

Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill

Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)

Below is our submission on the Assisted Suicide (Scotland) Bill. In making our submission we address the questions which are asked on the Scottish Government website:

1. Do you agree with the general purpose of the Bill to make it permissible, in the circumstances provided for, to assist another to commit suicide?

No. We would never agree to such a purpose in any circumstances. The Bill is based on the mistaken premise that man has a 'right' to end his own life. In vital matters such as this we must not be guided by our own wisdom but by the Bible, which is the Word of God. The Bible is the only rule to direct us in what we believe and how we behave and it reveals no such right, declaring that God retains that right over man. It states that our lives are in God's hand to do as He pleases with them and not in our hand to do as we please with them. Therefore it is a great sin either to take one's own life (which is what those who seek and procure an assisted suicide will be doing if the proposal becomes law) or to help another person to take his or her own life (which is what the licensed facilitators, pharmacists, doctors, etc., will be doing if the proposal becomes law).

The sixth commandment of the moral law contained in the Bible states, "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13). By this commandment we understand that both murder and self-murder are condemned by God.

2. Do you have any views on how the provisions in this Bill compare with those from the previous End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill?

We see little difference between the provisions contained in the two Bills. This is not surprising given that the Bills have the same author and the same general aim. Consequently we oppose this Bill as strongly as we opposed the previous one.

3. The Bill precludes any criminal and civil liability for those providing assistance, providing the processes and requirements set out in the Bill have been adhered to. Do you wish to make any comment on this?

We believe that the law of our land should reflect the law of God as we have outlined it above. Therefore criminal and civil liability for those who provide assistance in the commission of suicide under any terms ought to remain. The Larger Catechism, a doctrinal standard of our Church and of other Presbyterian churches in Scotland, explains that among the sins forbidden in the sixth commandment are: "all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of publick justice, lawful war, or necessary defence." (Q. 136) On this basis we are of the view that those who aid and abet suicide in any way should continue to be subject to the penalty of the law.

4. The Bill outlines a three stage declaration and request process that would be required to be followed by an individual seeking assisted suicide. Do you have any comment on the process being proposed?

As we object to the very idea of assisted suicide it is obvious that we also oppose whatever process the Bill may propose for the carrying out of assisted suicide: if the principle is wrong then the process must be wrong too, however it is organised.

5. Do you have any comment on the provisions requiring that the person seeking assisted suicide must have a terminal or life-shortening illness, or a progressive condition which is either terminal or life-shortening?

We do not believe that any of the situations in which people may find themselves, including those stated in the Bill, however difficult and distressing they may be for themselves, their families and their friends, justify the deliberate ending of their lives. Also for anyone to attempt to make a definitive judgment on what the duration of their own or another person's life will be is to assume the place of God.

Suicide is never the answer to any plight we may find ourselves in and indeed it is likely to plunge us into a far more miserable eternity. The way to true peace and lasting happiness is through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ which we have the privilege of preaching and hearing. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

We are thankful to the Lord for the great advances in palliative care which have been made in recent times. These developments mean that the suffering associated with conditions which may be beyond medical treatment can often be alleviated to a significant extent. We believe that in a truly compassionate society it is palliative care which ought to be promoted and not suicide, whether assisted or otherwise.

6. Are you satisfied with the eligibility requirements as regards age, capacity, and connection with Scotland as set out in the Bill?

As we object to assisted suicide in principle a consideration of the 'eligibility requirements' as they are set out in the Bill is superfluous.

7. Do you have any comment on the roles of medical practitioners and pharmacists as provided for in the Bill?

In the Larger Catechism from which we have quoted already the following sins are also forbidden in the sixth commandment: "the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life." Among the duties required in the sixth commandment are: "all careful studies, and lawful endeavours, to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of

any.” (Q. 135) While the duty of preserving life applies to all men it is especially relevant to those who are involved in the health professions. We regard it as particularly sad and indeed utterly perverse that people whose very calling is to sustain and maintain life should be officially employed in helping to bring about the early demise of some individuals.

8. Do you have any comment on the means by which a person would be permitted to end his/her life under the Bill?

As we object to the whole purpose of the Bill, which is to legalise assisted suicide, it is obvious that we also oppose whatever means may be proposed for carrying out assisted suicide.

9. Do you have any comment on the role of licensed facilitators a[s] provided for in the Bill?

We believe that the role of so-called ‘licensed facilitators’ as provided for in the Bill is a wrong and sinful one in that they would clearly be infringing the law of God: as we have indicated already the sixth commandment forbids “all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of publick justice, lawful war, or necessary defence.”

10. Do you have any comment on the role of the police as provided for in the Bill?

We believe that the role of the police as provided for in the Bill is also a wrong and sinful one in that they too would clearly be infringing the law of God which forbids “all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of publick justice, lawful war, or necessary defence.”

11. Do you have any comment to make about the Bill not already covered in your answers to the questions above?

We regard it as a most serious matter when those who occupy positions of civil power use their authority – which they have ultimately from God – to promote something which God plainly forbids. This is the case with the Members of the Scottish Parliament who are behind this Bill and will be the case with any MSPs who give their support to it.

We should use any position of authority we are entrusted with to protect and succour the weak and vulnerable in our society and not to facilitate the bringing of harm to them – and in this case actual death. In this regard we find it sad, and indeed tragic, that this Bill is under the scrutiny of the Health and Sport Committee – a body which should surely be advancing our well-being and not its very opposite.

If this legislation is passed then our fear is that people with various debilitating conditions may begin to think that they are under an obligation not to be a ‘burden’ on their loved ones or wider society and to feel that there is a certain pressure upon them to take the steps provided for them to end their

lives – especially when there are people available who are willing to ‘help’ them in this and make it more straightforward.

It is hardly surprising given the nature of this proposed legislation that the Bill and its supporting documents do not contain any discussion of what constitutes the real worth of a person’s life. We submit that man’s true dignity lies in the fact that he is made in the image and likeness of God: each of us has a never-dying soul which means that uniquely among the creatures we are capable of knowing and enjoying God and of finding our fulfilment in this.

Finally we urge all MSPs to take note of the recent solemn providence in connection with this Bill in the death of its proposer and call upon them to abandon this misguided legislation.

Rev. David Blunt

(Convener)

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