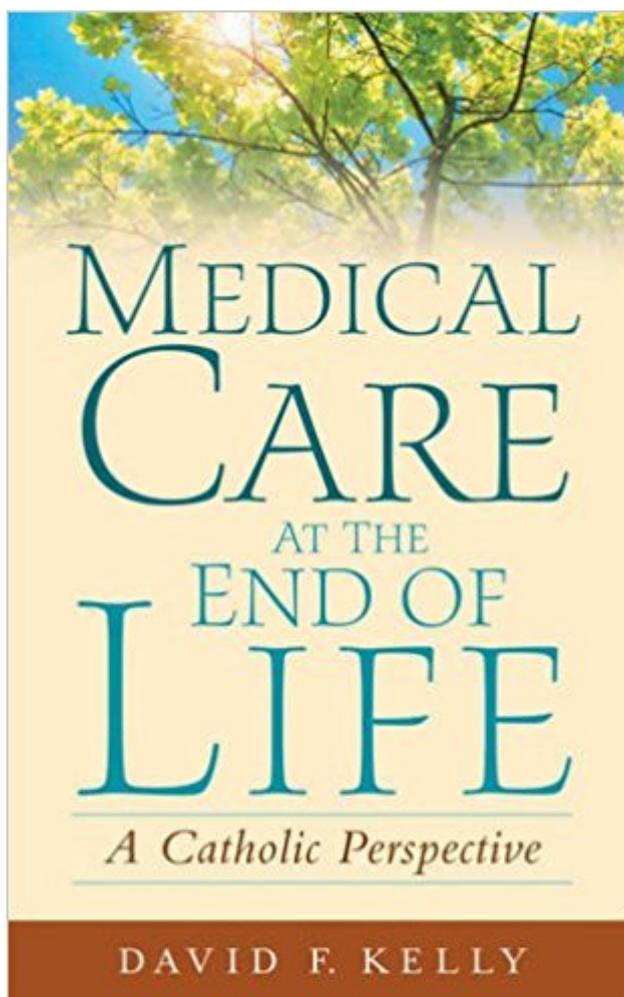


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# Medical Care At The End Of Life: A Catholic Perspective



## Synopsis

For over thirty years, David F. Kelly has worked with medical practitioners, students, families, and the sick and dying to confront the difficult and often painful issues that concern medical treatment at the end of life. In this short and practical book, Kelly shares his vast experience, providing a rich resource for thinking about life's most painful decisions. Kelly outlines eight major issues regarding end-of-life care as seen through the lens of the Catholic medical ethics tradition. He looks at the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary means; the difference between killing and allowing to die; criteria of patient competence; what to do in the case of incompetent patients; the meaning and use of advance directives; the morality of hydration and nutrition; physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia; and medical futility. Kelly's analysis is sprinkled with significant legal decisions and, throughout, elaborations on how the Catholic medical ethics tradition—as well as teachings of bishops and popes—understands each issue. He provides a helpful glossary to supplement his introduction to the terminology used by philosophical health care ethics. Included in Kelly's discussion is his lucid description of why the Catholic tradition supports the discontinuation of medical care in the Terry Schiavo case. He also explores John Paul II's controversial papal allocution concerning hydration and nutrition for unconscious patients, arguing that the Catholic tradition does not require feeding the permanently unconscious. *Medical Care at the End of Life* addresses the major issues that inform this last stage of caregiving. It offers a critical guide to understanding the medical ethics and relevant legal cases needed for clear thinking when individuals are faced with those crucial decisions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Strong in clinical experience and engagement with patients and families, Kelly offers a Catholic perspective on hotly contested issues . . . An excellent introduction to many legal controversies and rulings in the matter of health care."[America](#)"David F. Kelly's *Medical Care at the End of Life* is an indispensable guide for any person concerned with this topic<sup>1</sup> which should mean everyone . . . the book contains such a balanced treatment of all of the issues at hand."[Catholic Library World](#)"Kelly brings his expansive knowledge of Catholic health care ethics, church teachings and legal precedent together to contribute a fresh perspective on end-of-life care."[Conscience](#)"This book provides an exploration of the critical thinking necessary for a wide audience to make fully informed decisions regarding end-of-life health care treatment decision. It is sufficiently detailed through narratives and the application of cases to the author's own experience. Ethics committees, medical practitioners, patients and their families, and college bioethics classes will find the text useful for continuing education, clarification, and discussion."[Health Progress](#)"For those concerned about the ethical dimensions of caring for persons at the end of life, this book is valuable. In addition, it is indispensable for those who are seeking insight about Catholic moral teaching on these issues, and how that teaching has contributed to the broader secular conversation."[Vision](#)

