

Abschnitt Zeitschriften/Zeitungen durch eine 2 ersetzt werden.—Der Band wird erschlossen durch ein Personenregister, das für jede—historische—Person die Lebensdaten angibt. Ein Ortsregister fehlt.

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Bioethics: A Primer for Christians

G. Meilaender

Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997,
120 pp., pb, ISBN 0-85364-793-3

RÉSUMÉ

Ce petit livre a pour but de présenter aux chrétiens la complexité des décisions bioéthiques qui incombent à notre société aujourd'hui, ou qui lui incomberont dans un futur proche. Il se lit facilement, mais il lui manque les qualités que l'on attend d'un livre destiné à servir d'introduction.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieses kurze Buch will christliche Leser in die komplexen Fragen bioethischer Entscheidungen einführen, mit denen unsere Gesellschaft sich konfrontiert sieht. Es lässt sich leicht lesen, entspricht aber eher weniger dem Ideal eines einführenden Buches.

The field of 'bioethics' or biomedical ethics is actually as old as humanity's confrontation with illness and treatment. In dealing with human illness, the questions 'how?' and 'why?' inevitably get asked. If we roughly define ethics as 'how we should act', we see in ethics an overlap between what is *possible* and what is *permissible*. Both these spheres inform the sphere of what is actually being *practised*. Recent advances in medical technology and changes in public opinion regarding health and autonomy have, however, pushed back the borders of what is possible and permissible until the field of bioethics has come to resemble a vast and unknown ocean. For the most part, the waters are uncharted and there is little hope of finding fixed land. Some clamour to go back to familiar territory, others are invigorated by the challenges of new discoveries. Still others attempt to chart what is accessible to measurement or try to predict where the ship is most likely going to end up. Even though few issues in our pluralistic and politi-

cally correct society are likely to evoke as lively a debate as bioethical questions, policy-making has largely been the domain of 'experts', or based on judgements in test cases, whereas lobbying and picketing have been the main opinion outlets available to 'lay' people. Television debates thrive on clashes between reserved, educated liberals and emotive, uneducated conservatives, thus further implying that the voice of the lay person is best not taken into consideration when policies are decided.

Bioethical decisions have religious, philosophical, medical, political, legal, social, psychological and historical ramifications. No wonder people have strong opinions (or non-opinions . . .) about these topics—their whole sphere of existence is challenged in one way or another. For this reason, the voice of the lay person *must* be heard in the debate—unless we wish to abdicate our humanness to the decisions of an amoral 'elite'. But the very interdisciplinary nature of the topic has made it possible for multidisciplinary experts to 'shift the ground' to an objector's field of maximal ignorance, hereby 'proving' that the objections are not based on informed reason and therefore dismissable. This makes it all the more important to give people a 'tongue' to speak and debate and decide their viewpoints; they need to be taught the 'new language', or at least be taught the basic grammar, if their voice is to be heard at all. For this and other reasons, introductory books on bioethical topics are certainly much needed today.

An author wishing to write on bioethics faces a number of dilemmas. For one, there is the question of the reading audience's level of knowledge on the topic under discussion. Assume they know, and you might be shooting too high; assume they don't know and you might appear condescending. Then there is the problem of depth. How much detail does an introduction require? Too much, and your book becomes a doorstop; too little and you are selling little more than an embellished index. Both these questions are normally best answered by a guided bibliography. The serious reader is given a direction to follow once the introductory book is finished and the cursory reader need not be burdened by (often technical) detail.

When you address the field of bioethics from a Christian perspective, you are adding another set of complications, interdenominational sensibilities being the most obvious one. You are knowingly adding another interpretative filter to the theme, namely what

you consider to be authoritative for those who call themselves 'Christian'. For most evangelical Christians, it can safely be assumed that the Bible is regarded as authoritative, with the interpretation of the Bible being a possible bone of contention. All in all, the author of a 'primer' on bioethics for Christians goes boldly where angels fear to tread. Having said all this, let us take a closer look at Meilaender's bold attempt to 'say what we Christians ought to say . . .' (p. xi). He starts off with references to a theology of 'limits' and the 'duality of freedom and finitude'. A particularly profound statement, which all of us do well to reflect on is that '[w]hat makes us true individuals . . . is that God calls us by name. Our individuality is . . . established only in *community* with God' (p. 2, emphasis in the original). After this brief introduction, he addresses the main issues surrounding the beginning of life, the termination of life, genetic engineering, organ donation and human experimentation. The overview is neither comprehensive (transgenic organ donation and cloning are not mentioned) nor systematic. Meilaender appears to be more interested in a ramble across the heath without sticking to a path, rather than in describing the extent and prominent landmarks of the field under survey. This makes for easier reading, perhaps, but leaves the aftertaste of candy floss. The serious reader is left with little substance, since the lack of a systematic approach damages the book's value as a springboard for further study.

This difficulty is further compounded by the lack of a bibliography. This lack is only partially rectified by the footnotes. For a book addressed to Christians, there is surprisingly little reference to Scripture, with 'in my opinion' and 'I think' being the basis of virtually all the conclusions reached. The reader is in essence given Meilaender's gut-feeling on the topic under discussion, instead of a set of tools to work with. The chapter on human experimentation is particularly badly written. As somebody who has been directly involved in medical research on humans for more than a decade (on both sides of the needle), I found Meilaender's opinions and speculations to be poorly researched oversimplifications. Even taking into consideration that this book is a 'small introductory work', the ten pages devoted to this topic could have been better researched and organised.

To anyone who manages to introduce bioethics to the lay person in 120 pages, as Meilaender has done, I say, 'Hats off!' To write

succinctly and flowingly is an art. Yet, as a 'small step for man', no matter how bold, it lacks the substance which could have made it into a 'giant leap for mankind'.

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The Last Things

Herman Bavinck, Edited by John

Bolt; Translated by John Vriend

Carlisle: Paternoster Press; Grand

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RÉSUMÉ

La Société de Traduction Réformée Hollandaise a pour but de rendre accessible au monde anglophone des textes de piété et de théologie réformée classique. Sa première production, intitulée Les Fins Dernières, est tirée de la Dogmatique Réformée de H. Bavinck. L'introduction de l'éditeur nous donne un aperçu intéressant des tensions théologiques de l'époque, entre le piétisme confessionnel et la modernité adoptée par Ritschl. Elles ont influencé l'approche de Bavinck, bien que l'orthodoxie confessionnelle conserve le dernier mot dans sa théologie.

Bien que rédigée il y a un siècle, l'œuvre de Bavinck est néanmoins bien informée et équilibrée. L'auteur rend bien compte des opinions théologiques opposées aux siennes, tout en présentant ses propres convictions. Il se fonde abondamment sur l'Écriture, bien que les présupposés philosophiques qui sous-tendent son approche soient parfois évidents. Bavinck défend une position amilléariste, affirme la condition consciente des personnes dans l'état intermédiaire et défend vigoureusement la position orthodoxe du châtement éternel conscient contre les diverses autres positions, comme celles qui affirment l'annihilation des perdus et l'immortalité conditionnelle.

L'ouvrage nous fournit une présentation claire de l'eschatologie orthodoxe réformée hollandaise au début du XX^e siècle.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Als ersten Versuch, die englischsprachige Welt mit der klassischen reformierten theologischen und religiösen Literatur bekanntzumachen, hat die holländische reformierte Übersetzungsgesellschaft das Kapitel Die