

# Christian Bioethics in a Post-Christian age

## Bioética cristiana en una época poscristiana

### Bioética cristã numa época pós-cristã

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**ABSTRACT:** Christian bioethics conflicts with secular morality and its bioethics. From artificial insemination from donors, embryonic stem-cell research, and abortion to passive euthanasia, the commitments of traditional Christian bioethics collide with those of the dominant secular Western culture. For example, where secular morality cum bioethics regards prenatal diagnosis and selective abortion as integral to responsible parenting, traditional bioethics regards such as a form of murder. The differences are not defined simply in terms of particular prohibitions, but more significantly in terms of the metaphysical force and totalizing moral character of Christian claims. Unlike secular moral philosophy, Christianity provides and demands a definitive orientation in the cosmos. One's life as a patient, a nurse, and a physician must be metaphysically and morally Christocentric, because the cosmos is Christocentric. On the one hand, for secular bioethics the existence of humans is a surd contingency in a universe that seemingly comes from nowhere, goes to no place, and for no ultimate purpose. On the other hand, Christianity appreciates the dignity of humans as grounded not only in their creation, but in the Incarnation, through which there is the possibility of union with God. Beyond metaphysical differences, there are deep epistemological divergences: traditional Christianity (\*) recognizes not just empirical scientific and philosophical knowledge, but also experiential noetic, that is, mystical knowledge of God and reality. Secular and traditional Christian bioethics are thus set within radically different paradigms distinguished not simply by conflicting moral commitments, but by different understandings of the character of knowledge (i.e., epistemology) and the nature of reality (i.e., metaphysics). As a consequence, there is a divergence as to who should be counted as moral experts: moral philosophers versus holy men. This contrast is expressed in the implications of these disagreements for bioethics. In doing so, the Christianity of the first millennium, which continues in Orthodox Christianity, is taken as the primary point of reference, so as better to appreciate the deep historical and conceptual roots of the differences at stake. (\*) The term traditional Christianity is admittedly vague and cannot be given much precision within the bounds of this brief article. In this article, traditional Christianity is used to identify: (1) the unbroken Christianity of the first millennium, as well as (2) those Christian groups in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that are in substantive agreement with its commitments.

**KEYWORDS:** Bioethics; Christian bioethics; Moral philosophy

**RESUMEN:** La bioética cristiana está en conflicto con la moralidad secular y su bioética. De la inseminación artificial desde donadores, de la investigación embrionaria de las células-tronco y del aborto al eutanasia pasiva, los compromisos de la bioética cristiana tradicional chocan con las de la cultura occidental secular dominante. Por ejemplo, donde la moralidad secular cum bioética mira la diagnosis prenatal y el aborto selectivo como integral a la paternidad responsable, la bioética tradicional la ve como una forma de asesinato. Las diferencias no se definen simplemente en términos de prohibiciones particulares, sino más perceptiblemente en términos de la fuerza metafísica y del carácter moral totalizador de las demandas cristianas. Opuesto a la filosofía moral secular, el cristianismo proporciona y exige una orientación definitiva en el cosmos. Nuestra vida como paciente, enfermera y y médico deben ser metafísica y moralmente cristocéntrica, porque el cosmos lo es. De una parte, para la bioética secular la existencia de los seres humanos es una simple contingencia en un universo que viene aparentemente de ninguna parte, va a ningún lugar y para ningún propósito último. Por otra parte, el cristianismo aprecia la dignidad de los seres humanos como fundada no solamente en su creación, pero en la Encarnación, con la cual hay la posibilidad de unión con Dios. Más allá de diferencias metafísicas, hay divergencias epistemológicas profundas: el cristianismo tradicional (\*) reconoce el conocimiento científico y filosófico empírico, pero también la experiencia noética, es decir, el conocimiento místico de Dios y de la realidad. Las bioéticas secular y cristiana tradicional se fijan así dentro de paradigmas radicalmente diversos distinguidos no simplemente por compromisos morales que están en conflicto, pero por entendimientos distintos del carácter del conocimiento (es decir, epistemología) y de la naturaleza de la realidad (es decir, metafísica). Por consiguiente, hay una divergencia en cuanto a quién se debe contar con expertos morales: filósofos morales contra hombres santos. Este contraste se expresa en las implicaciones de estos desacuerdos para la bioética. Así, se toma el cristianismo del primer milenio, que continúa en el cristianismo ortodoxo, como el punto primario de referencia, para mejor apreciar las raíces históricas y conceptuales profundas de las diferencias implicadas. (\*) El término "cristianismo tradicional" es obviamente vago y no se le puede dar mucha precisión dentro de los límites de este breve artículo. En este artículo, "cristianismo tradicional" se utiliza para identificar: (1) el cristianismo intacto del primer milenio, así como (2) los grupos cristianos del siglo veintiuno que están en acuerdo sustantivo con sus compromisos.

