when their dependence on others to provide assistance and support is not adequately met, or when they are socially marginalized. Palliative care, which has yet to become fully available and accessible in our own country, offers a compelling answer – the only respectful, comprehensive and ethical alternative to what the government is trying to address through the legalization of euthanasia and assisted suicide. Palliative care seeks to alleviate the pain, loneliness, fear, distress, and despair which can lead individuals, where no such emotional, psychological and spiritual support is available, to the tragic failure that the option or choice of euthanasia and assisted suicide represents. Palliative care supports and respects the dignity of the person and is anchored in the recognition that human life has an objective value independent of illness or life situation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has painfully revealed that fear, distress and despair are not uncommon realities among our fellow Canadians and family members in assisted living and senior residences. The Canadian Armed Forces reported "horrific conditions" in some of the long-term care facilities in which they were called to serve.² The Prime Minister himself referred to the situation as "deeply disturbing."³ How can the Federal Government in good conscience expand the eligibility to euthanasia and assisted suicide in Canada when our country and its citizens are still unable to offer basic human care to the elderly and dying?

The proposed legislation of Bill C-7 remains deeply flawed, unjust, and morally pernicious. The Bishops of Canada call on Catholics and all people of good will to make their voices heard in opposition to the Bill. Similarly, all Canadian legislators

² Infestations, sedation and neglect: Military report details 'horrific' living conditions" by Karen Howlett, Jill Mahoney and Laura Stone, *Globe and Mail*, 26 May 2020 (updated 27 May 2020). <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-infestations-sedation-and-neglect-military-report-details-horrific/>

³ Ibid.

should recall that no law that permits the taking of innocent human life can ever be morally justified. Such a law would always violate the intrinsic dignity of the human person. The recent letter *Samaritanus bonus* by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith clearly summarizes the position of the Catholic Church on this matter:

It is gravely unjust to enact laws that legalize euthanasia or justify and support suicide, invoking the false right to choose a death improperly characterized as respectable only because it is chosen. Such laws strike at the foundation of the legal order: the right to life sustains all other rights, including the exercise of freedom. The existence of such laws deeply wound human relations and justice, and threaten the mutual trust among human beings. The legitimization of assisted suicide and euthanasia is a sign of the degradation of legal systems.⁴

We firmly support and uphold most categorically the inherent dignity of each and every human person as well as their inalienable right to life which the Government must respect and protect as in any democracy. Elected public officials should not avoid, shy away from or delay sincere dialogue and constructive consultations with faith and community leaders, and others, who could bring to the common reflection and societal discernment a valid perspective worthy of respect and consideration for the good of all Canadians.

+ Richard Gagnon
Archbishop of Winnipeg and
President of the Canadian Conference
of Catholic Bishops
20 October 2020

I thank you for your serious consideration of this matter. It is common for people at various points in their life to struggle for reasons to live. As a Canadian society we need to help them discover why their life *does* have meaning, rather than to “agree” with them that they would be better off dead. This has always been the rationale behind suicide hotlines, etc. Yes, it takes more effort to accompany someone through the feelings of wanting to end their lives, but let us not give up on them. Rather, let us help them to discover why their life *does* still have meaning and worth. Our fellow Canadians are worth it. Let us work to protect each other when we are in our most vulnerable moments. Thank you for your consideration to this brief.

Sincerely,
Michael Weitzl

⁴ Letter *Samaritanus bonus* on the care of persons in the critical and terminal phases of life. Section V.
<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/09/22/200922a.html>