

Read Archbishop Justin's contribution to the debate on the Assisted Dying Bill in the House of Lords:

My Lords, I am grateful to Baroness Meacher and listened with great attention to her extremely powerful speech. This is an issue on which many of us have personal experiences, often painful and difficult. There is unanimity on these benches that our current law does not need to be changed, but I know that people of faith hold differing views and no doubt we will hear those today and I look forward to them.

Everyone here shares the best of intentions. We should recognise that in how we listen and respond to each other. I hope that no one will seek to divide the House today, but I do welcome Lord Winston's amendment, because it draws our focus towards our use of language. We need clarity and precision in our terms.

Christ calls his followers to compassion. But compassion must not be drawn too narrowly, a point made indirectly and powerfully by Baroness Meacher. It must extend beyond those who want the law to provide help to end their lives, to the whole of society; especially those who might be put at risk. Our choices affect other people. The common good demands that our choices, rights and freedoms must be balanced with those of others, especially those who may not be so easily heard.

Sadly, I believe this Bill to be unsafe. As a curate and parish priest I spent time with the dying, the sick and the bereaved. I still do. All of us have personal experience. I have as well. We know that the sad truth is that not all people are perfect, not all families are happy, not everyone is kind and compassionate. No amount of safeguards can perfect the human heart, no amount of regulation can make a relative kinder or a doctor infallible. No amount of reassurance can make a vulnerable or disabled person feel equally safe, equally valued, if the law is changed in this way.

All of us here are united in wanting compassion and dignity for those coming to the end of their lives.

But it does not serve compassion if by granting the wishes of one closest to me, I expose others to danger.

And it does not serve dignity if in granting the wishes of one closest to me I devalue the status and safety of others.

I hope your Lordships will reflect, and while recognising the good intentions we all share, resist the change this Bill seeks to make.

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