

# Dignity & Compassion: Hospice Care vs Euthanasia

*And to this people you shall say: ‘Thus says the LORD:  
Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death. (Jeremiah 21:8)*

## 1. ORIGINS OF HOSPICE

- **Medieval**

A Hospice was a lodging for weary, ill or dying travellers on long journeys (like pilgrims to the Holy Land). They were owned and operated by religious institutions like the Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem. After the occupation of Jerusalem by the First Crusade, a group of knights discovered the hospice run by Brother Gerard in 1099. This hospice used advanced techniques for the day. It kept clean facilities, each resident slept in an individual bed and food dishes were not shared, all of which led to a superior survival rate. The group of knights joined in the hospice’s charitable works, and this would grow into the Sovereign Order of St. John. In 1113 Pope Pascal II recognized this Knight – Hospitaller order as a self-governing organization.<sup>1</sup>

- **Modern Day**

The modern day hospice movement began around 1948 in a London suburb under physician Dame Cicely Mary Saunders. During her time caring for the terminally ill, Saunders wanted to share what she had learned to create a better way of dying. Before founding St. Christopher’s Hospice (1968) she presented several lectures and wrote many articles and books about caring for the dying. In 1969 Elisabeth Kubler-Ross published “On Death and Dying” which would go on to influence both the hospice and funeral professions. It focused on a more personal treatment for an individual’s death, as opposed to a purely clinical setting.

- **Canada**

The hospice movement began in Canada in 1974 with the creation of palliative care units in the hospital setting at Winnipeg’s St. Boniface General Hospital and the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal. Dr. Balfour Mount, a physician who had survived two personal bouts with cancer, took his end-of-life training with Dame Saunders in England before becoming the founding director in Montreal. He is the one who came up with the term palliative (to alleviate or make less severe) care.

Canada, while it did have volunteer based hospice societies for the most part went the way of a hospital based palliative care approach due to the high costs associated with creating separate hospice facilities, and our underlying national ethos of state funded medicine.

## 2. PURPOSE OF HOSPICE IN THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

By the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century specialization in western medicine was advancing rapidly and new treatments were proliferating. There was an increased emphasis on cure and rehabilitation. Dying patients or “hopeless cases” were often seen as a failure of medical research and practice. At the same time death in the hospital rather than at home was becoming the norm. According to Dr. Robert Orr of the Christian Medical Dental Society, 90% of North Americans today die slowly from debilitating disease (organ failure, malignancy, dementia, etc). Because of the drawn out process and the use of high-tech interventions families are often unavailable or simply unable to care for dying relatives at home, meaning 70-75% of people will die in institutions.<sup>2</sup>

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1 <https://www.sosjinternational.org/history/>

2 Yow, Jesse ed. Faith and Science in a Skeptical Age. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis. 2014. 215-218.

Considering these changes and the continuing pace of change, does medical technology always improve people's lives? Though technology has lengthened our lives, it has also prolonged the suffering and increased the isolation of too many people.<sup>3</sup>

Hospice recognizes that the dying process is not a failure of the medical system, but is a part of the normal process of living. It focuses, therefore, on enhancing the quality of remaining life. People who are dying need only two things (this according to the American Medical Association): good symptom control (palliative care) and human presence. At the end of life care is emphasized over cure, and being a servant over being a saviour. Pain management is given top priority in patient comfort care. As modern hospice continues to evolve, it won't simply be about preventing pain. It will include a well-rounded approach that focuses on comfort, spirituality, relationships, and personal development right up until the final moments. It isn't about a proper death but a meaningful life.

[Anna's Story]

Many hospice workers see MAiD as directly conflicting with the philosophy of hospice and palliative care. Consider this statement from the website of Hospice Palliative Care Ontario: "Quality hospice palliative care *neither hastens death* nor prolongs life. The goal of hospice palliative care is to improve the quality of life for patients and their families facing problems associated with life-threatening illness."

But the times are a-changing! As Jonathan Breslin wrote in a 2017 article "Should Residential Hospices Opt Out of Providing Assistance in Dying?" "On its own this reason isn't very convincing. After all, medicine has evolved a great deal over its history and palliative care can evolve too"<sup>4</sup> That evolution of "care" as he and many others would define it demands the inclusion of Medical Assistance in Dying.