**PALABRAS-LLAVE:** Bioética; Bioética cristiana; Filosofía moral

**RESUMO:** A bioética cristã opõe-se à moral secular e à sua bioética. Da inseminação artificial a partir de doadores, da pesquisa com células-tronco embrionárias e do aborto à eutanásia passiva, os compromissos da bioética cristã tradicional conflitam com os da cultura ocidental secular dominante. Por exemplo, onde a moralidade secular vinculada à bioética considera o diagnóstico pré-natal e o aborto seletivo como parte legítima da paternidade responsável, a bioética tradicional vê uma forma de assassinato. As diferenças não são definidas simplesmente nos termos de proibições particulares, porém, mais significativamente, nos termos da força metafísica e do caráter moral totalizante das reivindicações cristãs. Ao contrário da filosofia moral secular, o cristianismo fornece e exige uma orientação definitiva no cosmos. A vida de cada um como paciente, enfermeira e médico devem ser metafísica e moralmente cristocêntrica, porque o cosmos é cristocêntrico. De um lado, para a bioética secular a existência dos seres humanos é uma contingência num universo que aparentemente surgiu do nada, não caminha rumo a coisa alguma e nem tem nenhum fim último. Do outro, o cristianismo considera a dignidade dos seres humanos como fundada não somente em sua criação, mas também na Encarnação, mediante a qual é possível a união com Deus. Além das diferenças metafísicas, há profundas divergências epistemológicas: o cristianismo tradicional (\*) reconhece não só o conhecimento científico e filosófico empírico, mas também o conhecimento noético experiencial, isto é, o conhecimento místico de Deus e da realidade. A bioética cristã tradicional e a bioética secular pertencem a paradigmas radicalmente diferentes que não se distinguem simplesmente por compromissos morais opostos, mas por entendimentos diferentes sobre o caráter do conhecimento (isto é, a epistemologia) e da natureza da realidade (isto é, da metafísica). Há conseqüentemente uma divergência a respeito de quem devemos considerar peritos morais: os filósofos morais em oposição aos homens santos. Esse contraste é expresso nas implicações desses desacordos para a bioética. Assim agindo, o cristianismo do primeiro milênio, que tem continuidade no cristianismo ortodoxo, é considerado o ponto preliminar de referência, de modo a melhor se apreciarem as profundas raízes históricas e conceptuais das diferenças que estão em jogo. (\*) A expressão "cristianismo tradicional" é reconhecidamente vaga e não pode ser melhor precisada no âmbito deste breve artigo. Aqui, "cristianismo tradicional" é usada para identificar: (1) o cristianismo imorredouro do primeiro milênio e (2) os grupos cristãos do século XXI que estão em acordo substantivo com os compromissos daquele.

**DESCRITORES:** Bioética; Bioética cristã; Filosofia moral

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## Taking Christian Bioethics Seriously in a Post-Christian Age: An Introduction

Even from a secular point of view, St. Constantine the Great's (A.D. 275/288-337) embrace of Christianity is a historical watershed<sup>2</sup>: Christendom came into existence as an established framework of governance and law, along with a public Christian culture that spanned more than a millennium. While Christianity was regnant, it was exported globally through the Western European imperialist expansions of the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was only after the bloody religious wars of Western Europe, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the October Revolution that this cultural fabric was in various stages brought into question. Though Christianity has far from disappeared, we now live after Christendom and after the establishment of a secular fundamentalism: the public forum has become normatively secular, and religious claims are held to be subordinate to secular claims. The various secular, moral, and po-

litical accounts seek to secure a priority and claim a neutrality that can marginalize religious concerns to a sphere of the private. This sphere of the private, albeit initially conceded, is nevertheless qualified, defined, and dominated by the claims of the secular.<sup>3</sup> The secular culture for its part, since it possesses moral content, turns out to be far from neutral.<sup>4</sup> As a result, there is a cultural rupture, a disruptive faultline of disputes that manifests itself in the culture wars:<sup>5</sup> a conflict-marked cultural cleft separates traditional Christianity and the secular establishment.

