End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill

Religion and Morals Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland

The Religion and Morals Committee has been contributing to the discussion of assisted suicide for many years in its yearly report on religion and morals to the Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland and considers that it represents a viewpoint and evidence which is not represented by other denominations in Scotland to the same degree.

We do not agree that a person should be able to request end of life assistance from a registered medical practitioner and consider this possibility likely to have a very serious detrimental effect on patient and doctor relations.

Being resolutely opposed to the proposal in the Bill on point of principle we do not regard the age profile, connection with Scotland or the categories of people under consideration in the Bill to be of relevance to the question at issue. We are not at all satisfied that any verification process suggested would be appropriate or necessary as we reject the premise that end of life assistance should be an option to any person. Therefore we do not consider the professed safeguards either requisite or adequate to prevent end of life assistance. We firmly believe that if the provisions of this Bill are implemented the categories of persons seeking this assistance will over time greatly expand and the safeguards will be greatly weakened to accommodate these new categories. This has happened when other sins have been legalised such as abortion and “no-fault” divorce.

Our evidence which is presented in opposition to the terms of the End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill is derived from the moral precepts of the Bible on which the Christian faith is founded. We consider this source of evidence to have ultimate and absolute authority and we believe that it teaches us expressly and clearly regarding suicide and end of life assistance.

We welcome any and every attempt which is proposed for alleviating and reducing mental and physical suffering in those who have either a terminal illness or have suffered a trauma leaving them permanently physically incapacitated and incapable of living independently. We heartily support palliative care medicine and as a Church we have considerable experience in facilitating such care in the running of two residential care homes for the elderly. Christians throughout Scotland have daily contact with such as are described in the proposed bill as requiring end of life assistance as they seek to follow the Christian calling to express sympathy and practical help to their neighbour.

We do not consider the terms of the End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill to be either an adequate or reasonable approach to such suffering and contend strongly that the proposed qualifications miss a fundamental aspect of
spiritual care and responsibility which is owed to any person desiring assistance to end their life.

We affirm in accordance with the teaching of the Bible that it is the duty of all people, especially as near relations and friends to others affected, to take all lawful endeavours to preserve their own life and the life of others and that the moral law of God forbids any from taking their own or their neighbour's life unjustly, or whatever tends to that. Consequently to assist any person to end their life on such terms as are proposed by the Bill is to sin against the sixth commandment in our duty to our neighbour and encourages and aids such a person also to commit a sin against the sixth commandment.

We propose as evidence for the Committee to consider in response to the End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill that “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 6:23) and “Behold all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth it shall die.” (Ezekiel 18:4)

We further propose as evidence that “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement.” (Hebrews 9:27) and “For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:10)

We propose that by assisting someone to die, even when that assistance is at their own request, is to assist someone to appear before God with great guilt of sin on their souls. Consequently such guilt as a person dies with, if it be not forgiven in this life for Christ’s sake, will lead to the eternal ruin and misery of soul and body in hell forever, which is the greatest calamity that could overtake any person.

We propose therefore that the End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill is not, in spite of sincere efforts to make it, compassionate, promoting of human dignity in dying or in any way beneficial to the living. We propose, in accordance with Bible teaching, that life is a sacred gift of God and a trust committed to mankind.

We firmly believe that the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ, proclaimed in the Bible and freely offered to all men to whom the Bible comes, promotes human happiness even in the most painful and distressing of circumstances and that however intolerable life for a terminally ill or incapacitated person may be, the saving mercy of Jesus Christ is abundantly adequate to meet and answer this pain and distress so that such persons can and do continue to live fulfilled lives to God's glory and their own and others' good.

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Convener
Religion and Morals Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland
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