



March 3, 1978

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Fourth In a Series

About Euthanasia:
Death With Dignity

By Henlee H. Barnette
For Baptist Press

Euthanasia is a term derived from the Greek words "eu," good, and "thanatos," death, and means literally "good death." Simply put, it usually refers to a "deliberate easing into death" of a person afflicted with a painful and incurable disease or injury.

Euthanasia has long troubled the consciences of the physician and the public. It has become a critical ethical issue with the development of new technologies for prolonging life. Does a patient have the right to reject mechanical means such as the respirator which may prolong life a few more painful weeks or months? Does such a patient have the moral right to choose the time and manner of death? These and other questions confront the Christian conscience in relation to euthanasia.

Euthanasia or the "good death" may be achieved by direct or indirect means. Direct euthanasia is a deliberate action to shorten or to end the life of the terminally ill person-- for example, injecting air into the veins of a patient with cancer. Indirect euthanasia may be accomplished: (1) by stopping treatments that prolong the patient's life such as "pulling the plug" that keeps a life-supporting system operating; (2) by withholding all treatment; and (3) by giving the patient increasing doses of pain-relieving drugs until enough toxicity is built up to cause death.

Thousands of Americans have written to the Euthanasia Educational Fund in New York for copies of "A Living Will." The Living Will is a brief testament by the patient addressed to family, physician, lawyer, clergyman, any medical facility in whose care the patient may happen to be, and to any individual who may become responsible for the patient's health, welfare or affairs during an illness in which there is no reasonable expectation of recovery.

The statement is to be signed in the presence of two witnesses and copies given to four or five other persons such as a doctor and to those most likely to be concerned "if the time comes when you can no longer take part in decisions for your own future." The Living Will, however, has no legal weight and will not stand up in court.

In 1976, California passed the nation's first right-to-die legislation. It is called the Natural Death Act. The directive to the doctor applies only to the terminally ill patient in terms of the measures in the bill.

Bills are pending in other states for right-to-die legislation. Among these are Hawaii and Montana. Switzerland is perhaps the only country which has legalized euthanasia on terminally ill persons.

Arguments are presented for and against euthanasia. Some of the points debated pro and con are as follows:

Con: Euthanasia is murder.

Pro: But murder is unlawful killing of a human being with malice aforethought.

Con: It violates the injunction, "Thou shalt not kill."

Pro: But the commandment means "no murder." Those who justify an unjustifiable war and capital punishment cannot condemn euthanasia on this ground.

Con: God must decide who shall live and who shall die.

Pro: If this is true then it is also wrong to seek to prolong life.

Con: Suffering is a part of the divine plan and the terminally ill person should live through the pain until the end.

Pro: The Bible teaches "Be merciful" and ending the life of an incurably suffering patient is an act of mercy.

Con: The sanctity of life forbids euthanasia.

Pro: The notion that life is absolutely sacred is not Christian. Some things are more valuable than life itself. Christian martyrs knew this. Life is not the highest good; the quality of life is more important than mere physical existence.

Con: One should do everything to save a life no matter the cost.

Pro: It is not right to bankrupt a family with hospital and medical costs when there is no hope of the recovery of the patient.

And so the debate goes on.

My own position is that neither indirect nor direct euthanasia should be absolutized. However, I feel more comfortable with the indirect method. The patient's wish that treatment be withdrawn should be honored. It is true that the conscious patient may make the decision impulsively or under extreme pain. But a safeguard can be established by requiring a time lag between the patient's decision and the withdrawal of treatment for a change of mind. If the patient is unconscious or in a coma, the decision could be made by the family in consultation with a team of doctors, nurses, and a clergyman.

Indirect euthanasia for the terminally ill person is morally defensible because it is in harmony with the Christian ethic of love. It allows the patient to die with a measure of dignity. Also it may save the family from bankruptcy due to the enormous cost involved in keeping the patient alive with a quality of life which is intolerable. (BP)

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This is the fourth in a five-part series on Christians and biomedical issues, written by Henlee H. Barnette, Ph.D., Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, University of Louisville School of Medicine. Barnette prepared these articles in consultation with the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Language Missionary
'Skycaps' For Star

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CHICAGO (BP)--It isn't often a missionary gets the chance to "skycap" for a professional football star, then share Christian experiences with him.

But it happened to Oregon's Harold Hitt, a language missionary for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Hitt, boarding an airplane recently in Kansas City, noticed a young man in a tuxedo struggling with heavy bags and an even heavier trophy and offered to help.

