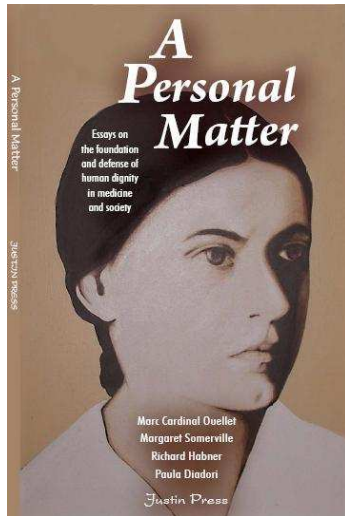


A PERSONAL MATTER

BY MARC CARDINAL OUELLET, DR PAOLA DIADORI, DR RICHARD HABNER AND DR MARGARET SOMERVILLE, JUSTIN PRESS ISBN 978-0-9813184-6-2

REVIEWED BY PRAVIN THEVATHASAN



The collection of essays in this book originated in the second annual meeting of the Canadian Federation of Catholic Physicians Societies held in Montreal in 2010. They are highly recommended for clinicians and non-clinicians alike. They address the truth that when human rights are detached from natural law, the consequence is ethical relativism leading to euthanasia and other immoral practices.

Dr Paola Diadori argues that the intention to kill a person who suffers from indignities brought on by terminal illness is always wrong because it attacks the "intrinsic Dignity" of the person. The Dignity of human beings is the same no matter who they are. This means that we ought to treat the severely disabled with the same respect we owe to other human beings.

Dr Margaret Somerville argues that there are difficulties when we put the case against euthanasia because in doing so we are saying that harm to the community trumps individual rights. It is much easier for the advocates of euthanasia to film people who are determined to die and who see this as a personal choice that should not be interfered with. Seeing people pleading for euthanasia makes for gripping television. However, legalizing euthanasia harms "the very important shared societal values of respect for life and changes the basic norm that we must not kill one another. "

So why is there a drift towards the acceptance of euthanasia now? Because people fear dying alone and without being loved. Death has been "professionalized, technologized, depersonalized and dehumanized." In the past, we gave value to our suffering by recourse to religion. Now suffering is seen as the greatest evil and of no value. The phrase "You would not do that to an animal" comes to mind.

Dr Somerville argues that people in pain have a right to good palliative care and that is very different from endorsing euthanasia.

Dr Richard Habner examines the sanctity of life at its beginning. Prenatal diagnosis is permissible from a moral viewpoint when used for therapeutic purposes. If used to detect an anomaly with the aim of abortion, it is not permissible. He notes that IVF embryos have the same rights as those naturally conceived and to produce them in order to experiment on them is to treat them as mere biological material to be disposed of as we see fit.

In summary, this is a fine work reminding us that an incorrect understanding of human rights leads to morality being thought of as purely a "personal matter."