End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill

Professor Michael Stewart

I have never written to a parliamentary committee before, but feel constrained to do so in connection with this bill.

Having worked in the NHS for 20 years and later in the South African Health service, I have, on numerous occasions, been in contact with patients, including children, nearing the end of their lives or suffering from dementia. I have never heard a patient indicate that he/she wished to end their life, despite severe suffering, although I have to believe that others have. I have been at the bedside of a number of men and women and have observed that their chief desire has always been that their relatives would be supported through these times.

I have also been involved in counselling people who, with the best of motives, have encouraged medical practitioners to hasten the death of a loved one. Without exception these dear folk have required to confess that the pain of the experience has stayed with them and have sought assurance of forgiveness.

It is not the right of any human being to take the life of another. We already have the abortion law in this country which has led to unnumbered women carrying the pain, guilt and shame for taking the lives of their children. Again, I have had the sad task of helping these women, and also fathers, to work through the consequences of their decisions, which are often taken under stress and with minimal assistance from families, friends and support organisations.

The fact that something is lawful in this country does not make it morally right. There is a gut feeling in the majority of us that these things are wrong, but politicians bow to the opinions of those who do not believe in the concept of morality.

The recent election has shown how out of touch government has become with the core beliefs of most people.

Killing is wrong and must remain wrong. Just as fiddling parliamentary expenses is wrong. How can it be that MPs and MSPs who have reacted to the latter by resigning their seats, can even contemplate the introduction of legislation of a far greater import than "Thou shalt not steal"?

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