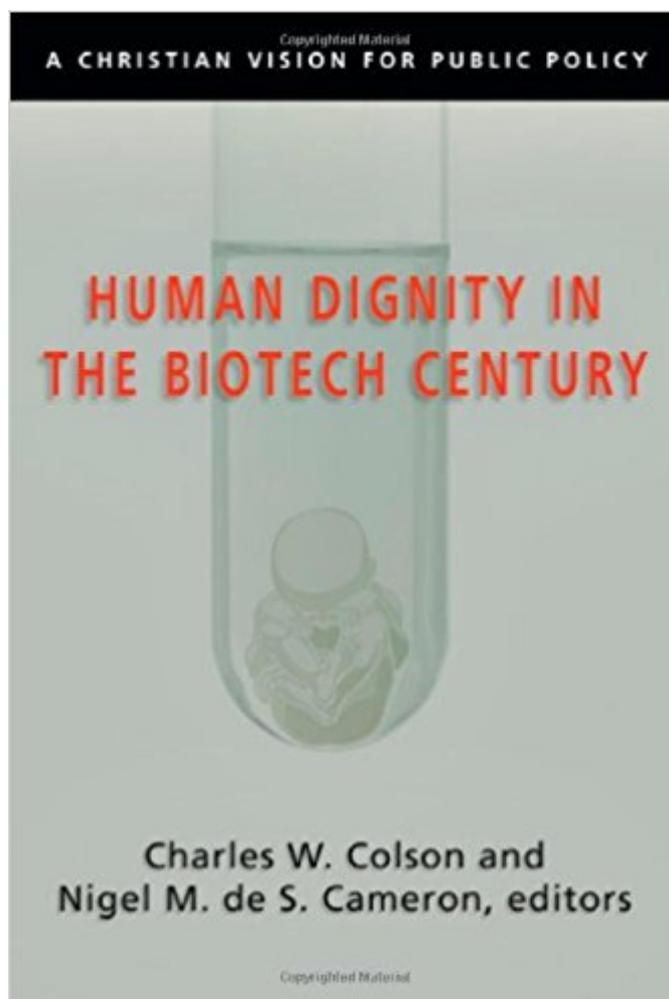


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Human Dignity In The Biotech Century: A Christian Vision For Public Policy (Colson, Charles)



Synopsis

What will be the greatest moral challenge facing our society throughout this century? Are we ready to face it? Editors Charles W. Colson and Nigel M. de S. Cameron, along with a panel of expert contributors, make the case in this book that the greatest watershed debates of the twenty-first century concerning ethics and public policy will surround the issue of biotechnology. In twelve essays they address several of the legal and ethical challenges before us: embryo research, stem cell research, cloning, genetic engineering, gene therapy, pharmacogenomics, cybernetics, nanotechnology and, of course, abortion. Contributors include William L. Saunders, J. D., Family Research Council; Christopher Hook, M.D., The Mayo Clinic; Henk Jochemsen, Ph.D., Free University of Amsterdam; David A. Prentice, Ph.D., Indiana State University; Nathan A. Adams IV, Ph.D., J.D., Christian Legal Society; David Stevens, M.D., Christian Medical Association; Paige Comstock Cunningham, J. D., Americans United for Life; C. Ben Mitchell, Ph.D., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; Richard Doerflinger, M.A., Secretariat for Pro-life, National Conference of Catholic Bishops; Wesley J. Smith, J.D., International Task Force on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide. Leaders in their fields, these contributors point out the crucial role Christians can and should play in the public square. The well-informed and forward-looking perspectives they present will help us prepare for the challenges ahead.

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Customer Reviews

This essay collection provides a worthwhile, if somewhat uneven, selection of conservative Christian thought about biotechnology and its ethical and legal implications. Colson and Cameron assemble a reliable team of contributors, weighted more towards organizational leaders and lobbyists than academics. In general, subtlety is not a strong point here. Colson characterizes therapeutic use of embryonic stem cells as "high-tech cannibalism," a practice that "will lead inevitably to the abolition of humankind and the ultimate end of Western civilization as we know it." Yet some other contributors (including Paige Comstock Cunningham, a former president of Americans United for Life) reach out to a wider audience, recognizing that on issues of cloning and genetic engineering, pro-life conservatives may find unexpected allies among pro-choice advocates and Greens, who share their suspicions of eugenics and biotech capitalism. Other highlights include David Prentice's calculations of the feasibility of "therapeutic" cloning for major diseases such as diabetes and Christopher Hook's discussion of "transhumanism," using cybernetics and nanotechnology to enhance human potential. Overall, the volume cannot quite deliver on the promise of its subtitle: there is not enough of a coherent theological framework here to constitute a Christian vision for public policy. But there are certainly some promising suggestions for Christian public advocacy. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"This collection gathers essays from top bioethics thinkers and activists. Pick among topics such as learning from our mistakes, new technology, genetics, and transhumanism. Get ready for the science fiction realities of the 21st century, and get involved!" (Paige C. Cunningham, *Dignitas*, Winter 2009)"This volume comprises essays from the top thinkers and activists in the field on topics like learning from past mistakes, new technology, genetics, and transhumanism. Get ready for the science fiction realities of the 21st century, and get involved." (Paige C. Cunningham, *Christianity Today*, November 2009)"Each article is well-referenced and hence quite helpful in pointing readers to a wealth of published material in academic journals and books, popular literature and news, and various academic and popular websites." (Jason T. Eberl for *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Fall 2007)

Bought for Bioethics student in college. Well thought out and written.

