



# BGST INSIGHT

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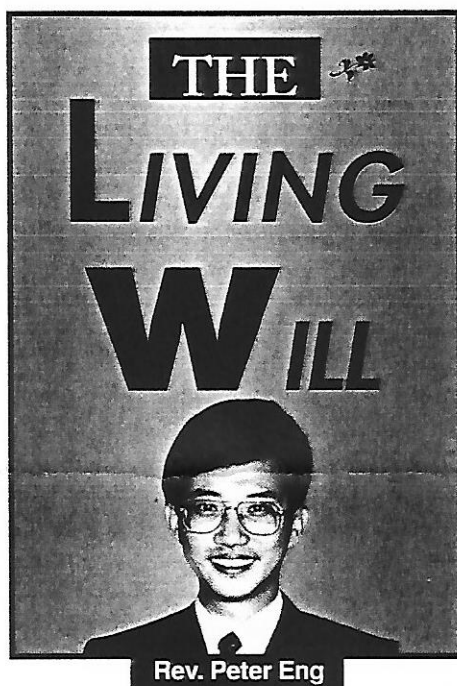
In recent months there has been discussion on whether one can and should make a will to be taken off life support machines when one is terminally ill. We have passionate proponents and opponents on this issue for it is a subject close to our hearts. Some of us may wonder if we should make a Living Will. Others have loved ones in that situation.

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I wish to discuss this subject dispassionately though it is an emotive one. This is because morality does not depend on emotion but on the will of God. To determine the right and wrong of a moral issue, we cannot take the path of least resistance. Nor is the path of most resistance the correct one. **Morals and ethics go back to what God has revealed in his Word.**

The term that comes up in such discussion is the generally accepted term 'euthanasia'. 'Euthanasia' comes from a compound Greek word, *eu-thanatos*, which means "good-death." When a person is suffering, he may want to die rather than suffer, and asks another person to help him speed his death.

We may also have the situation when



a person is no longer able to make a conscious decision, and the family members feel that it is in the person's best interest to die rather than to live on.

The first internationally publicized case was Karen Quinlan who was on the life support machine. Her adoptive parents went to court to gain the right to turn off the machine. Eventually, they won the right to do so. Later, a baby named 'Doe' was born with a gullet that did not connect to the stomach. This is a problem that can be corrected by surgery, but the parents felt it was better for baby Doe to die. They also won the court case. Baby Doe starved to death. In Holland, many cancer patients ask their doctors to give them medication that will kill them. It is usually done through a lethal dose either through injection or ingestion.

The law courts are at a loss. There is

no moral direction in the world for an issue such as this. Even clerics who are interviewed say that the Bible does not talk about it. They say that science has overtaken the Bible in that science has created questions of morality that the Bible has no answer to. But is that true?

The Word of God is sufficient for every spiritual and moral need. Can science overtake the Bible? *"All Scripture is inspired by God, and useful for training in righteousness that the man of God may be proficient, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (1 Tim 3:16).* Let us examine this issue together.

## The Issue

First we need to understand the issue. There is active and passive euthanasia, voluntary and involuntary euthanasia.

1. Active euthanasia is to speed the process of death.
2. Passive euthanasia is to withhold treatment which will result in death.
3. Voluntary euthanasia is when a person requests death.
4. Involuntary euthanasia is when family members decide to end the life of a person no longer capable of making that decision.

The issue of the Living Will is motivated by considerations such as quality of life, medical cost, and the rights of the individual to end his own life. And the Living Will is concerned primarily with voluntary euthanasia.

**Case Study of Active Euthanasia - Saul (1 Sam. 31:1-6; 2 Sam. 1:16)**

Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me."

But his armor bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it. Another person came along and wanted to claim credit for Saul's death. He reported to David:

*"I happened to be on Mount Gilboa," the young man said, "and there was Saul leaning on his spear, with chariots and riders almost upon him.... Then he said to me, 'stand over me and kill me! I am in the throes of death, but I am still alive.' So I stood over him and killed him because I knew that after he had fallen he could not survive."*

David asked him, "Why are you not afraid to strike the Lord's anointed?"

Then David called one of his men and said, "Go, strike him down!" So he struck him down and he died."

This incident tells us that Saul's armor bearer did not think it right to speed Saul's death though Saul requested it. Another young man reported to David, that he expedited Saul's death though he did not.

The judgment upon him was that he was executed for his act of active euthanasia, even though it was voluntary on Saul's part. Subsequently, the people discovered that that was not the case. But this is immaterial because David's judgment was based on the self confession of the young man, probably hoping for a reward.