The stridency of these cultural conflicts is considerable. Traditional Christianity is not disposed to concede priority to the secular, much less consider itself merely a fabric of cultural myths from the past to be recast in terms of the claims of a secular perspective. This state of affairs and its appreciation are also complicated by the circumstance that Christianity is itself fragmented into a traditional and various post-traditional Christianities, with the latter in various ways transformed by the assumptions of the surrounding secular society.<sup>6</sup> As a conse-

quence, many live within cultural commitments that make an adequate acknowledgement of the secular moral and metaphysical strangeness of traditional Christianity more difficult, further complicating an assessment of our cultural condition. On the one hand, the conflicts between secular culture and traditional Christianity are robust. On the other hand, post-traditional Christianity often cannot appreciate why a substantive conflict should exist. After all, post-traditional Christianity has conceded, if not incorporated, many of the points demanded by the dominant secular culture regarding the morality of abortion, sexual relationships outside of the marriage of a man and a woman, and end-of-life decision-making.<sup>7</sup>

My goal today is to account for the secular moral strangeness<sup>8</sup> of Christian bioethics by laying out some of the differences separating traditional Christian from secular bioethics. It is important both for secularists and for Christians to appreciate these differences<sup>9</sup>: they are a key to understanding the fundamental disagreements and disputes defining contemporary mo-

1. The term traditional Christianity is admittedly vague and cannot be given much precision within the bounds of this brief article. In this article, traditional Christianity is used to identify: (1) the unbroken Christianity of the first millennium, as well as (2) those Christian groups in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that are in substantive agreement with its commitments.

2. With St. Constantine the Great's recognition of Christianity, the public space became normatively Christian and remained so with few exceptions (e.g., the reign of Julian the Apostate) until the French Revolution. It is impossible to understand the history of Europe and, because of the world dominance of Europe, world history, save with reference to this decisive occurrence.

3. For an example of the radical qualification of claims to areas of privacy within which area one might think it is possible to live the religious life, one might consider John Rawls. On the one hand, he indicates that the "ecclesiastical governance" of churches need not be democratic (Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *University of Chicago Law Review* 64 [Summer 1997], 789). Yet, on the other hand, all areas of life must conform to his principles of justice. "...if the so-called private sphere is alleged to be a space exempt from justice, then there is no such thing" (p. 791). It is for this reason he holds that "the principles of justice enjoining a reasonable constitutional democratic society can plainly be invoked to reform the family" (p. 791).

4. Any secular moral perspective with content is not neutral. It assumes and affirms a particular ranking or ordering of right-making conditions. One might consider, for example, the role of John Rawls' particular thin theory of the good in driving and shaping his particular account of justice as fairness. See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971; rev. ed., 1999), especially 60, pp. 347-350. For an exploration of these issues, see H. T. Engelhardt, Jr., *The Foundations of Bioethics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), chapters 1 and 2. This work has appeared as *Fundamentos da bioética*, trans. José A. Ceschin (São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 1998).

5. The term culture wars was popularized by James Davison Hunter in *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991). Although this volume focuses on the culture wars in the United States, these conflicts are global, as is shown by the activities of Mohammedan fundamentalists, as well as the American incursion into Iraq. See, also, Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

6. The gulf between Orthodox Christianity and the Christianities of the West is starkly characterized by Bartholomew I, Bishop of New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch: "The manner in which we exist has become ontologically different." Patriarch Bartholomew I, "Joyful Light," Address at Georgetown University, Washington, DC, October 21, 1997.

7. For examples of the accommodation by post-traditional Christianity to the demands of the secular culture, consider Michael J. Gorman and Ann Loar Brooks, *Holy Abortion?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003); Raymond J. Lawrence, Jr., *The Poisoning of Eros* (New York: Augustine Moore Press, 1989); and John Shelby Spong, *Living in Sin?* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

8. In the first centuries, Christians experienced themselves as strangers in the surrounding pagan culture. Christians "dwell in their own fatherlands, but as if sojourners in them; they share all things as citizens, and suffer all things as strangers. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is a foreign country" "Epistle to Diognetus" V.5-6, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 359, 361.

9. It is also important for non-Christian believers to appreciate the strangeness of traditional Christianity. However, this matter is complex, for each religion has its own perspective and therefore falls beyond the compass of this paper.