Colson and Cameron do an outstanding job putting together a compilation of essays and articles from some of the top thinkers in the world on the issue of biotechnology and bioethics. Contributors

include a who's-who of lawyers and doctors from groups like the Family Research Council, The Mayo Clinic, and the International Task Force on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide. Dr. Cameron himself is a research professor of bioethics at Chicago-Kent College of Law and the president of the Institute on Biotechnology and the Human Future. He also directs the Council for Biotechnology Policy (Washington D.C), chaired by Charles W. Colson. The twelve essays alert the reader to the ethical and legal challenges facing our generation involving embryo research, stem cell research, cloning, generic engineering, gene therapy, pharmacogenomics, cybernetics, nanotechnology, and abortion. The papers are well researched and well reasoned and provide for the reader an excellent insight into the future of this debate from a biblical foundation. The fundamental issue raised by the book regards the direction of our nation, especially in the area of public policy. Colson notes that the government's responsibility is not the greatest good for the greatest number (utilitarian theory), but rather the protection of the weak from the strong who would exploit them. That foundational biblical principle should be our guiding light as we enter this public debate - what kind of society do we want for the generations that follow - one that seeks to create life only to destroy it for the immediate benefit of those alive or one that seeks to protect and promote life based on its intrinsic value as a special creation of God.

Here is a good and informative collection of essays, written from a Christian perspective, concerning the importance of contemporary bioethical issues. Though the authors come from a variety of experiential and academic backgrounds, they are all united in both their commitment to genuinely Christian cultural engagement and in defending the God given dignity of human beings in an age in which the Christian view of humanity is under increasing assault. All of the essays are worth reading, but the ones I found most informative and helpful came from Nigel Cameron, C. Christopher Hook, David Prentice, William Saunders, and Page Comstock Cunningham. William Saunders essay was particularly valuable to me for the way in which he demonstrates how the arguments currently used to disenfranchise the human embryo and declare it less than a person are virtually identical to those used by the Nazis to declare certain classes of people "unfit" or less than persons. Hook deals with the issues surrounding "transhumanism" and the altering of the human body through technological modification. David Prentice addresses the question of what it means to be human and how this question is central to issues surrounding research using human embryonic stemcells. He discusses how the use of human embryos for research violates basic ethical norms for research done on human beings, and how there are ethical alternatives to using human embryos in research. Both Cameron and Cunningham deal with issues of strategy in publicly addressing bioethical matters and

defending human dignity. Cameron's essay is particularly valuable for the way in which it addresses our current cultural climate and its relationship to bioethical issues, particularly relating to the culture of abortion. He also addresses well the state of the contemporary church and its preparedness (or lack thereof) to address such important issues. If you want to be informed about bioethical issues from a Christian perspective, are simply interested in how some Christians are approaching these issues, or are concerned about question of human dignity in contemporary culture, this book is definitely a worthwhile read.

The title of this collection of essays is both a good summary of the book and an important warning as to where we are headed as a society. Certainly the 21st century will be known as the century of biotechnology. Whether genetic engineering, designer babies, human cloning, stem cell research or nanotechnology, the advances in this field will continue apace. But so too will the ethical concerns. Indeed, what it means to be human, what it is to be a person, and questions of human worth and dignity are all raised in the light of these new technologies. While perhaps all of the technologies are being championed as means to a better human end, many more cautious minds are expressing concerns about the potential for dehumanisation and a cavalier attitude toward life. Very real concerns about the state of personhood and the uniqueness of human life are engendered by the new biotech. Clear ethical and social understanding of where the new technologies are taking us is thus the order of the day, and the editors of this book are well-suited to the task. They have both been at the forefront of ethical and theological reflection on the direction of the new biotech revolution. Charles Colson has long championed the need for a biblical worldview to assess where western society is heading, and Cameron is a leading bioethicist who has been dealing in these issues for quite some time now. His important volume *The New Medicine*, penned back in 1991, was one of the early wake-up calls as to where the new medical technologies were taking us. In this volume we have twelve essays written by experts in the field, experts such as David Prentice, Richard Doerflinger, Wesley Smith and William Saunders. They all offer relevant expertise in the areas of medicine, genetics, the new reproductive technologies, and biotechnology. But they also combine with that expertise the necessary moral, theological and philosophical framework by which to judge these new advances. Cameron's opening chapter sets the stage, reminding us that it is not just such fields as embryology and genetics that we need to be up on, but anthropology as well. That is, we need to see the bigger picture of what it is to be human. The authors here all approach their anthropology by way of the Judeo-Christian worldview. Cameron discusses three developments in the field of bioethics. In the first period, discussion centered on whether and when we should take

life, as in the abortion and euthanasia debates. During the second period, the debate was on the making of human life, as in IVF. The most recent period has focused on the manipulation and manufacture of life, as in robotics and nanotechnology. Cameron says this progression really entails talk of taking life to making life to faking life. Not a bad summary of the way biotech has been evolving. Cameron urges a two-pronged strategy for dealing with these trends. One, a strong pro-life paradigm must be articulated. Two, working alliances with more politically progressive groups may be needed if we wish to stem the tide of runaway Big Biotech. The other authors also provide stimulating and informative offerings. Most of the big ethical questions get a lengthy hearing. When does life begin? Are there limits to science and technology? Who owns our genes? Will a clone have a soul? Are we witnessing a new eugenics? These and related questions are more than adequately covered in this comprehensive and incisive volume. The meaty chapters in this book focus on a number of the new biotech developments, but all with a view to maintaining human dignity and value. With science and technology fast outstripping our moral and social reflection on them, a book like this is vitally needed to help us think critically, ethically and in an informed manner. Thus this volume deserves a very wide reading indeed.

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