### 3. HOSPICE AND MAiD IN THE CURRENT CULTURE

The "Fourth annual report on Medical Assistance in Dying in Canada 2022" was released this week, and the numbers are staggering. Over 13,200 Canadians died by assisted suicide in 2022. This is a 31.2 percent increase from 2021 and brings the total number of deaths by lethal injection in Canada since 2016 to 44,958. All of this is unfolding in the midst of a healthcare crisis in which we are incapable of offering comprehensive psychiatric services, suicide prevention, or palliative beds. As we have seen from the conveyor belt of horror stories being reported around the world, many Canadians are opting for state-sanctioned and state-funded suicide simply because they feel they have no other choice. In many cases, "MAiD" is the only thing they're eligible for.<sup>5</sup>

And it is not just an option to be explored, but sometimes a mandate to be enforced by weight of the law. In December of 2017 the Fraser Valley health authority in British Columbia ordered all the healthcare facilities it oversaw, including hospices, to offer MAiD. The Delta Hospice Society, which ran the Irene Thomas Hospice in Delta, BC, objected. An ugly battle ensued between the health authorities and the hospice society. Courts became involved. The matter split the local community. Pro-euthanasia activists became involved, trying to take over governance of the hospice society by getting the courts to redefine membership criteria so that anyone, near or far, could become a voting member. Their plan backfired when the pro-life board launched its own membership drive and recruited a higher number of pro-life citizens from across the country. In response the province went on to withdraw \$1.5 million in annual funding to the society and then terminated the lease for the land that the hospice was built on and evicted the hospice's residents. The health authority then took over the running of the hospice with new rules that allowed MAiD on the premise. To this day Dying with Dignity

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3 Ibid.

4 SHOULD RESIDENTIAL HOSPICES OPT-OUT OF PROVIDING ASSISTANCE IN DYING?  
<https://hospitalnews.com/residential-hospices-opt-providing-assistance-dying/>

5 Euthanasia skyrocketed in Canada last year and is set to get worse under Trudeau <https://www.lifesitenews.com/blogs/euthanasia-skyrocketed-canada-trudeau/>

Canada seeking to pressure British Columbia law makers to mandate Catholic hospitals and Hospices provide MAiD.<sup>6</sup>

Euthanasia in Quebec has reached seven percent of deaths, the highest in the world. Onto this background Quebec has brought forward Bill 38 which among other things proposes a change that hospices will no longer be able to exclude MAiD from the care it provides, with some exceptions. Currently, only 6 of the 37 hospices in Quebec do not offer medical assistance in dying.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4. DYING WITH DIGNITY: ARGUMENTS FOR MAID IN THE HOSPICE SETTING

- **It is Expedient.**

It's only logical, you already have the dying people on site, you have health care providers with the necessary training on hand. You have a well oiled arrangement with local hospitals, doctors, and funeral homes. It just makes sense to keep it all in one place. Don't you want to make things easier for the government? Yet, Easier is rarely better. And Expedient almost always leads to future regrets.

**(Isaiah 55:8-9)** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

- **We wouldn't treat our animals this way!**

No, but people are not animals. Human beings are created in the image of God. Animals are not. People have mental and spiritual needs (and capabilities!) that animals do not.

*"In Canada, we fund no-kill animal shelters with pride to allow animals sanctuary from death. In places like British Columbia and Quebec, we are not allowed to have no-kill hospice palliative care facilities that refuse to allow euthanasia."* Angelina Ireland<sup>8</sup>

**(1 Corinthians 6:19-20)** <sup>19</sup>Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, <sup>20</sup>for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

- **It helps prevent the unnecessary prolonging of life.**

Who defines what is necessary or unnecessary? On what basis and by what parameters is this defined? While this sounds good to a hurting heart, it is terribly vague language to base decisions and policy upon.

**(Psalm 31:14-15)** <sup>14</sup>But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." <sup>15</sup>My times are in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!

- **Certain life is not worth living.**

Quality of life is a moving target. What gave value to your life when you were in your 20's? How about now? And who gets to define what is "quality worth living" Would you entrust that to your younger self? Why then entrust it to another who isn't you?<sup>9</sup> What you consider an unbearable suffering now might be very different tomorrow when you know different things or have had different experiences.

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6 Hospice Society President Warns euthanasia lobby is 'going after' Catholics in Canada.

