

Introduction

Address in honor of Dr. Yvon Kenis

on the occasion of his retirement from the Service of Medicine at Institut Jules Bordet

29 June 1987

WE ARE here together in order to honor Dr. Yvon Kenis. He has decided to terminate his work at Institut Jules Bordet. He wants to devote his time to activities of his own choice, of which one will be the study of bioethics, an important area for a physician philosopher. Our sadness to see Yvon leave will be tempered by the realization that he does not really abandon us since he will enlighten us through his reflexion and experience on some of the most intricate ethical subjects in contemporary and future medicine. Bioethics is another illustration of the ambiguous role of the physician at the junction of science and morality. We will want to hear Dr. Kenis communicate his projects, his positions, his advice. Our doctors, young and old, will therefore continue to gain, as in the past, from the diversity of his talents and from the thought of a man who always was an honor to the medical service of the Institut Jules Bordet.

We have always liked Yvon Kenis and this is why we feel sad at his departure and why this meeting is a little sad. We ask him to return to us often and to continue to be one of us. Yvon is a man of great sensibility, kind-hearted, who feels and perceives acutely the human misery in disease and the avoidable misery of social injustice. He always contributes a warm dimension to medical work. He is a physician as all physicians should be, the friend of humanity in health and in disease and at the end he is preoccupied by death and the ways of insuring dignity to the act of dying.

He is also a man of reflexion and experience: all present here know his career in the hospital and the University. He is and has been one of the truly good clinical oncologists of the last 30 years, a first-rate clinical investigator, careful in his observation and experimentation, honest in his conclusions. We all know his work, his publications, lectures and lessons. There is hardly a single problem of therapeutics which he did not approach and help resolve. The long list of his publications reads like the marching progress of cancer chemotherapy. His pupils are numerous in Belgium and abroad. His example was the best teaching.

We like also Yvon because he is not malicious. In our academic world, less cruel probably than the business world but often cruel enough, he never did display unfair or harsh rivalry. This is why we will remember him kindly.

I may be permitted to add a personal note. It was in April 1954 that Yvon Kenis became my assistant in the newly created Service of Medicine. A number of notables, I use this vague word purposely, often well situated, were predicting the impending death of a service of cancer medicine, a superfluous creation. "It is bad enough to sacrifice a man," meaning me, said they, "but to draw in a young doctor, what madness!" We both ignored these encouraging words, because my American experience had taught me to disregard objections to a worthy project and Yvon because of his adventurous and optimistic turn of mind. I will not tell

the history of the Service of Medicine: many tried to make their prediction come right. As of now, if one enquires, thank you, the Service is successful and prosperous.

Let us not listen to augurs. Yvon did not listen and his image is associated in my mind, my remembrance, with the tales told to the children, the story of the wicked spirits who cast a bad spell on newborn babies. But there comes the good elf who cancels the spell: the child grows into a vigorous adult. The first years of the Service of Medicine with Yvon Kenis were one of these tales. The readers will be

able to identify the good and the bad spell-casting individuals.

My dear friend Yvon will probably never be president of an Academy. He belongs to the restricted and precious family which creates by action and reflexion the hidden instruments of human progress. This is why we admire and congratulate him.

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