

## Losing Canada's Humanity

—Peter Stockland—

Within 14 months, Quebec doctors will almost certainly begin intentionally killing their patients across the province.

They will deliberately inject the dying, the depressed, and the distraught with lethal drugs as a form of legislatively approved medical treatment.

Neither the time frame nor the wording of the preceding sentences are figurative or alarmist. They express the primary recommendations of the Quebec legislature's Select Committee on Dying With Dignity. Without a massive public outcry against them, they will be adopted and implemented by June, 2013.

The malfeasance of the elected officials responsible is breathtaking. More shocking still is the response of the public, which can be accurately described as no response at all. Somnambulant, it seems, Canada is about to become a country where the doctor slips the needle into grandma's arm, and the orderlies come and cart her corpse away. Such language may sound harsh. It should. It is the reality we all face. We cannot, must not, soften it with euphemism.

Those outside Quebec who think this technocratic horror will never come to their province or town better think again. The very process advocated by the select committee guarantees the spread of the Quebec medical homicide model. It calls for the provincial cabinet to ignore federal criminal law by invoking the province's constitutional powers over the administration of both justice and health care. A simple ministerial directive would re-define medicalized killing as medical care. Another would direct prosecutors to refrain from laying charges in qualifying cases of health care homicide.

Such directives would be a frontal assault on the federal government's sole prerogative over the Criminal Code. They would represent perhaps the most serious unraveling yet of our constitutional order. Prime Ministers past would never have accepted such provocation.

Yet the current majority occupants of the Canadian government have been no more responsive to the threat, even as an exercise in turf protection, than has the general public. Prime Minister Harper was quick to protest the Ontario Court of Appeal's recent decision striking down Canada's prostitution laws. There has been nary a peep from the PM nor his ministers on the Quebec select committee report. Sex got their attention. Death, nothing.

The silence all around this issue is as baffling as it is distressing. Is it merely because it has been classified as a "social conservative" agenda item and that, as colleague Rob Jouston observed in a blog post last week, automatically puts it beyond the political pale in Canada? If so, then it is not only individual patients in the nation's hospitals who risk being euthanized. It is Canada as a nation where the rule of law, arising from our universal acceptance of the sanctity of human life, prevails.

Many will argue, of course, that Canada died 43 years ago when abortion was legalized. It's a valid point. But abortion was able to proceed as a procedure only by the exploitation of invented ambiguity over the legal personhood of the unborn child. No such ersatz uncertainty will possibly exist as the euthanasia needles start going into arms in Quebec next year.

Those being killed will be indisputably physically alive at the moment death is administered, and still undeniably persons even to those who employ the conscience-soothing vocabulary of "quality of life." Killing them will be the unequivocal obliteration of our foundational understanding of what it means to be Canadian, that is to be human. Opposing "dying with dignity" has nothing to do with social conservatism, and everything to do with conserving our common humanity.

When the first patients die in Quebec next year, Canada dies with them. Curious, is it not, how no one seems to care that we have a little over a year to live.

## Please, Do My Job For Me

—Brian Dijkema—

Politicians like to talk to the public like they're children. Because of this, the tenor of our politics resembles that of a kindergarten class deciding who gets the last red smartie on a rainy day.

Perhaps this is because our modern methods of communication force them to interact with the public through means—newspapers, television, radio, the internet—which, for any number of reasons, have become purveyors of mindless barbarism. Of course, this is not new. George Orwell noted some time ago "that the present political chaos is connected with the decay of language" and that journalism was right at the heart of it. Today, that chaos is alive and well. Those inclined to doubt this should watch question period on a regular basis and then watch the evening news. Keep your eye open for how the latter shapes the former.

The biggest problem here is not that politicians' speeches are debased by such tired and misleading phrases as "tough on crime" or "right-wing ideologue", but that the debased tenor of their speech becomes the habit of mind, and therefore speech, and therefore action, of all the citizens of this country. And such speech is not only ripe for harsh, childish, and generally unenlightening debate but it fails to recognize the humanity of those we're speaking with. It demeans and erodes our common life together.

So, what do we do? I suggest that—contrary to popular opinion—the solution is not for the conversation to grow up, but to be more authentically childish. After all, it's not the fact that politicians speak to us like children, it's that they and the journalists who cover them take the tone of uppity school marms who secretly despise their children. We should demand that our politicians and journalists treat us as respectable children, not spoiled brats.

And it's here that we should take the advice of another great writer who knew a thing or two about communicating to children. In 1956 C.S. Lewis responded to a young American fan of his Narnia books named Joan Lancaster, who wrote to him asking for advice on writing. In describing good writing he outlined five points that "really matter."

- Always try to use the language so as to make quite clear what you mean and make sure your sentence couldn't mean anything else.
- Always prefer the plain direct word to the



C.S. Lewis, author of the Narnia books

long, vague one. Don't *implement* promises, but *keep* them.

