In recent years, scientists and medical providers alike have referred to the twenty-first century as the biotech century—predicting sweeping advancements within the realm of modern medicine. Along with increased capacities to better treat and heal individuals, we also have the ability to more easily kill and destroy. As promising as advancements in biotechnology may seem, we must give consideration to the ways in which we value—or devalue—human life. It is with this in mind that Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco has penned *Biomedicine and Beatitude: An Introduction to Catholic Bioethics*, an invaluable resource for any Catholic interested in the increasingly complicated intersection of theology, philosophy, science, and medicine.

In 1979, Tom Beauchamp and James Childress published the inaugural edition of *The Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, the first American textbook in the then-emerging field of bioethics. For these authors, the practice and application of bioethics should be guided by four principles of autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice. Now in its seventh edition, their work has become the definitive bioethics textbook and has given birth to “principlism,” the philosophy which now dominates the field of bioethics.

In *Biomedicine and Beatitude*, Nicanor Austriaco, a Dominican priest and an associate professor of biology at Providence College, does not categorically reject the four principles offered by Beauchamp and Childress. Instead, Austriaco posits that a Catholic approach to bioethics must be rooted first and foremost in the virtue of charity. Beginning with Pope John Paul II’s 1993 encyclical *Veritas Spendor*, Austriaco draws from the three elements of Christian morality to frame his arguments: the witness of the person of Jesus Christ, happiness as understood through beatitude, and the call to seek perfection through God’s grace in our actions. “Charity,” for Austriaco, “is the most excellent of all the virtues because it obtains God himself as its proper object” (274). Moreover, charity orders our relationships with one another, our families, and our societies. In accepting this approach to bioethics, we are drawn into a richer understanding of ourselves and an opportunity to share in the divine as we seek the common good—in this case through medicine.

For Austriaco, a proper understanding of bioethics must commence with a proper understanding of the human person and human acts.
Christopher White

this perspective, Austriaco conveniently organizes his book by issue, each section addressing specific bioethical debates, most notably beginning of life (contraception, abortion, reproductive technologies, etc.), end of life (euthanasia, pain management, etc.), and organ donation and transplantation. In each of these categories, he provides a holistic response—one that is rooted in the Church’s concern for human dignity and the protection of the family unit and its rejection of the consequentialist approach to bioethics that seems to dominate much of the field, both in thought and application.

In anticipation of criticism from his detractors, Austriaco includes a most helpful concluding chapter on Catholic bioethics in a pluralistic society. In response to secularists who reject certain principles in bioethics because of their Catholicity, he draws from the approach of philosopher Alasdair Maclntyre by noting that “there is no expectation that there is one set of rational standards that transcends communal differences and is accessible to all persons” (259). Nevertheless, Maclntyre and Austriaco agree that rational dialogue is still possible where individuals of one tradition learn to engage in the internal standards of justification accepted by another tradition. The proposed outcome is that “individuals who engage in this task would be translators, who are able not only to speak the language of both communities, but also to mediate the rational discourse needed to resolve conflicts between the two rival traditions” (259). Yet even with this rejoinder, for Austriaco, the best Catholic bioethics is done on one’s knees in a life seeking both holiness and wisdom.

In an era where Catholic physicians and patients alike face serious threats that could potentially violate their freedom of conscience, *Biomedicine and Beatitude* is most timely. Austriaco has provided a masterful work that is equally thorough and accessible. A Catholic approach to bioethics is one that draws on virtue and demands excellence in thought and deed. This work is a fine attempt in shaping our consciences so that we may begin to live up to that high calling.

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