

Does Vischer consider his formulation a genuine expression of the aim and function of the Faith and Order Commission? If so, how will he reconcile it with the Orthodox and Catholic teaching regarding Christian unity? In the reviewer's opinion, Vischer's interpretation is no accident. It expresses a dichotomy which appears in several of the Accra documents and which needs to be dealt with.

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Wilson, Jerry B. *Death by Decision: The Medical, Moral, and Legal Dilemmas of Euthanasia*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975. 208 pp. \$7.50.

The problem of euthanasia has become acute since medical technology is now able to prolong life indefinitely, and it is complex because it involves medical ethics, law, religion, and economics.

The author begins his discussion with a historical survey of the practice of euthanasia from the time of ancient Greece to the present. He then sets the stage for his further discussion by presenting four levels of moral discourse, based on the expressive-evocative, the moral, the ethical, and the post-ethical. The first is the unreflective spontaneous emotional reaction. The second deals with practical problems of conduct based on moral rules and regulations. The third evaluates and challenges the moral rules and regulations, especially when two rules conflict or when the application of these rules causes great inconvenience or suffering. These evaluations are based on ethical principles rather than rules. The post-ethical level deals with the validity of the ethical principles which have a metaphysical or theological basis. Obviously the problem of euthanasia should not be approached from the first level. In general practice it is dealt with on the second level. The author urges the discussion to go on to the ethical and post-ethical levels. He shows that because of conflicting standards, necessity forces us to deal with it on the ethical level. Here the conflicting positions are based on what one feels demands the priority—the value of life *per se* or the dignity of life: "Advocates of euthanasia emphasize the quality of life over its quantity and insist that the value of life is destroyed when it is accompanied by severe restrictions or suffering. Opponents of euthanasia emphasize the sanctity of life *per se* and claim that life always has value, regardless of its quality" (p. 52).

After dealing at length with conflicting religious views, medical dilemmas, and legal problems, Wilson presents what he considers should be the new requirements of care for the dying. What in practice goes on, that is, a furtive practice of euthanasia, is, he feels, unacceptable. While the courts tend to be lenient in cases involving mercy killing or euthanasia, there is no assurance that such will be the case. In practice both medically and legally there is tacit agreement that the patient not only has a right to live but also the right to die. Building on what he calls theocentric faith, Wilson urges a patient-centered (not life-oriented) and responsible medical care. He sees death not as the enemy of life but as one of the processes of life

created by God. He calls for a social-systems model instead of the conventional pattern of private practice in emergency situations. To make decisions in such situations, he suggests a committee of five including two physicians in fields related to the patient's illness, a representative of the hospital, a counselor or psychiatrist, and a chaplain or the patient's rabbi, priest or minister. The patient himself should be permitted to make his own decision concerning voluntary euthanasia when capable, but if not, the family or guardian assumes responsibility. He lays down specific guidelines concerning defective infants and the aged, and also legal guidelines. In the latter he calls for the legalization of voluntary euthanasia when the request is made by a competent patient, or by the nearest relative or legal guardian when the patient is not competent, in cases which are terminal. The committee of five functions to "evaluate his condition, verify his desire to die, and decide whether active or passive euthanasia is warranted" (p. 194). All of these should be indicated on appropriate legal forms. Such a death should not affect insurance benefits or survivorship rights.

Wilson has set forth the issues on this problem clearly and his suggestions make good sense. However, the book shows some signs of originating as a dissertation; it is not written as clearly as it might have been. There is a tendency to be overly precise in the breakdown of categories so that there is much repetition of material and overlapping of ideas. In his last chapter there needs to be more elaboration of his ideas regarding theocentric faith and its implications. Death is described as one of the processes of life, but how this is so in view of the Bible's conception of death is not explained. Affirmations are made without support. There is nevertheless much value in this book on a timely subject.

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