

Appeal to Belgian parliamentarians on medical ethics

18 November 2019

We learn that our federal parliament wants to legislate again in the field of bioethics. In particular, parliamentarians from several parties are proposing two things, which we think have serious consequences.

First, they want to extend the duration allowed to abort; and extend the statutory period to 18 weeks, instead of 12 weeks.

These parliamentarians vote among themselves, a text and a law, that they do not intend to bring to the public discussion. This is indeed how representative democracy works; and it is their privilege not to have to consider any other opinion than theirs.

However, in such a sensitive subject, where it is decided which living being can be cut off from society and its protection; where we decide who deserves the name of a human being and who does, it seems to us that the voice that publicly opposes this decision must also be heard. It can not be said later that no one has opposed it.

We therefore call for a major public debate on this important issue.

However, we wonder about the real willingness to take into account proposals of this type. In fact, the example of France makes us rather pessimistic about the real sincerity of parliamentarians; where the advice received during the debate was put aside, without taking it into account, because the result was not the result expected by them.

Secondly, they want to force the conscience of the doctors.

Doctors who do not wish to participate in an act that they believe to be bad, will be forced by law to participate. There will be no more freedom of conscience.

Would the law be superior to medical ethics?

This is not the opinion of our association.

Of course, the execution of a seriously unjust order of the act lessens the responsibility of the physician, but does not make it completely disappear. The responsibility of the physician in the collaboration to this act therefore proceeds from the Law, to which obedience is due.

But it is this same reasoning that has sentenced the executors of national socialist decisions in the last century from the point of view of moral responsibility.

The state constraint, therefore, never makes the individual moral responsibility disappear.

On this basis, we urge the recognition and protection of the law, the freedom of conscience of physicians, and the recognition of the autonomy of our medical ethics.

This medical ethics is currently fairly widespread worldwide, as re-stated by the World Medical Association, which concludes in the beginning of life, that "it is a matter of personal conviction and conscience that must be respected." (Medical Ethics Manual, 3rd Edition, p. 57).

In faith whereof, we make this appeal to our parliamentarians.

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