Walter Payton of the Chicago Bears, 1977's premier running back in the National Football League, returning from an awards presentation, readily accepted Hitt's offer. When they deplaned in Chicago, Hitt again carried one of Payton's bags.

"On the way to the baggage area, Payton asked me what it had been like when I became a Christian," Hitt recalls. "I shared with him, then asked his experience.

"He related it to me, adding that his mother had always wanted him to be a Baptist preacher," Hitt said.

Quoting Payton, Hitt added: "'Now, I get a lot of opportunities to speak, especially to young people. I often try to share with them what it means to be a Christian. And you know, Reverend, I think they listen to me more than if I was a preacher.'"

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Vandercook Honored For Overcoming Obstacles

CHICAGO (BP)--John P. Vandercook, who withstood early criticism and became the "father of Southern Baptist seamen's ministries," was honored with the 1978 Language Missions Exemplary Service Award.

Vandercook of New Orleans, who prevailed in his efforts "to offer a person centered approach which has become the bench mark for seaman's ministries" across the Southern Baptist Convention, received the award at the 21st annual Home Mission Board Language Missions Leadership Conference.

In the 15 years since Vandercook and his wife Catherine began their pioneering ministry in the basement of their home, thousands of seamen from dozens of nations have visited the Baptist Seamen's Center of New Orleans.

More than 1,000 from 23 countries made professions of faith in Jesus Christ in one recent year, and each year, the center distributes some 2,000 Bibles in different languages and thousands of Scripture portions.

Throughout his ministry, Vandercook has had to fight the concept which labeled seamen as "rough, uncouth, amoral, ungodly people who couldn't respond to the gospel if they wanted to," said Oscar Romo, director of the Home Mission Board's language missions department.

Most seamen do not make trouble, said Vandercook, whose World War II service in the U.S. Navy sensitized him to their needs. Instead, they are lonely men, far from home and often having limited knowledge of the English language and American customs.

Since beginning the New Orleans Baptist Seamen's Service, Vandercook has discovered "almost any display of interest or concern" gets response from the seamen. Yet he has struggled to gain support necessary to keep the ministry running.

"Despite the obstacles and protests, Vandercook ventured out on faith to do what he knew was right," Romo said.

Vandercook, previously a pastor in Mississippi, was pastor of Third Street Baptist Church in New Orleans, in the heart of the riverfront area, when he began his seamen's work.

The Little Rock, Ark., native and his wife, Catherine, also active in the ministry, have three sons and a daughter. One son, Paul, serves as a home missionary working in seamen's ministries from a base in Gulfport, Miss., one of an estimated two dozen such programs begun since his father started the first Southern Baptist Seamen's work in 1962.

Balanced Church Growth
Needed in Local Churches

By Jim Lowry

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Balanced, systematic church growth has been neglected by ministers of education in Southern Baptist churches in recent years, but interest is on the upswing, according to church administration consultant Will Beal.

A new awareness of evangelistic expectations by Southern Baptists is a primary reason for the increased interest, Beal told 64 ministers of education from 17 states during a Sunday School Board seminar on how to function as an effective growth agent in the local church.

Church growth, based on winning more people to Christ, should be a major part of the minister of education's responsibility, emphasized Beal, consultant to ministers of education in the board's church administration department.

Interest in church growth has increased noticeably, but the concept is not new to Southern Baptists--merely concentrated application of efforts now known and used in local churches. Beal recommended use of existing organizations as the best way to approach a growth plan, and he listed Sunday School as the chief evangelistic agency in the church.

The Sunday School organization contains a majority of church members, is well organized, is the largest organization in the church, and is assigned the task of outreach, a primary concern of growth, he said.

"Church growth is not accomplished just with preaching or buses, or any single element," he continued. "It needs to be a mix of things to give sustaining growth."

Although overall Southern Baptist Convention membership continues to rise, Beal said, SBC growth mostly involves biological and transfer growth in local churches. This involves children and relatives of church members joining churches, or members transferring from one church to another. While some churches grow, he said, many times churches in other cities or states decrease in membership.

"The Southern Baptist Convention needs conversion growth," Beal told the group, "by winning lost persons to Christ. Every church needs to plan a growth strategy to maximize use of physical, organizational and financial resources. This will provide a balanced program for growth."

The seminar outlined several projects to use in church growth. They included such board emphases as the ACTION Sunday School enrollment plan, the "Adult Start a Class" plan, church-wide census, new units, Vacation Bible School, revival, cradle roll baby hunt and bus outreach.