"This practical book will be a valuable tool for health care chaplains who must deal with these issues on a regular basis."[Rev. Jeffrey R. Funk, executive director, Healthcare Chaplains Ministry Association](#)"This book provides an excellent understanding of Catholic perspectives on medical care at the end of life. Kelly brings to his analysis a broad knowledge of medical ethics, a deep Christian wisdom, a cogent and convincing presentation, and a clear writing style."[Charles E. Curran, Elizabeth Scurlock University Professor of Human Values, Southern Methodist University, and author of The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II](#)"In *Medical Care at the End of Life*, David Kelly brings his usual blend of rich clinical experience, excellent theological and bioethical resources, and a high degree of common sense and wisdom to bear on problematic issues surrounding the care of people at the end of life. His discussion of these issues is thoughtful and practical, well-grounded in the ethical dimensions of the debates, and extremely pastoral in application. This is a very important contribution to these debates and will be helpful to many

different audiences." — Thomas A. Shannon, professor emeritus of religion and social ethics, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

This book addresses the ever complex issue of ethics in end of life care by applying a Catholic perspective. I'm a Catholic and appreciated the fact that the author questions many Catholic inconsistencies in regards to this issue.

Well done. He explores the problems faced by physicians and family at the end of life. I agree with his view of giving enough pain Medication to completely remove the pain in a definitely dying patient even though it might speed death. I am a Catholic physician and disagree with some of the thoughts stated in other books which are against this. Most of these who have the latter opinion are not as familiar with the end of life as I am. I would wager that the end of life of Pope John Paul II was eased my way. Doctors are not outspoken when they care for someone they are sure is dying--for good reason.

On page 103 of this book, the author makes the following statement: "To claim that treatment can be morally extraordinary only when the person's death is imminent, regardless of whether the treatment is given, is to give biological life itself an absolute value that supercedes all other values." The problem for Mr. Kelly is that his Catholic 'perspective' contradicts Catholic doctrine. The Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church states the following: "471. What medical procedures are permitted when death is considered imminent? When death is considered imminent the ordinary care owed to a sick person cannot be legitimately interrupted. However, it is legitimate to use pain-killers which do not aim at in death and to refuse 'over-zealous treatment,' that is the utilization of disproportionate medical procedures without reasonable hope of a positive outcome." In other words, Catholics can only contemplate the sort of actions envisioned by Mr. Kelly when death is indeed imminent, and owe a higher standard of care than he suggests. Likewise, they should be wary of the erroneous conclusions found in his book. A far better resource is Archbishop Jose Gomez's *A Will to Live: Clear Answers on End of Life Issues*.

Kelly's book provides a helpful, and at the time of its publication, magisterially correct presentation of end of life issues from a Catholic perspective. This is an accessible summary that gives an overview of general principles. There is a later pronouncement by Benedict the XVI making giving food and hydration to patients in a permanent vegetative state a moral requirement which is

something John Paul II had not done. There are ongoing debates about the theological coherence of this pronouncement, and many commentators believe that Benedict departed from the major lines of Roman Catholic medical ethics. Readers wishing to think through a more technical theological discussion of these debates will find Tollefsen's *Artificial Nutrition and Hydration: The New Catholic Debate* a helpful but difficult read.

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