

End of Life Debate

The current round of Westminster Faith Debates came to an end last week with a debate on whether we should legislate to permit assisted dying. 'Assisted dying' means helping those who are already terminally ill to commit suicide and, according to a YouGov poll, is supported by the overwhelming majority of people in Britain, including most churchgoers. According to the YouGov poll 72 per cent of Anglicans and 56 per cent of Roman Catholics support a change in the law. As in the case of polls on other ethical questions conducted for the Faith Debates, most opposition to change came from Baptists and Muslims. In the debate the case for change was made by the former Lord Chancellor, Charles Falconer, and the opposition came from two medical professors, Rob George of King's College, London, and Lady Ilora Finlay. Both doctors pointed out that whatever the general public may think, doctors remain firmly opposed to changing the law, especially those who might be in the position of having to help someone commit suicide. They pointed out how difficult it is to define a 'terminal illness' and warned that we should never regard any diagnosis as 100 per cent accurate. Professor George spoke with the experience of helping 20,000 people to die. Whatever the opinion polls may say, the opponents of assisted dying won the Westminster debate.