10. Many purely secular controversies threaten the peace of the 21st century. One might think, for instance, of the disputes between the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China, and the independence movements on Taiwan (aka Formosa).

ral discourse. It is also important to appreciate that the moral controversies that fragment our cultures are not the result of religious views alone: secular morality is also at its heart rent by important and deep disagreements. Last but not least, the bloody conflicts of the past, and even those that threaten in the present,<sup>10</sup> are not rooted only in religious disagreements. I will turn to these last points first.

### Taking Moral and Bioethical Controversy Seriously

In all societies free of the totalizing imposition of a particular, dominant moral perspective, controversy characterizes moral discourse. In such societies moral discourse is defined by: (1) the presence, (2) the persistence, and (3) the intractability of foundational moral controversy. On almost all, if not all, substantive moral issues, there is disagreement. The only question is the salience of the disputes. From abortion to physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia, not only are the debates often bitter, but they have histories reaching back millennia.<sup>11</sup> It is also important to underscore that disputes persist in areas where the matters at stake are purely secular. For example, there is foundational moral as well as public policy disagreement about the legitimacy and force of secular moral claims regarding equality and the redistribution of

resources.<sup>12</sup> These disputes, although they are secular disputes, persist because their resolution would require conceding at the outset particular, controverted, basic moral and/or metaphysical premises as well as granting disputed rules of moral and metaphysical evidence regarding such issues as the nature of ownership and the circumstances under which needs generate rights.<sup>13</sup>

As was well appreciated by Agrippa, the third-century Skeptic, the arguments between many disputing parties inevitably go in a circle, beg the question, or involve an infinite regress.<sup>14</sup> The parties are separated by disparate interpretive frameworks that lead to different characterizations of what is at stake. Moreover, there is insufficient common ground to allow the controversies to be resolved by sound rational argument. An adequate account of contemporary bioethics and health care policy must acknowledge the depth and intractability of most moral disputes. One is not able to appeal to a universal, canonical understanding of moral rationality, so as (1) to equate the moral with the rational, so as then (2) to convey definitive, secular, rational authority to one particular account of public policy and law, as well as (3) to justify the claim that all individuals are implicitly members of one secular moral community whose commitments are grounded in the claims of a unique, rightly-ordered, secular moral rationality. The re-

cognition of this state of affairs, this failure of the aspirations of secular moral reason, does not involve endorsing a moral relativism or metaphysical skepticism, but only acknowledging the epistemic limits of moral philosophy.<sup>15</sup>

The limits of moral reason undercut the Enlightenment's hopes to establish an uncontroversially and rationally universal morality. Post-modernity ensues. The result is that moral rationality is shattered into numerous, competing, and incompatible accounts of the morally reasonable. Each party in terms of its own moral vision has good grounds to hold that the other party falls radically short of an appropriate appreciation of what it is to be truly human. Each party can regard the other as threatening the realization of human flourishing, rightly understood. When the differences between moral understandings undergird all-encompassing, but incompatible ways of living, these disagreements can invoke considerable passion. Indeed, disagreements regarding justice, fairness, and equality led to the death of tens of millions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One might think, for example, of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century secular pogroms on behalf of justice in the Soviet Union, China, and Pol Pot's Cambodia.<sup>16</sup> Divergences in moral viewpoints have allowed disputing parties to see each other often not simply as moral strangers, but as moral enemies, divided by issues about which it is worth fighting, dying, and killing.

11. Paul Carrick, *Medical Ethics in the Ancient World* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001).

12. Thomas J. Bole III and William B. Bondeson (eds.), *Rights to Health Care* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991).

13. Human needs are by themselves simply a fact of the matter in the sense of what is as a matter of fact necessary for certain human functions and undertakings. One must have a normative basis through which correctly to discern in what circumstance needs generate rights and of what strengths. Moreover, one needs an account of when states may coercively enforce such rights. For example, if there is significant philosophical dispute regarding the generation of particular rights, the question then arises as to how much certainty is required to legitimate their coerced recognition.

14. Agrippa's five tropoi also include the considerations that all arguments are contextual and developed within a particular perspective, as well as a recognition of the failure of philosophy up until now to establish a single canonical account. For an overview of Agrippa's arguments, see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* IX.88, and Sextus Empiricus, outlines of Pyrrhonism," I.164.

15. Recognizing the limits of secular discursive moral reflection does not foreclose the possibility of a moral truth available through noetic or mystical knowledge. For a further discussion of this issue, see H. T. Engelhardt, Jr., *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics* (Lisse, Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger, 2000), chapter 4.