<https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/hospice-society-president-warns-euthanasia-lobby-is-going-after-catholics-in-canada/>

7 Quebec health minister introduces bill to expand access to medical assistance in dying <https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/quebec-health-minister-introduces-bill-to-expand-access-to-medical-assistance-in-dying-1.5918715>

8 Pro-life hospice launches 'Guardian Angels' program to help patients avoid euthanasia trap

<https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/pro-life-hospice-launches-guardian-angels-program-to-help-patients-avoid-euthanasia-trap/>

9 How Will You Say Goodbye To Someone You Love? Euthanasia Prevention Coalition. S6

**(2 Corinthians 12:9-10)** *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong*

- **Not wanting to be a burden.**

This is a moral inversion of the very concept of compassion. The one actually suffering does not bear the responsibility to alleviate the potential suffering of those who are not! There is never a “duty to die” only to love and share the burdens of one another. Sometimes you bring the bearing, sometimes you bring the burden. Sometimes you give, sometimes you receive. That is how God’s love is shared.

**(Galatians 6:2)** *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

- **Suffering leads to an undignified death.**

Death with dignity is not an event – it is a process. People do not generally die with any more dignity than they have lived with. Dignity is not injected into someone’s bloodstream when they are at their lowest point.<sup>10</sup>

**(1 Corinthians 10:12-14)** <sup>12</sup>*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. <sup>13</sup>No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. <sup>14</sup>Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.*

[Bill’s story]

#### **4. SERVING WITH COMPASSION: CHRISTIAN ETHICS SURROUNDING DEATH AND DYING**

- **Dignity in Scriptures**

Dignity “worthy” can’t be given. It is created by our attitudes and actions. In other words, dignity is a character trait. It comes from being worthy of respect, regardless (or precisely because of) external circumstances. In the Scriptures it is not a foreign concept, but it is a very rare one. In fact it needs several different words to give us the scant few times it is found in both the Old and New Testaments. And in not one of the cases is “dignity” the primary definition of the word in question.

‘υφος – sky, height, exalted, dignity [Luke 16:15]

σεμνοτης – serious, good character, proper conduct [1Tim. 2:2, 3:4; Ti 2:7]

מרום – high, lofty, height, dignity [Ecc. 10:6] (\*1/54)

נאש – raised, elevated, lifted up (same root as leprous scabs) [Gen. 49:3; Hab 1:7] (\*2/14)

One might argue that the very first temptation to sin (in the Garden of Eden) was a devilish call to dignity. (“God is denying yours. Eat this to take it back.”)

- **Compassion in Scriptures**

In comparison, the concept of compassion is found all over the scriptures. Compassion comes from the Latin roots which mean to “suffer with, or to suffer alongside of.” Most obviously the life and ministry of Jesus was marked by (is defined by!) a divine compassion. And so the life of His disciples should be focused on similar compassion, no matter what it requires of us, or how undignified the cost to us.

למח – commiserate

רחם – have compassion/ mercy

Σπλαγκνιζομαι – sympathy (a yearning in the bowels – also as in Gen 43:30)

- **ALL Life is a Gift of God**

Every single human being is created in the image of God! We have a value unlike any other part of creation. God breathes His own Spirit into Man to give him life. We are beings of Spirit as well as flesh and blood. Part of our unique value and place within creation is shown in that Jesus shared our human nature. He became one of us to redeem all of creation. He shared in our joys and in our griefs and sorrows as a human being. And, of course, all human life has been redeemed by Christ's sacrifice – therefore every single life (and every single minute of it) is precious to Him.

- **The Fifth Commandment**

We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbour in his body but help and support him in every physical need. Help and support. That means protecting life, even to the end. Cause no harm, do not say or do anything that endangers another person. No despising certain groups of people as less worthy of our help and support (ie the dying). It also means speaking and acting in every way to help and defend our neighbour, to show Kindness and Compassion, and support those who are in need (including the dying).

*[Dorothy's Story]*

- **Death is already defeated! (The Baptism Connection)**

Healing for the sick and dying begins with repentance and faith, knowing that through His suffering death and resurrection, Christ has won the forgiveness of our sins. Therefore, we go to the cross of Jesus Christ not to learn how to deal with suffering at the end of life but to know that by faith in Christ our suffering is not in vain.<sup>11</sup> In fact, Paul says that we can rejoice in our suffering because we know that our suffering is not the end for which God created us. He will sustain us in the midst of it so that we may partake of all He has for us in Christ.<sup>12</sup>

God is in control of our lives. Comfort for the dying and their loved ones comes from the God of grace. We rejoice knowing that in our dying, God's Word declares that we are new creatures in the resurrected Christ.<sup>13</sup> Holy Baptism grants us that new identity in Christ. Since we have been baptized into His death and resurrection, we, too, live a new life in Christ. Comfort care begins with the cross of Jesus Christ and continues throughout our earthly life until we stand before the Lord in our heavenly home.<sup>14</sup>

