

16th July 2014

Most believers back assisted dying despite opposition of church leaders

Ahead of the House of Lords debate on Lord Falconer's assisted dying bill on 18th July 2014, an article in The Times by Rosemary Bennett and David Sanderson quoted a 2013 YouGov poll commissioned by Professor Linda Woodhead for the Westminster Faith Debates.

The article detailed the survey findings, which show that a majority of Anglicans, Jews and Roman Catholics favour a change in the law to allow assisted dying, in contrast to the official view of church leaders, whom the article describes as 'out of touch' on this issue.

Linda Woodhead is quoted as explaining that the most common reason cited in support of a change in the law was a belief that it was up to the individual how they die; the most common reasons for opposing change were a fear that assisted suicide might become more widespread, or that vulnerable people would feel pressurised into accepting it:

"It appears church teaching has not got through. The vast majority of believers are at variance with their leaders. We are used to having more control over our lives and I think that is partly why there is this overwhelming number of people saying that they have a right to decide for themselves."

During the subsequent House of Lords debate, various surveys were cited among the contributions, including the findings of the Westminster Faith Debates poll indicating that most Anglicans, Catholic and Jews are in support of a change in the law on assisted dying.

Peers backed the assisted dying bill at second reading, which faith leaders had urged Parliament to reject, after debating its measures in a packed chamber in which a record number of peers had requested to speak.

The Times article is available to subscribers here:

http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/faith/article4148558.ece