## Case Studies of Passive Euthanasia - Paul

Passive euthanasia is a refusal to act though a person knows that by his inaction, death will result. Popular Christianity argues from the point of the sanctity of life. It is true that man, made in the image of God, has a life that is sacred, which only God can take away. We also need to recognize that eventually we all die (Heb 9:27). **Above the value of life, is the will of God.**

The events leading to Paul's death are instructive (Acts 21:10-14; Phil 1:21-23). They are summarized below:  
*After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his hands and feet with it and said,*

*"The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles."*

*When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." When he could not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."*

*For to me, to live is Christ, to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what I shall choose I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ which is better by far; but it is more necessary that I remain in the body.*

The circumstances surrounding the death of Paul were that he headed for Jerusalem despite Agabus' prophecy. Paul probably believed that the prophecy was for information (to prepare him) rather than to dissuade him. The prophecy did not say that he will die, and he did not. But the prophecy implied the possibility of death.

This forms the crux of the issue. What is obvious is that Paul did not dodge what might lead to death though he could have done so by changing his course of actions. He continued in a course of action passively that might result in his death.

When Paul was eventually imprisoned in Rome, (when he wrote Philippians), he reiterated that to him, life and death were non-issues. It is the question of a fruitful ministry with the people. And regardless of what happened, he will not die till God has accomplished through him what God desires.

The biblical principle to be drawn from this is that there is no iron clad rule to prolong life regardless of what happens. A person may allow what he perceives as the natural events of his life to determine whether or not he lives or dies.

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what happens.**

The practical application of such a rule will differ. Many feel that if medical intervention can correct a problem, one is obligated to use available medical means. If medical means cannot correct the problem, but only prolong the problem (and the life), one is not obligated to employ such medical means. We can allow a person to die.

In the case of Paul's companions, they did not want Paul to go to Jerusalem, but finally relented. In a sense, they could block Paul's path, a path which would eventually lead to his death, but they did not. They too accepted that it was the Lord's will.



## Conclusion

The issue of euthanasia is complex and has endless variations. But the Bible does provide guidelines for us to follow. The Bible is sufficient for every moral issue, and has all we need to live a holy a life - including the issue of euthanasia.

Briefly stated, I would conclude that no person has a right to active euthanasia (to speed up the process of death), whether it is voluntary or involuntary. Life is in God's hands, not ours nor our family members'.

Passive euthanasia is permissible, whether voluntary or involuntary. That is to say, we are not obligated to prolong life indefinitely. If the Lord has called a person home, we should let the person go in peace.

Beyond the points raised in this article, there will be many others. (e.g. "When does a person die?") It is impossible to address every issue in this short article. The specific subject I am raising here is the morality of the Living Will.

I suggest that the usual frame of reference for examining the morality of the Living Will is incorrect. Most people are looking at the morality of this act from the point of voluntary or involuntary euthanasia. The right reference is to ask if the Living Will promotes active euthanasia, or does it simply give legal right for passive euthanasia.

Now you decide.





# LIVING

# WILL - A final word

(for the  
moment

at least)



- by Rev. (Dr.) Quek Swee Hwa

In the last issue of BGST Insight, we promised a further word on the matter of Living Wills or Advanced Medical Directives (AMD). Rev Peter Eng, our New Testament lecturer dealt with the view that seems to be prevalent that "science has overtaken the Bible" and "created morality questions" to which the Bible has no answer. He dismissed that view and insisted that the Bible does throw light on the matter. Active euthanasia is forbidden in the Bible. Nevertheless Rev Eng is of the view that it is permissible from a biblical standpoint and points to Paul's refusal to accept the prophetic word from Agabus in Acts 21:10-14 as one such example.

For myself, the troubling point is that the line between passive and active euthanasia is thin and tenuous. Active euthanasia is not a problem at the moment as there is widespread revulsion against the idea from the "ground" in Singapore and the proposed Bill specifically prohibits it. However, I maintain that there is a very real probability that Living Wills may lead to euthanasia, at least to passive euthanasia understood as a refusal to prolong life indefinitely in a hopeless situation. Some deny that such a thing exists at all. In the minds of the general public in Singapore, I suspect, living wills will be perceived as giving a person the legal right

for passive euthanasia.

I gave in the last issue of BGST Insight a survey of the research literature on Living Wills, showing both those who were against it and those who were for it. I did not give my own position then as I wanted to wait for a more definitive word from the Government authorities concerning the legalization and implementation of this matter. It is not necessary to wait further as it is a foregone conclusion. Living Wills are going to be a reality in Singapore very soon. Many have voiced support for it, including prominent Christian leaders in Singapore. Many Christians I have asked are not very concerned and dismiss it as an non-issue because, as they rightly point out, the AMD is voluntary act: no one is being forced to sign it.

