End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill

Pam Pashley

The Church welcomes all efforts to improve the quality of care available to all Scotland’s citizens. History and contemporary experience bear witness to the fact that, true to the injunction of their leader to show love and compassion to all, followers of Christ have long been at the forefront of social care: the Church of Scotland remains one of the largest providers of social care in the country.

We therefore find the contents of the proposed End of Life Choices (Scotland) Bill being brought to the Scottish Parliament by MSP Margo MacDonald deeply disturbing, undermining as it does the accepted need to offer care and comfort to all- especially those who are placed in a vulnerable position as a result of age, incapacity or other circumstance.

We believe the whole approach taken by Ms MacDonald to be flawed. Given that what is proposed would result in healthcare staff being called upon to deliberately terminate life, such legislation represents a seismic shift in the relationship between carer and patient.

A major concern is that any legislation allowing the deliberate killing of another person would always be open to abuse or misuse. Are we really to believe that, when a patient can die in an NHS ward after 26 days without being fed, and when recent cases highlight that vulnerable children can fall through all the “safety nets”, guarantees can be given that legislation with the express purpose of bringing about the deliberate ending of a human life will never be misused or abused?

Allusions to altruism, as in the recent high profile Debbie Purdy case, are also wrong. The Court of Appeal, in its judgment of the Purdy case, recognized that “not all cases of assisted suicide represent the final act or acts of love or the culmination of a lifelong loving relationship”, and that these types of situations might be open to abuse.

One of the issues which is repeatedly deployed in discussions around this issue is the area of personal autonomy: “it’s my life, and I can choose how and when to end it”. While personal autonomy is indeed an important issue, it is a dangerous fallacy to believe that a person can act independently of all others, with their actions having no consequences for anybody else. The idea of “burden” is, by its very nature, a comment on relationships and therefore not a statement of autonomy.

The worth and dignity of every human life needs to be emphasised and celebrated; in particular, the deliberate ending of life would be a matter to be deplored if it were to be seen as a means of saving resources, or that any person was perceived (or perceived themselves) as merely a burden.
Any legislation which endorses the deliberate ending of a human life undermines us as a society. We do not accept that the law should be changed to allow the legal termination of human life, and believe that society is better served by the sacrificial love exemplified and enjoined by Christ- whatever the cost.

We would urge you not to sign the proposed End of Life Choices Bill.

Pam Pashley
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