

Euthanizing A Civilization

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Forerunner, "WorldWatch," July-August 2015

The name of Frank Van Den Bleeken is not well known on this side of the Atlantic Ocean, but his name would likely be recognized by many Europeans. Van Den Bleeken is Belgian, but more than that, he is a murderer and serial rapist who has served more than thirty years in prison for multiple crimes. Other than his criminal record, what sets Van Den Bleeken apart is his request in early 2014 to be put to death under Belgium's euthanasia law, which has been on the books since 2002. His request and the Belgian government's decision provoked sharp reactions from the public.

Since the law's inception, about 1,400 Belgians a year have been euthanized. The diminutive European country has on its books what is considered to be "strict conditions" for granting a euthanasia request. Among its strictest stipulations is that applicants for the procedure must be competent and sensible and present a "voluntary, considered and repeated" request to die.

Van Den Bleeken, meeting all legal conditions under the law, was granted permission to die by Belgium's justice minister in September 2014. However, in January 2015, the procedure was postponed because the physician who was to perform it refused to participate, citing the lack of "certain legal due diligence." The case is still being held in abeyance.

Once known, three facts about this man's case are bound to shock those reared in a Judeo-Christian culture: 1) that any civilized Western nation could condone "mercy killing" of any kind in the first place, much less legalize it; 2) that much of the ensuing outrage across Europe centered on, not that an otherwise healthy man's life would be snuffed out with lethal drugs, but that he would not be forced to serve out his full life-sentence in prison; and 3) that no one in authority in Belgium—or even in the wider European Union—thought that there was anything fundamentally wrong with his request.

Along with The Netherlands and Belgium, Luxembourg has also legalized euthanasia, but its case numbers per year are quite low, barely breaking into double-figures. Switzerland and Germany permit assisted suicide, and in several other European nations, the practice resides in a legal gray area where it is not explicitly a criminal activity. An estimated 12.3% of all deaths in The Netherlands occur by way of euthanasia, about 6,000 in all. Switzerland's assisted suicide numbers skyrocketed by 700% over eleven years due to "suicide tourism." If trends continue, total deaths by euthanasia across Europe will soon reach the 10,000/year mark. (Euthanasia is banned in Ireland, Italy, Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Greece, and Poland.)

More troubling, lawmakers in The Netherlands and Belgium believed that euthanasia is such a profound right and moral good that their parliaments passed statutes making it available for children. The Belgian law specifies that "the patient must be conscious of their decision and understand the meaning of euthanasia." On its face, this is a ridiculous notion, as no child possesses that level of understanding. Next door, The Netherlands estimates that 650 newborns are euthanized each year simply because their parents are distressed by the fact that these babies are weak or sickly.

Euthanasia was promoted by its advocates as a "humane" method for ending the suffering of patients who faced excruciating pain in their final weeks or days. Their rhetoric brought to mind sympathetic

images of cancer patients and those suffering from severe burns. Yet, it is increasingly being used to terminate the lives of people with more moderate conditions—and even suspected-but-not-yet-present conditions. Earlier this year, a 47-year-old Dutch woman was lethally injected because she suffered from chronic tinnitus, otherwise known as ringing of the ears. Another individual was euthanized after a sex-change operation, and a set of deaf twins chose legal assisted suicide because they feared they *might* also go blind.

Worldwide, in addition to the nations listed above, euthanasia is legal in Colombia, and assisted suicide is lawful in Japan and Albania and in the U.S. states of California (beginning January 1, 2016), Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington. Canada is close to legalizing assisted suicide, as its Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the law banning assisted suicide is unconstitutional (Quebec has already passed right-to-die legislation).

But for Albania and Japan, all of these are Western, majority Christian nations/states, many of which are also on the forefront of abortion and homosexual rights, progressive issues that push a culture of death on the populace. Whether the means is death by injection, death before birth, or perverse sexual practice in which procreation is impossible, the guiding principle seems to be that human life is worthless and needs to be cut short as soon as practicable.

In contrast, Jesus Christ came to this earth that, ultimately, all people “may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). The apostle Paul calls death “the last enemy” (I Corinthians 15:26), and God advises us to “choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). A culture of death, taking life whenever it is convenient, is inimical to Christianity and true morality. It is well on its way to weakening Western civilization to the point that it will be unable to recover.