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PROBLEMS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE
(Another in a series)

DEATH WITH DIGNITY

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A friend of mine passed away after a long illness. The doctors concluded months before his death that the illness was terminal. Yet, he was kept alive for several weeks by artificial means. This cost the family thousands of dollars. They possibly could afford it, but most families could not.

This experience relating to my friend and similar incidents raise some questions that should be answered. Should one whose illness is definitely terminal be kept alive by artificial means: medication, tubes, etc.?

Some people contend that the doctor's oath binds him to preserve life and not to take it. Some even suggest that the physician is under obligation to keep one alive as long as possible. Others say that his oath simply means that he is not to take life; he is not to practice positive euthanasia. The latter is the correct interpretation. The only statement in the oath that relates to this matter is as follows: "I will give no deadly medicine to any one if asked, nor suggest any such counsel."

Another argument made by some people for the artificial continuation of life is the fact that a doctor's diagnosis may be wrong. He may consider a case terminal when it is not. For one thing he has no way to measure the will to live of a particular patient. Furthermore, some insist that a doctor cannot predict how God will work in a particular case. Therefore, so they reason, the doctor should use every skill and technique available to keep one alive.

There are others, including some doctors, who claim that the medical profession may learn a great deal by using artificial methods to keep a patient alive. If this is a valid reason for using various means of extending life in terminal cases, we do not believe the family should have to pay the bill. The doctor, the hospital, the medical society, the government, or some charitable foundation should relieve the family of the tremendous expense frequently involved.

There is a possibility that one reason for efforts to keep people alive as long as possible is the fear of death. This may be understandable for non-Christians, but it is hard to understand why Christians should fear death personally or for their loved ones who are Christians. After all, regardless of what is done death is inevitable. There are limits to how long it can be postponed.

Members of the family, who should have a major voice regarding any decision that is made, should be fully informed regarding possible costs. And while the cost should not be the deciding factor in any decision that is made, it may properly be a major factor at least for families with limited financial resources.

The one whose voice should speak the loudest is the patient himself. This is particularly true if he decides against the artificial continuance of his life. Such a decision should be made while he is still in full control of his faculties. If he wishes to be permitted "to die with dignity" he should let his family and his doctor know. Those wishes should be respected. We have such an understanding in our household. There is no question about our understanding being carried out by the family and by the family physician.

Why should any of us want to hold on to life when our days of usefulness are over? Why should we want to live any longer when it would simply add to the burdens of loved ones and friends? Why not go on and be with the Lord? After all Paul said, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). Do we really believe this or have we been teaching and preaching something we have not believed?

Word Can't Be
Locked In Cuba

ATLANTA (BP)--"They locked me up like a common criminal because I preached the Word, but they haven't locked up the Word," Missionary David Fite, who recently was released from prison in Cuba, cited from 2 Timothy 2:9.

Fite and his wife, Margaret, and Mrs. Fite's parents, the Herbert Caudills, all missionaries formerly to Cuba, reported some of their experiences recently during a luncheon meeting of the board of directors of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board here.

In 1965, Fite, then pastor of Buena Vista Baptist Church, and Caudill, director of Baptist work in Cuba, were imprisoned after being convicted of charges of espionage and illegal currency exchange.

Mrs. Fite said she was discouraged and "felt at many times I was not really doing mission work--looking after children and just obtaining food."

She said it was "sort of a dare to live in a Communist country," and still maintain one's Christian convictions. She illustrated proudly how the young Fite boys "always stood up for what they believed."

Mrs. Fite said 12-year-old Jamie explained to his teacher that he would never speak against the Cuban government, but that he would appreciate it if the teacher would not talk against his government in his presence.

Mrs. Caudill defined the crisis in Cuba as a "refining process," referring to Job 23:10--"But he knoweth the way that I take: When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

She said that the refining came among those who claimed to be Christian at the beginning of the revolution. "The ones left really love the Lord and are faithful," she said, "and are willing to pay whatever price may be necessary."

Just four days before, Mrs. Caudill had been released from Emory Hospital in Atlanta where on March 4 she underwent successful eye surgery to seal numerous perforations that could have resulted eventually in a detached retina.

The relatively new procedure was performed by Dr. William Hagler, the same Atlanta Ophthalmologist who had performed surgery on Caudill--once in the United States and again in Cuba.

"Although the Word is limited, it is not chained," Fite said. He said the people are trying to find new ways of witnessing in Cuba, and it is one of the most challenging mission fields," Fite said.

"It may be that more effective work is being done now with the door only partly open than it was when it was wide open," Caudill added.

In the regular Spring business session, the board of directors adopted a resolution that "...rejoices in the Cuban government's release of missionaries...and in their safe return to the United States..."

The resolution further conveyed thanks to "...thousands of Southern Baptists and other concerned Christians and friends (who) sought to help and have expressed their concern by prayer and by such actions as were available to them..."

These "friends" included the Baptist World Alliance, Canadian Baptists, the U. S. State Department, the Swiss Embassy in Havana, the Mexican Government, Church World Service, and Baptist Press (most of whom aided in the necessary transactions to effect the missionaries release and return).



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