Whether as an infant or later in life, Baptism works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare. Baptized Christians know that Christ walks with them, bringing the hope that is in Him. Baptism tells us that we are in Christ and that physical death is a gain.<sup>15</sup>

*[Art's story]*

Death is not a friend to be embraced. It is the final enemy. But death is also not something to run from for it is defeated. Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

## **5. DIGNITY OR COMPASSION: THE PROBLEMS OF INTEGRATING MAID OR EUTHANASIA INTO HOSPICE**

- **Confuses the Person (dying) with the Problem (pain/suffering etc).**

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11 Yow, Jesse. 218

12 Ibid. 218

13 Ibid. 218

14 Ibid. 218

15 Ibid. 218

Conventional medications such as morphine and other narcotics can control (by some professional estimates) up to 97% of all pain. This of course also leads to the grey area of pain management and loss of function and/or hastening of death. Which is worth a whole separate discussion. The underlying principle is simple enough. We care for the person by removing the pain. We don't treat the pain by removing the person.

Every person in hospice is still alive. Still living. Still People! They are still making new memories, sharing experiences, giving and receiving love and compassion. They are still very much who they have always been. They are not less of a person, nor are they simply a problem to be dealt with expediently. Suffering in any of its forms doesn't change the value of a human life. Indeed, suffering can bring us closer to one another and to God and His Son Jesus who shared in our suffering so we might share in His glory!

**(Revelation 2:10)** *Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

- **Destroys Trust.**

It places the power over life and death into the hands of another person, a power that can be abused by the individual or the state. When someone has the right or "duty" to directly cause the death of another the question becomes "who decides and why?"

**(Matthew 5:37)** Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

- **Causes fear and doubt among the most vulnerable.**

Euthanasia and assisted suicide directly threaten the lives of vulnerable people. Very few times in life are more vulnerable than at the death bed. Both for the one dying and their family. Those suffering from chronic physical or mental pain are more susceptible to the power of suggestion and are therefore less autonomous.<sup>16</sup>

**(Jeremiah 22:3)** Thus says the LORD: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place.

- **It doesn't remove suffering ... only transfers it to others.**

While the one facing death may be able to avoid some parts of the suffering by choosing MAiD, those who love them, those who must take part, those who are left to deal with all that comes after the assisted suicide often grieve in ways they simply can't imagine. Death leads to one kind of grief ...killing to a very different kind. The society that has accepted death as a treatment for difficult medical conditions and abandons its vulnerable members from the care that they need is a society that has become hard and callous.<sup>17</sup>

**(Luke 10:34-35)** He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'

- **It denies the Hippocratic oath, and makes hospice care providers complicit in killing.**

**(Genesis 9:5-6)** <sup>5</sup>*And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.* <sup>6</sup>*"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.*

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. S2-3

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. S2

The point is to remind ourselves that euthanasia is not palliative care! One way treats suffering with compassion and care. The other ends a person's suffering by taking their life. They do not and cannot belong together under the same roof. Caring and compassion, not killing in the name of dignity, is the only God-pleasing response to suffering.

## 6. HOW YOU CAN HELP!

- **Speak up for Compassion not killing**

Talk to your political representatives. Talk to friends and neighbours. Talk to your pastor and fellow church members. Make sure you are heard. Get to know the people running your local hospice. Talk to them about your concerns too.

**(Proverbs 31:8-9)** <sup>8</sup>*Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. <sup>9</sup>Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.*

- **Volunteer to show compassion!**

Talk is a good start, but even better is to put your money (time) where your mouth is. Volunteer to lead by example. Share your God-given compassion with the dying and their families. There are plenty of ways you can help out, even if you are nervous or unsure.

**(Matthew 25:34-40)** <sup>34</sup>*Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. <sup>35</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'* <sup>37</sup>*Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? <sup>38</sup>And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? <sup>39</sup>And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'* <sup>40</sup>*And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'*

- **Live a life of Forgiveness!**

So many people in our culture have been fed a never-ending diet of satanic and anti-human lies. While we must stand strong to defend life – even in places of dying – we must also do so while being patient, kind and forgiving. Christ died for these misguided ones, these hurting and scared ones, these suffering ones too!

**(Ephesians 4:32)** Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

- **Live a life that celebrates life!**

Never miss the opportunity to celebrate with those around you every milestone and every accomplishment in life (both yours and theirs). Send a note. Make a visit. Share a meal. Go for an outing. Make all life at every stage, and in every situation, worth living!

**(Luke 15:31-32)** And he said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."

*<sup>7</sup>For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. <sup>8</sup>For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. <sup>9</sup>For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. (Rom. 14:7-9)*

Comments and/or Questions?