16. Large-scale slaughter was done on behalf of realizing that which was held in purely secular terms to be truly human. "Revolutionary justice appeals to the future as its standard. ... For it is certain that neither Bukharin nor Trotsky nor Stalin regarded Terror as intrinsically valuable. Each one imagined he was using it to realize a genuinely human history which had not yet started but which provides the justification for revolutionary violence. In other words, as Marxists, all three confess that there is a meaning to such violence – that it is possible to understand it, to read into it a rational development and to draw from it a humane future." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror*, trans. John O'Neill (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969; orig. publ. 1947), pp. 30, 97.

In bioethics and health care policy, the differences can also cut deeply. For instance, insofar as a specific, secular, moral vision shapes a particular account of public policy bearing on who rightly possesses what resources, and therefore on who under what circumstances can have access to what health care, matters of life and death are at stake. There is a conflict of competing and incompatible understandings, each attempting to become dominant so as to shape society as well as how it addresses suffering and death. The culture wars occasion passions that can fragment a society independently of any issue of ultimate meaning or the claims of religion. The culture wars have substance without raising issues of religious or metaphysical disagreement.

In summary, even before the acknowledgement of particular religious commitments and their differences, there are incompatible secular moral understandings, which are enough in and of themselves to fuel profound controversies and even bloody conflicts about proper human action and appropriate public policy. Religious differences add a depth to moral and bioethical controversies, but they are not unique in their capacity to fuel conflicts or occasion violence. Moreover, simply being a religious fundamentalist with a fanatical

commitment to one's beliefs does not by itself translate into violent behavior, as is clear from the example of the very committed but pacifist Amish. One can be religiously and passionately devoted to a particular way of life, which can also involve firm commitments to being peaceable. Dispositions to long-term, peaceable behavior can also arise by default through the abandonment of any strong commitments to any ideals, and the pursuit instead of immanent sensuous gratifications, epitomized in the easy moral decadence of social democratic capitalism. As both Kojève<sup>17</sup> and Fukuyama<sup>18</sup> have argued, the pursuit of immanent pleasures, when combined with a moderate welfare system, so as to ensure all at least minimum access to such gratifications, may go a long way to bring people to the view that there is nothing for which it could be worth living, dying, and killing. Yet, the human heart will always again, as history shows, hunger for moral depth and ultimate meaning. Even the Fukuyamist must have a commitment to imposing the ideology of peace grounded in the pursuit of immanent gratifications.

### Why Christian Bioethics is so Different

Religious differences can cut deeply. Religious viewpoints tend

to bring together a fabric of moral commitments that are global in enlisting the full commitment of those who credit their claims. They tend to offer a point of final orientation in terms of which all else is understood. Their explanatory scope is global, in that they tend to give a final account of the ultimate meaning of all things. They tend to be totalizing in requiring all elements of each person's life to be lived with reference to this final point of orientation. Their obliging force is all-encompassing in its scope. They tend also to be preemptively demanding. Their obliging force is taken to trump all other concerns, including life itself. Religious commitments as a result in principle require martyrdom.<sup>19</sup> Most, but not all, secular accounts (a counter-example is Marxism) tend to be more qualified in their explanatory scope and moral demands. Many religious groups, traditional Christians in particular, also differ from the secular moral culture in invoking a form of knowledge associated with experiencing the ultimate.

The last point is decisive. Many religious believers do not embrace the moral and metaphysical epistemologies of secular moral discourse.<sup>20</sup> The secular strangeness of traditional Christians in part lies in their claiming knowledge grounded in neither sensible, empirical knowledge, nor in analytic, deductive reasoning. Where scientific

