

Catholic Bishop's statement on the Assisted Dying Bill

Bishop John Sherrington, Lead Bishop for Life Issues, has issued a statement outlining the Catholic Church's opposition to a Bill that could make assisted dying legal in England and Wales. The Assisted Dying Bill, a Private Member's Bill introduced by Baroness Meacher, was debated in the House of Lords on Wednesday 26th May 2021.

Statement :

The fragility of life and the reality of death has been brought into sharp focus during the Covid 19 pandemic. In the face of much suffering and death, we have witnessed the extraordinary commitment of healthcare professionals and their loving care for the sick and dying. We too have made a collective sacrifice this last year to protect the most vulnerable from the devastating impact of the Coronavirus. These acts of heroic love are a powerful testimony to the fundamental dignity of the human person and to the importance of proper love and care in the face of grave illness and in the last moments of life.

Against this backdrop of loving care and commitment, we are now faced with the very real threat of the legalisation of 'assisted suicide' in our country. Tomorrow will see an 'Assisted Dying' Bill introduced into the House of Lords, by Baroness Meacher who seeks to alleviate the 'intolerable suffering' of terminally ill patients in England and Wales. Similar attempts to legalise assisted suicide in the UK, have overwhelmingly failed with the most recent Marris Bill defeated by a 330 to 118 majority at its second reading in the House of Commons in 2015.

The immense value of the sick person

Although this new Bill is framed as a compassionate response to those in the last stages of their life, such compassion must be denounced as 'false compassion' as Pope Francis reminds us. A "true compassion" he says, is "the just response to the immense value of the sick person." It finds expression in treating the dying person with love, with dignity and by making use of appropriate palliative care. This proposal would also fundamentally change the relationship between the doctor and the patient, as it would change to it from treatment and care to assisting another's death. Life is a gift to be valued and cherished until its last breath, through natural death, which opens into the promise of eternal life.

Opposing assisted suicide

The Catholic Church remains opposed to any form of assisted suicide and will examine this proposed legislation when it is published tomorrow. We reaffirm our support for high quality end-of-life care, which includes spiritual and pastoral support for the one who is dying and their family. The 'Day for Life', to be celebrated on Sunday 20th June 2021 in England and Wales, will call Catholics to pray for good care of those who are elderly, sick and dying and to oppose such legislation.