



ORGANISME CATHOLIQUE POUR LA VIE ET LA FAMILLE
CATHOLIC ORGANIZATION FOR LIFE AND FAMILY

PRESS RELEASE

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A Disturbing Step Towards Eugenics

The February 5th recommendation of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada (SOGC) for all pregnant women to be offered non-invasive prenatal genetic screening for fetal aneuploidy, with a particular emphasis on Down's syndrome, is a disturbing step towards eugenics in our society.

The *National Post* reported on January 6, 2007 that according to the executive vice president of the SOGC, this screening was being recommended "so that a greater number of women would have the option to terminate their pregnancies should fetal abnormalities be detected".

In response, the Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF) calls upon all Canadians, especially obstetricians, gynecologists and expectant parents, to uphold the inherent worth and dignity of every human life and to protect the basic human rights of the disabled, including first and foremost their right to be born.

Prenatal diagnosis demonstrates the positive advancements of science when it is employed to safeguard the life and integrity of the child and the mother, and does not place them at risk. However, for most genetic conditions that can be identified in the womb, including fetal aneuploidy and particularly Down's syndrome, there are no available cures or therapies that can be administered before the child is born.

The predominant purpose of prenatal genetic screening for fetal aneuploidy is thus to offer parents the option of aborting "defective" babies. This places parents in the position of making life-death decisions based on their own preferences, fears, and guesses about the future quality of their own lives and their children's.

Yet human life is worth more than a series of rational calculations. So many Canadians with an illness or disability have made a positive contribution to our lives. Such people remind us that perfect health and a normal IQ are not required for happiness, friendship, and love of life. Rather than offering the parents of

these children a way of eliminating their unborn, we should be providing them with more resources and support. We cannot rely solely on the State; all of us have an individual responsibility to help natural caregivers in everyday life.

People with disabilities are a blessing for our communities. Jean Vanier, the founder of *L'Arche*, has said that "Each person is unique, precious and sacred." We all bring special gifts to this life, and the disabled are no exception. One of their gifts is often a capacity to relate and to love. Indeed, even when they are unable to relate to us, the disabled invite us to learn to love and to freely give of ourselves. In their weaknesses they become witnesses of human dignity and equality, showing us that human worth does not come from successes, beauty or fame but from simply being created in the image of God.

A society that aspires to social justice is measured by how it treats its weaker and more needy members. The announcement of the SOGC is a signal for Canadians to make a commitment to recognize and protect the rights of the disabled, including their first and fundamental right to life. As Pope Benedict XVI said on February 4, 2007: "Life, which is the work of God, must not be denied to any one, not even the smallest and defenseless newborn, and much less so when he has serious handicaps." In a world of limited funding, the priority should be on research into cures and therapies for genetic diseases rather than on tests that might be the equivalent of a death sentence.

COLF is co-sponsored by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus. It promotes respect for human life and dignity, and the essential role of the family.

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