

Cameron, Nigel M. de S. , Scott E. Daniels, and Barbara J. White, eds. *Bioengagement: Making a Christian Difference through Bioethics Today*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000. 265 pp.

This volume consists of a series of wide ranging essays predominantly authored by evangelicals working in bioethics, from the academy, the health care professions, and public policy. It is an attempt to move the discussions of bioethics out of the purely academic realm and put some “shoe leather” on the discipline. A concerted attempt is made to make a tangible difference in the culture as it intersects with bioethics. The book emerges out of a 1999 conference sponsored by the Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity, affiliated with Trinity International University, located outside Chicago. The conference for that year focused on how Christians in bioethics can proactively encourage change in the cultural landscape as it regards bioethics.

The volume is broken up into five major sections, of three to four essays per section. Part I lays out a Christian vision for cultural engagement in bioethics. The following sections apply these perspectives to the various spheres of influence. Part II deals with making a difference in the educational and media and includes the controversial area of sex education.

Part III is perhaps the most helpful section in the volume, dealing with public policy and the law. Contributors to this section include a philosopher (Francis Beckwith) who deals with the conceptual areas of faith and public policy, a lawyer (Samuel Casey, who directs the Christian Legal Society), and a health policy expert (Scott Daniels) with extensive background in bioethics and public policy at the state level. Part IV addresses the health

care professional, focused equally on physicians, nurses, and health educators.

Part V addresses the church and its role in making a difference in bioethics. Particularly helpful in this section is the essay on “Pastoral Care in the Abortion Society” focusing on the church’s role in opposition to the practice of abortion and in picking up the pieces in women’s lives as they move forward following abortion.

This volume is a very eclectic collection, without a clear driving theme, other than the broad one of making a difference. It will prove helpful for those who may have an interest in one of the specific essays. It will also be helpful for those who desire a biblical and theological foundation for Christian cultural engagement in bioethics.

The material in Part I is both solidly grounded (“A Biblical Mandate for Cultural Engagement,” by John Kilner) and resonates with experience. The essay by British member of Parliament Brian Mawhinney is rooted in his political experience in England wrestling with providing leadership in public policy that is consistent with his faith.

Those who want to pursue questions of faith and public policy would do well to digest Beckwith’s essay (“Is Statecraft Soulcraft? Faith, Politics, and Legal Neutrality”). He rightly critiques the presumed neutrality of classic political liberalism and encourages what he calls “worldview analysis” as well as isolated issue analysis. His essay is also superbly documented for further resources on this complex issue. Scott Daniels’s essay provides insightful critique of the various bioethics commissions that have made recommendations for public policy.

Finally Sam Casey’s essay takes a specific issue, embryo research, and shows how the law does not simply reflect society’s values,

but has a powerful impact shaping and reinforcing those values.

This volume will have value to readers seeking either foundational theological input on cultural engagement or specific guidance on making a difference in their sphere of influence. It is unlikely that a reader will profit from the entire volume, since the essays are so diverse. But this is a fine contribution to the goal of making a tangible difference in the maelstrom of discussion and debate over bio-ethical issues.

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Dombrowski, Daniel A., and Robert Deltete. *A Brief, Liberal, Catholic Defense of Abortion.* Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000. 153 pp.

Imagine that you are a professor of philosophy at a university founded and operated by Jesuits, and you decide to write a book arguing that abortion is morally permissible up until the start of the third trimester of pregnancy. Imagine further that you want to argue that your position is "at least as compatible with Catholic tradition" as that which everyone *thinks* is the Catholic position, which is that direct, intentional abortion is always gravely immoral. Not far fetched enough? Well, add that you decide to argue that your position is as Catholic as the Catholic tradition without once in the course of the book offering a discussion, let alone an analysis, of the teaching of the Catholic Church on the issue. Still not enough? Add that you will base your conclusions on arguments from history and philosophy without using real historical sources, while your arguments from "reason" defy logic. Be sure to try to enlist St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas in your attack against the Magisterium's condemnation of abortion, even though both were fiercely loyal to the Magisterium and anti-abortion. As a topper, fill your book with

unsupported assertions, and garnish it with harsh and misleading rhetoric. After you have done all that, know that Professors Daniel Dombrowski and Robert Deltete have beaten you to it with their *A Brief, Liberal, Catholic Defense of Abortion*. The only redeeming quality of this book is that it is indeed "brief," being only 129 pages of repetitive text.

The central thesis of the book is that within the "Catholic tradition" (like most terms in the book never defined or never defined clearly), early abortions were tolerated, since the fetus at the early stages was considered subhuman. It was only after mistakes in seventeenth century medicine were taken up into the tradition that the idea became widespread that fetuses at early stages of pregnancy deserve protection.

It is clear, however, from the Didache and the writings of Tertullian that the Catholic Church has condemned abortion since at least the end of the first century. How do the authors deal with that? They set up a strawman. They claim that the only grounds for opposition to abortion within the early Church was something they call the "perversity position." The so-called "perversity position," is the idea that abortions are wrong because they result from sexual intercourse (even between married couples) that is perverse by virtue of being pleasurable to the partners. The only evidence that the authors offer that this actually was the grounds for the Catholic Church's opposition to abortion is their erroneous analysis of a portion of St. Augustine's treatise *On Marriage and Concupiscence*. They reduce St Augustine's teaching to "those who mix pleasure with sex, even sex with one's spouse commits sin." But that is not even close to a fair reading of the text. Rather, St. Augustine condemned sex that is against the procreative meaning of the conjugal act, that is, sex engaged in not for the intention of producing life but solely for the purpose of satisfying the demands of lust. In modern parlance, what St. Augustine is actually condemning is objectifying the other, using the body of one's spouse to satisfy lustful desires.

Unhindered by what St. Augustine actually wrote, the authors then leap to the conclusion that St. Augustine's entire opposition to abor-