# Should we grant the right to die?

Living was, in years past, looked upon as the natural phenomenon largely under the control of Providence and little influence by the actions of many plying, except from violence or poisoning, was looked upon also as an inevitable phenomenon, with

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looked upon also as an inevitable phenomenon, with the time of death beyond the control of man. These attitudes are now obsolete. Today, man has much more control over the time of dying. This change, produced my medical science, requires that we examine more closely the ethical framework of living and dying. Death was once an agreed-upon end point. This has ceased to be true. Every day, persons in whom the heartbeat and respiration have stopped are restored to life and return to normal activity. On the other hand, we all know of people who are still alive because the heart and respiration continue, although the brain has ceased to function. What is, or rather, what should be the definition of death?

WHAT GUIDANCE does our society give to physicians when they encounter patients who have terminal illnesses? How should the medical team best handle these situations? How long should the doctor make a determined all-out effort to maintain life

When is the time to determine that comfort and freedom from pain are more important than an extra rasping breath, an additional day or week or month of physical torment? We have not yet formulated meaningful responses to these questions. The problem needs to be defined in the clearest terms. We are not speaking of so-called euthanasia or "mercy kiling." Certainly no one has the right deliberately to take a sick person's life with lethal medication. Nevertheless, it is quite possible to shorten life by withholding certain sophisticated therapy usually available at hospitals.

This withholding of therapy in certain apphisicated therapy that the problem that our society faces as we move across new frontiers in medical scince.

I KNEW A BRILLIANT professional man who had become severely ill with cancer that had spread throughout his entire body. Full doses of radiation therapy had given only enough relief to make life bearable, provided that he remain perfectly still. The slightest motion precipitated paroxysms of exerutiating pain.

Other procedures, including surgery and chemotherapy were of no avail. With intravenous decing, oxygen therapy, constant nursing care and an-



tibiotics, it was possible to extend his span for two or three months. Was it right to do so? We have only begun to consider the ethical issues involved in this as in so many other similar cases. I find a growing concern today that medical science keeps some people alive when they should be permitted to die. But it is not fair to place the entire burden of responsibility on the physician and the medical teams. the medical team

the medical team.

It is incumbent upon religious institutions to address this problem of defining living and dying, for these fundamental questions must be answered by our most sacred values and highest ideals.

### Family living ecumenical topic

Six major Protestant denominations and the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit and the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit will sponsor a day-long convocation on family living Saturday, March 14, in Metropolitan United Methodist Church, 8000 Woodward Ave.

Presenting the program touching on many issues formerly difficult for churches to face will be the interde-

many issues formerly difficult for churches to face will be the interde-tominational School For Ministry, deadquarted in Ann Arbor. In addition to traditional aspects of

family living, the convocation will deal with singles, interfaith marriage, two-career marriag, divorce, step-parenting, single parenting, sex edeation, the aged and homosexuality.

Registration at the door is \$18, covering program and lunch. Special rates are available for those who register in advance as well as for couples and groups of six or more.

Those rates may be obtained by calling the School for Ministry, \$94-0111.

### Social service director speaks at Jewish-Catholic Day luncheon

Dr. John Dempsey, director of the Michigan Department of Social Ser-vices, will be speaker for the annual Jewish-Catholic Day beginning at 11 a.m. Thursday, March 19, at Sacred Heart Seminary, 2701 Chicago Blvd., Detroit.

Detroit.

The event, sponsored by the League of Catholic Women an the League of Jewish Women's Organizations of Greater Detroit, will begin with a social hour and petite luncheon at noon. The program will follow.

Dr. Dempsey's topic will be "The Rights and Wrongs of Social Services Relative to Human Rights." Respond-ing to his talk will be Thomas Bergeson of the Michigan Catholic Conference, and Selma Goode, director of the Jew-ish Labor Committee in Detroit.

The public may attend the event, which traditionally attracts 500 women in the metropolitan area. No reservations are needed, and there is a \$1 charge for lunch.

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