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02 November 2024

PASTORAL LETTER ON ASSISTED SUICIDE

My brothers and sisters,

As you will be aware, on the 16th October 2024 the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill was introduced to Parliament by the M.P. for Spen Valley. This Private Members Bill will receive its Second Reading in the House of Commons on the 29th November 2024. M.P.s are being granted a free vote, that is to say that they will not be subject to any party whip.

The presentation of this Bill raises many critical questions for our society. The absolute value and dignity of each and every human life is a principle not subject to variation. Flowing from this primary consideration there is a cascade of implications to be considered on issues linked to the care and protection of every human being. It is the preservation of this care and protection that is our responsibility, not their removal.

Many of those who have advocated so called ‘assisted suicide’ have emotively framed the debate in terms of personal choice. This line argumentation entirely misrepresents the true nature and purpose of human freedom. Our proper autonomy can never be understood as granting us the right to dispose of human life as if it were our own possession, a mere commodity amongst others. We rejoice to proclaim that human life is nothing less than a precious gift from God, a gift we are duty bound to treasure and protect.

During the month of November the Church draws our focus to the Last Things: death, judgement, heaven and hell. The moment of death is not a step into oblivion but a sacred translation from the confinement of time and space into the expanse of eternity. At the moment of death, we are called to embrace the fullness of life.

In a recent address to the Archdiocese of Westminster, Cardinal Vincent Nichols highlighted three points for reflection regarding the proposals outlined in the named

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Bill: be careful what you wish for; a right to die can become a duty to die; being forgetful of God belittles our humanity.

In those parts of the world where so called ‘assisted suicide’ has been legalised, the evidence demonstrates how supposed safeguards have diminished with the passage of time. Original controls on eligibility have often been changed with a widening of application to categories such as mental illness, dementia, disability and even sick children. Individuals can become subject to the danger of defining themselves in terms of being a burden to their family or to society in general, either emotionally or financially. Such legislation clearly undermines the effective provision of palliative care and places intolerable demands on medical staff. It has proven to be a short step from so called ‘assisted suicide’ to euthanasia.

Derived from all that is revealed in Christ, the teaching of the Church is clear: it is a sinful act to deliberately – with full knowledge – take one’s own life.

I ask you to write to your local M.P. urging them to vote against the proposals contained in the named Bill. Attached to this letter are the contact details of every M.P. in each parliamentary constituency within the boundaries of the Diocese of East Anglia.

I am writing these words as I look upon a photograph of Leonard Cheshire who, together with his beloved wife Sue Ryder, contributed so much to establishing the network of palliative care across the United Kingdom. Suffering from Motor-Neurone Disease, Leonard Cheshire faced death with great faith and serenity at his home in Cavendish, Suffolk, on the 31st July 1992. As a nation we should commit ourselves to properly supporting the provision of palliative care, according to need, across the length and breadth of the land.

I ask you to write your letters and to pray earnestly at this critical moment in the history of our civilization.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Peter G. Collins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P' and a cross at the end.

The Right Reverend Peter G. Collins
Bishop of East Anglia