

Consensus lacking on end-of-life issues

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By George Henson

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BROWNWOOD—When it comes to some of life's hard questions, answers aren't any easier for Christians than they are for other people—including questions concerning end-of-life issues.

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A universal consensus on topics such as euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide does not exist, said John Ferguson Jr., assistant professor of political science at Howard Payne University's Douglas MacArthur Academy of Freedom and author of [*Point/Counterpoint: The Right to Die*](#).



“There’s not one Christian view, and there’s not even just one Baptist view. A lot of Baptists differ in their views on the topic and where these lines of differing opinions should be drawn,” Ferguson said. “Some would argue that it is a very Christian thing to support a right to die if it will alleviate pain.”

As Ferguson points out in his book, however, the Southern Baptist Convention approved in 2001 a resolution castigating euthanasia. The strongly worded resolution read: “The messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting ... affirm our belief that every human life, including the life of the terminally ill, disabled or clinically depressed patient, is sacred and ought to be protected against unnecessary harm; and be it further resolved, that we find legalized euthanasia immoral ethically, unnecessary medically and unconscionable socially.”

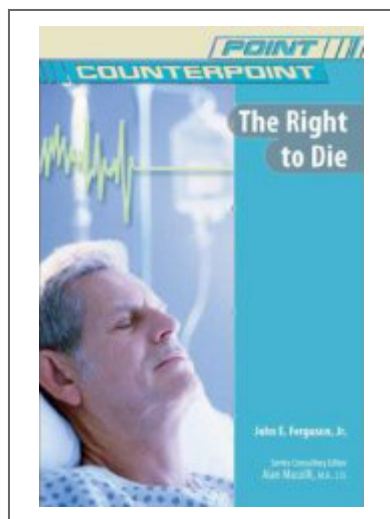
Ferguson’s book, written primarily for a secular audience, tries to provide both sides of the argument—not supplying an answer, but offering the fuel necessary to power the engines of thought.

“I see a lot of students who are very interested in these topics, and they

tend to have a very reflexive reaction because of the views they've heard from others. They haven't given enough thought to these issues to make them their own," Ferguson said.

As a teacher, he often thought of students while writing his book that offered divergent viewpoints.

"It's a very personal situation, but a lot of undergrads who have never had to deal with a loved one in this situation have very stringent views. But if they have seen a loved one go through a lengthy or painful death process, they are more open to seeing other viewpoints," he said.



The situation gets much more complicated when Christians are elected to office and start to make public policy based on their personal beliefs of what is right or wrong. Ferguson pointed to the machinations of the legislature and judicial bodies in the Terri Schiavo case as an example of how bad things can get.

When Christians become convinced they are right and all others are wrong in such cases, "it doesn't show the gentler side of Christianity for those on either side of the issue," he pointed out.

Ferguson discovered the difficulty of finding an easy answer as he

researched the subject before he wrote his book.

“I criticize students for not seeing more than one viewpoint, but this is one subject I hadn’t thought very deeply about. I discovered that this is a question where there are no quick, easy answers,” he said.

He doesn’t posit one viewpoint as better concerning the right to die in the book and will not now. But he reached one conclusion while writing the book: It’s important to put into writing one’s wishes concerning whether to continue life when there is little hope for recovery—and do it long before a crisis occurs.

“The problems that arise in this area are because people don’t think about it in advance, and it puts tremendous burdens on families and divides families as they try to choose their course,” Ferguson said. “Everyone needs to have written instructions for their family to follow.”

Ferguson also advised churches to be careful dealing with right-to-life issues in Sunday school lessons and sermons.

“The church is to be a place of healing, and these right-to-life Sundays can be very divisive and hurtful to families who have had to make very difficult decisions,” he said.

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