No one? For the moment at least. In this concluding article I wish to mention that I was quite prepared to lay the matter aside until I re-read what Chris Hackler had written in "Advance Directives and the Refusal of Treatment," *Medicine and Law* (vol.7, 1989, pp.457-465). Hackler mentioned that California was the first state in the USA to legalize living wills and this was done in 1976. Seven other states followed suit and by 1987 out of 50 states 39 had such provisions. But these were beset with problems as regards enforcement and what was actually

provided. Thank God, Singapore is lagging behind with reference to the legalization of living wills. That is to our advantage as it may help us avoid making the same mistakes as our predecessors. I offer to our readers the following conclusions:

## 1. The Biblical Issue\*

The Bible does not speak directly about the matter. But it does speak about euthanasia, a related matter, and that has significant bearing as to how we regard living wills. I believe we can establish a connection between the two issues. Christians must recognize that they have no right to determine how or when they wish to die.

## 2. The Slippery Slope\*

The need to keep on revising living wills provisions in the case of the Anglo-American examples warns us that we cannot think that the proposed Bill is going to rest as it stands. Problems will definitely arise requiring further amendments. For example, AMD's in Singapore can have a proxy provision which allows another person familiar with the wishes of the person making the will to enforce it. Familiarity is a rather ambiguous concept and may be difficult to establish, legally speaking. Further, I am un-

comfortable about the decision-making process concerning what constitutes terminal illness. Death is a multi-dimensional thing and the medical aspect is but one consideration. No Christian should allow a panel of expert doctors to make that decision for him. Their criteria would be based on purely medical considerations and life is more than just that. The all-important spiritual dimension is not considered at all! I am sure that as further legislation comes in to tighten the statutory provisions for living wills, there might indeed be a loosening of controls and the result will be what has been described as the slippery slope from living wills to euthanasia.

### 3. Sanctity of Life\*

Hackler is aware of the oft-cited comment by those against living wills that signing such a document is tantamount to "assuming a divine prerogative or 'playing God.'" and he adds, "One may respond to such arguments in at least two ways. In a pluralistic and liberal society one may appeal to the principles of toleration and religious freedom. But in any society one may argue that such objections are based upon a rather primitive theology." What a preposterous argument! That is no argument at all! Let all who endorse living wills consider whether or not they are in agreement with Hackler's heckling against the sanctity of life.

### 4. Enforcement Issues\*

What is troubling is the call by Hackler to force physicians and

others who ignore AMD's to obey them. He mentioned that while "all states relieve physicians of the legal liability for following the instructions of a valid directive...only about half hold physicians responsible for ignoring them." This was because no directive, however carefully framed, should be applied by a responsible physician "in a wooden manner, insensitive to the peculiarities of the particular situation." A doctor who thinks he is acting in good faith by ignoring a directive must provide good reasons and what is "good" may be differently construed. In such a case, he faces disciplinary action and some states in the USA have passed a bill making "noncompliance a misdemeanor". Hackler proposes a more aggressive measure: doctors or hospitals who submit bills for treatment which have been refused earlier in a AMD would simply not be paid: no one should be forced to pay such bills. Furthermore, "neither the patient nor the estate nor a third party payer (such as an insurance company or government agency) would have to pay for the refused treatment."

### 5. Economic Incentives\*

Still more alarming is the proposal to encourage more substantial number of people signing AMD's to reduce "health care expenditures for futile treatment, with consequent savings to families, insurance companies, and government entitlement programmes." Rather candidly Hackler concludes: "It would seem that the most serious impediment to greater use of advance directives is not considered

opposition; rather they are ignorance, apathy, and the unpleasantness of thinking about death. These are not valid reasons for spending large sums of money for futile or even marginally beneficial treatment." Hence he suggested that the signing of an AMD be made a condition for insurance coverage or social security benefits. He is prepared to see attached to an AMD an option for a patient to change his mind and request for a full and aggressive treatment. But that is subtle as he is insisting on the signing of an AMD first. At the least he hopes that a signed AMD would qualify a person for insurance discounts or bonus social security payments. This brings us to where many suspect was the real reason for starting the whole discussion on living wills - reduction of government and personal on the skyrocketing spending costs on health care. Then it comes to this point and Christians must be clear-minded on this matter. The value of a human life must never be linked to placing a monetary value on it. Avoiding unnecessary medical costs is a sound and good policy, but we know that God supplies our every need and that includes help in defraying medical costs in the preservation of life.

Let's not be mistaken. If I may be permitted a prophetic word - an uncritical acceptance of living wills and an unrestrained legislative approach to refine the provisions as they presently stand will surely lead to an endorsement of euthanasia, however it may be conceived - as active or passive. And it is better to advocate legal minimization in this regard.