- Never use abstract nouns when concrete ones will do. If you mean "More people died" don't say "Mortality rose."
- In writing. Don't use adjectives which merely tell us how you want us to feel about the thing you are describing. I mean, instead of telling us a thing was "terrible," describe it so that we'll be terrified. Don't say it was "delightful"; make us say "delightful" when we've read the description. You see, all those words (horrifying, wonderful, hideous, exquisite) are only like saying to your readers, "Please will you do my job for me."
- Don't use words too big for the subject. Don't say "infinitely" when you mean "very"; otherwise you'll have no word left when you want to talk about something *really* infinite.

Debates among politicians and within the citizenry will be much improved if we apply this advice to our political dialogue, or even our consumption of the pabulum our media gives us. If journalists and politicians, through their use of the English language, ask you, "Please, will you do my job for me?" I suggest do it!

If you hear a politician speak in a way that can mean any number of things, write them to find out what they really mean. If you hear the words "implementation of key government programs" find out what those programs are; who will it affect, and how? How will our lives or work be changed by the government's actions? If you hear a minister talk about "kinetic activity in an operating theatre" ask him how many troops and civilians were killed. In short, ask them to explain things to you like you're a two-year-old. If they don't give you an answer, don't vote for them.

I realize that this won't fix things. But, as Orwell notes, "one cannot change this all in a moment, but one can at least change one's own habits."

## Sabbath Rest

—Kathryn de Ruijter—

Each Saturday, my husband and I do the work of keeping up a house and a home. While we believe that keeping Sabbath is important, every week there seems to be a small list of things that we push over to Sunday, things that didn't get finished on Saturday.

Lately, though, I've been thinking about the age-old tradition of Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath): a day of rest, communion, and feasting, usually preceded by a day or two of busy, hectic work, with family members rushing around making final preparations for the Sabbath. When the sun sets, work stops. Period. And so Shabbat begins.

It's a restorative rhythm. I've been thinking about this time of preparation and rest, and also my own leniency when it comes to how I observe it.

Throughout the Old Testament, the Sabbath is mentioned again and again, right from the beginning of Genesis:

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done (Genesis 2:2).

Keeping Sabbath is so important to God that he included it (the only ritual mentioned) in the ten commandments: "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" (Exodus 20:8). He commanded Moses to tell the Israelites that anyone who works on the Sabbath was to be put to death (Exodus 31:14).

## Holy Week and Public Theology

—Ray Pennings—

Today is Maundy Thursday, the day in which some Christian traditions engage in feet-washing rituals, as a commemoration of the events surrounding the Last Supper. There Jesus instructed his disciples both through the object lesson of humbly washing their feet (a task that they were too proud to volunteer for) as well as through direct instruction. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

Those of us involved in public life, when explicitly appealing to our Christian motivation for these actions, are often quick to cite the Christian obligation of love for neighbour as an animating force. In fact, sometimes this emphasis can cause a perceived tension between believers who make social engagement a priority and others who fear this emphasis leads to a neglect of the vertical relationship between believers and God. The tension is usually expressed in the context of practical rather than theological disagreements, as all recognize that the command to love God above all and our neighbours as ourselves is not two but one command.

Still the debate is often framed as a matter of balance. We need to both be heavenly-minded and think about the earthly good that is required of us. At a practical level, that is true. One needs to set aside time for personal devotional practices, corporate worship, and seasonal reflections or they don't happen. Thinking about these things as a matter of balance, however practically helpful, brings problems of its own. The concept of balance involves the relationship between two separate things. But biblically speaking, the concepts of "heavenly mindedness" and "earthly usefulness" cannot be separated, just as Jesus' command cannot be separated.

C.S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, makes this point clearly.

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim and heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in'; aim at earth and you will get neither.

The apostle Paul famously argued to the Corinthians that if Christ had not risen, then his preaching would be vain. So it is for our public theology. Maundy Thursday is not simply a calendar day to be remembered (or not) according to the practices of our religious traditions and the lead-up to a long-weekend with some extra time off. The events surrounding the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are fundamental to our task of Christian public theology. The promise of re-creation, made certain by the triumph of the Messiah over death and the grave, provide the basis for Christian hope and the very reason for reaching back to the insights not just of 2,000 years of Christian social thought, but all the way back to creation itself in order to find answers to life's basic questions. Creation, fall, redemption, restoration—this is the story of the world and of our lives. To try and make sense of how to live together in this time while being indifferent to the plot of history is a misguided adventure.

Christ's coming and resurrection is a reminder of the heart of what we are about as humans, what we believe about life in this world and its purpose, and what gives us confidence regarding the message we have to share. It is why the message "He is Risen" provides hope for eternity, but is also at the heart of addressing the everyday issues of life.

Happy Easter.