All leaders of a church must be involved to have a successful church growth campaign, Beal said, including the pastor, minister of music, minister of education and leaders of all organizations. "Involving all church staff members and leaders in the church growth effort will provide a planned outreach which can give steady, solid increases."

"We're not advocating new revelations or miracles for church growth," he said, "but we're seeing a new focus in our denomination on growth which we have not seen for years. We need to continue the tried and proven formulas we've used for years in training and Bible study but try new things in the area of being a growth agent by balancing the ministries of the church to reach out to as many people as possible."

Seminars on the minister of education as a growth agent are planned at the Sunday School Board, Oct. 23-27, 1978, and Feb. 19-23, 1979. The board will release a manual, "Minister of Education as a Growth Agent," in October, 1978. Beal, author of the manual, was minister of education at First Baptist Church, Abilene, Texas, before moving to the board and previously served as minister of education at three other Baptist churches.

Retirement Income Main Problem For the Elderly

SAN ANGELO, Texas (BP)--Inadequate income in retirement is the number one problem afflicting America's elderly, Darold H. Morgan, president of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board said.

Speaking to the Southern Baptist Association of Ministries With the Aging, Morgan focused on segments of needs for older people and pinpointed major developments toward meeting them.

He said that although older Americans have won the attention of the government, a gap still exists between the elderly and religious and private sectors in establishing worthwhile programs for facilities and services greatly needed compared with those available.

Greater income heads the list of needs, Morgan said, noting that Social Security is the chief source of support for most elderly. But many recipients remain at poverty level or below, even though Social Security benefits have almost doubled since 1970.

Supplemental security income was initiated to assist but even the maximum amount is not enough for many elderly persons, he said.

Morgan commended churches for establishing programs to serve the elderly and the association for extending its vision to promote them. He predicted the church will be more sensitive and creative in this ministry as the older population grows.

"Our older population will live long, enjoy better health and have less money due to inflation, so our churches will have to help them cope with these challenges," he declared.

In a four-session workshop, Elbert C. Cole, a Methodist pastor, led the group in "creative concepts in care," all based on the successful Shepherd's Center he established in Kansas City.

Cole said the Shepherd's Center provides home services which play a major part in helping older persons avoid institutionalization and live in their own homes. The center provides seven home services, ranging from young people who help the elderly shop to handyman projects which utilize the skills of craftsmen who make minor home repairs.

Older people are futuristic, eager to keep informed and stay up-to-date about new developments and ideas, Cole continued. The center conceives of itself as a conduit to help older persons in these areas and help other agencies in serving them more effectively.

The Southern Baptist Association of Ministries With the Aging was restructured and objectives redefined last year to keep the entire Baptist community informed on aging needs, trends and services. Outgoing president, R. Furman Kenney, administrator of the Virginia Baptist Home, Newport News, said membership is open to any church, agency or state convention that offers a service or program to the aged.

New officers elected were R.L. Herring, administrator of Buckner Trew-Ryburn Home, Dallas, president; Horace Kerr, family ministries, Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tenn., president-elect; W.H. Branyan, Union Avenue Baptist Church ministries, Memphis, Tenn., vice president; James Barber of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, secretary-treasurer; and W. L. (Bill) Howse III, Hurt Gerontology Center, Culpepper, Va., coordinator. The group will meet in Long Beach, Calif., Feb. 25-27, 1979.

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Baylor Given Expensive Computer Equipment

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WACO, Texas (BP)--Computer equipment valued at \$792,708 has been donated to Baylor University by the Daniel International Corporation, a construction company based in Greenville, S.C.

The Honeywell 600 Series system should be installed in Baylor's Computation Center by mid-March, said Ed V. Harris, computation center director.

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WMU Leader Says 'Total
Woman' Approach Wrong

COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP)--It is incredible that "the manipulation and self-deceit of the "Total Woman" approach to life and relations between the sexes is being presented as the attitude of the Christian church toward women, the executive director of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union told a women's conference in Columbia, S.C.

Carolyn Weatherford, addressing the "Conference on Women in the Church in the Future," said as women move into leadership roles in the church and elsewhere, it is "feminine attitudes that need more changing than males' attitudes."

She urged those attending the conference, spearheaded by women's organizations in 15 major denominational groups in South Carolina, to form support groups for women involved in seeking new roles in church and society.

Women who actually move into leadership roles report that they receive the least support and the most criticism from women in the church, she said.

Miss Weatherford, top officer of the SBC's woman's organization, characterized this as "an era of emerging women" in the United States but deplored the negative development forming across the country "of a network of those opposed to what they call 'radical, man-hating females.' It is appalling that there are those in our churches who will listen to anyone who quotes any part of Scripture and believe what they say as Gospel."

She quoted statistics showing that "only 14 percent of divorced women receive alimony, only 44 percent of divorced mothers receive child support, while when it comes to funds provided for the elderly and retired, widows are asked to exist on half the money that men receive." And she pointed out that only 58 percent of those arrested for forcible rape last year were prosecuted.

"The Christian woman needs to say 'I can do all things with Christ,' and go forth to do, not what God has called her husband or father to do, but what God has called her to do," she said.

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Suicide Increasing
Among Young People

By Liz Skillen

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THOMASVILLE, N. C. (BP)--Five years ago it was rated fifth. Today, according to the World Health Organization, suicide is the second-leading cause of death among young people in the U. S.

"Suicide among young people aged 15 to 24 has increased in epidemic proportions," said Ari Kiev, a Cornell Medical School psychiatrist in a recent Family Weekly interview.

Why such an increase?

"There's much more pressure placed on young people to participate in activities before they are ready," Kiev said. "And the family has been undermined by such perplexities as a rising divorce rate, high mobility, fragmented structure of communities and weakened goal-directed behavior."

To the confused youngster, death may seem a way out.

"People commit and attempt suicide for a number of reasons," offered William Springs Jr., psychologist for the Baptist Children's Homes in Thomasville, N.C. "Lack of communication, a plea for help, internalized aggression, depression, impulsivity are reasons among today's youth."

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Springs says an old myth is that people who talk about suicide won't actually do it. "Those who discuss killing themselves are just as likely to commit suicide as ones who don't. We need to listen and be aware of humans in trouble."

Suicide and attempts at it are often pleas for help. When a person receives no assurance of his worth, self-inflicted death may become a last bid for love and attention to a fast-moving world. Immediate-help hot lines can be an effective place to turn.

"It's very difficult to express negative feelings in this country," Springs pointed out. However, hostility, guilt, fear and hate need to have some sort of outlet so that they are not directed toward self.

Internalized aggression--hatred of one's self--is destructive; if intensive enough, suicide may result. Equally, aggression directed toward the young person--a parent's hatred for example--may become the individual's death wish.

Depression, "a feeling of utter helplessness" as Springs described it, ranks near the top of reasons for suicide and attempts. Individuals in this condition are also more difficult to reach. To the severely depressed, there is no answer to the question, "Why live?"

"The biggest problem with people who are feeling down," Kiev stated, "is that they don't think people understand." The Cornell psychiatrist suggests a sympathetic approach, rather than a "snap out of it" attitude when dealing with a depressed youngster.

Suicide can also be the result of a spur-of-the-moment decision. Impulsivity--action without forethought--is high in the American teenager.

Statistically there are more suicides among boys; more attempts among girls. According to Springs, this is partly due to choice of death means. The instruments that males select are usually quicker and more accurate, like a gun.

Impulse suicides are prompted by motives such as spite--"They'll cry when I'm gone;" peaking of internalized aggression; loss of love object--a boyfriend or girlfriend who dies or defaults.

Are there ways to detect suicide before it occurs?

"In most suicide cases," Springs noted, "you can go back and find mileposts--a person's feelings of not belonging, the fact that he had no one to talk to and had problems with day-to-day living."

Kiev suggested that parents, friends and teachers be alert to intense withdrawal, outspoken unhappiness, disturbances in appetite or sleep, loss of interest in sports or former hobbies, decline in school performance, giving away meaningful objects, any mention of suicide--even in a joking, lighthearted way.

"In order to prevent suicide we're going to have to train school guidance counselors, pastors, parents, teachers to recognize and identify suicidal behaviors," psychologist Springs stated. "Take the same steps as if looking for drugs. Note radical changes in either appearance or behavior, and be watchful of the teenager that repeatedly locks himself in his room and has no interaction with others."

Springs attributed part of the statistical rise in the number of suicides to the fact that self-inflicted death is no longer a hidden affair. However, he agrees there is definitely a death trend among America's adolescents. And before that trend can be reversed, the psychologist said that those closest to today's youth--his family--must wake up. Be alert to needs expressed in actions, as well as those verbalized; be available; be supportive. Care.

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CORRECTION

In Baptist Press story mailed 2/27/78, entitled "Trust es Say Dismissal Charges Not Valid," in line one of graph 7, make that read: Johnson, now pastor of Forest Park Baptist Church, Joplin, Mo. etc (rather than First Baptist Church).

Thanks,
Baptist Press