17. Alexandre Kojève, through his peculiar Marxist reading of Hegel, interprets Hegel as holding that history ended at the Battle of Jena (6 August 1806) with the dominance of the liberal state in central Europe. History here is understood as ideological progress, as the development of new categories for the unity of humans in political and social life. In this account, with Napoleon's victory at Jena, the end of ideological struggles is anticipated, which is the end of true history, in that liberalism will lead to a culture within which humans like animals will simply pursue the satisfaction of their immanent desires. "The disappearance of Man at the end of History, therefore, is not a cosmic catastrophe: the natural World remains what it has been from all eternity. And therefore, it is not a biological catastrophe either: Man remains alive as animal in *harmony* with Nature or given Being. What disappears is Man properly so-called – that is, Action negating the given, and Error, or in general, the Subject *opposed* to the Object. In point of fact, the end of human Time or History – that is, the definitive annihilation of Man properly so-called or of the free and historical Individual – means quite simply the cessation of Action in the full sense of the term. Practically, this means: the disappearance of wars and bloody revolutions. And also the disappearance of *Philosophy*; for since Man himself no longer changes essentially, there is no longer any reason to change the (true) principles which are at the basis of his understanding of the World and of himself. But all the rest can be preserved indefinitely; art, love, play, etc., etc.; in short, everything that makes man happy." Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (New York: Basic Books, 1969), pp. 158-159. Remarkably, Kojève holds that "the final stage of Marxist 'communism' was reached in the 'classless' consumerist society of the United States in the late 1940's and early 1950's (p. 161).

18. Fukuyama, drawing on Kojève's interpretation of Hegel, develops the view that "the historical process rests on the twin pillars of rational desire and rational recognition, and that modern liberal democracy is the political system that best satisfies the two in some kind of balance." Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p. 337. On the basis of this view, he pictures human history as a wagon train of different cultural perspectives on its way to the satiation of human desire and craving for recognition, which can only be fully achieved in a consumerist social democracy. "Alexandre Kojève believed that ultimately history itself would vindicate its own rationality. That is, enough wagons would pull into town such that any reasonable person looking at the situation would be forced to agree that there had been only one journey and one destination" (p. 339).

19. It is important to note that traditional Christianity as a rule discourages persons from seeking martyrdom, but instead requires them to accept martyrdom only when the alternative is to deny the faith. See Canon IX from the 15 Canons of Peter, Pope of Alexandria (fl. 304).

20. For example, traditional Christians refuse to affirm Jürgen Habermas's *Diskursethik* because, in denying noetic knowledge and reference to matters of ultimate importance, it radically distorts the human condition. See Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), 2 vols.

disputes involve different interpretations of sensuous empirical findings, and where philosophical disputes involve different analytic, phenomenological, reflective, and critical accounts of the meaning and coherence of particular claims, with regard to religious issues the disputes can turn on competing accounts of how to have a reliable experience of the ultimate significance of reality. Religions by speaking to the ultimate meaning of the universe, and to the proper orientation of humans in the universe, lay out all-encompassing ways of coming to understand morality and human flourishing, which are at odds with those of the secular culture.

Given the different character of their background accounts of reality, religious accounts can provide interpretations of the significance of sexuality, birth, suffering, dying, and death deeply incompatible with secular culture and its bioethics. After all, traditional Christian bioethics regards abortion as the equivalent of murder, any reproduction or sexual activity outside the marriage of a man and a woman as perverse, and physician-assisted suicide as physician-assisted self-murder. Such differences either directly or indirectly lie behind the disputes regarding the moral acceptability of artificial insemination by donors, human reproductive cloning, human embryonic stem cell research, and euthanasia. At stake are not merely incompatible accounts of what

is allowed or prohibited, but deeply contrasting accounts of virtue, human flourishing, the meaning of life, and the ultimate significance of existence itself. Religious understandings, when taken seriously, separate. For example, Physician assistance in prenatal diagnosis with selective abortion will be recognized as engagement in murder, not responsible medical practice.

The particular bioethical concerns are set within an all-encompassing metaphysical and epistemological framework, which is at odds with the dominant secular cultural paradigm. Christianity, for instance, appreciates that the history of persons defines cosmic history. Christianity knows that all of cosmic history begins with creation, passes through the sin of Adam, and is aimed at the second coming of the Messiah and the restoration of all things. In addition, Christianity recognizes the centrality of the Incarnation and that the Incarnation makes it possible for humans to become gods by grace.<sup>21</sup> The Christianity of the first millennium lives as well in the appreciation that it is those who are capable of empirical-noetic, mystical knowledge who are theologians in the strict sense.<sup>22</sup> Traditional Christianity, as many world religions, acknowledges that humans possess a capacity to know immediately, that is, noetically, the deep truth of things. Therefore, the focus is on achieving through prayer, asceticism, and almsgiving that purity of heart ("Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God." Matt 5:8) that makes such noetic

knowledge possible. As a consequence, theology was and is appreciated as not primarily a discursive, philosophical discipline, but as union with, and an experience of, God.<sup>23</sup>

Because of this view of theological knowledge,<sup>24</sup> the Christianity of the first millennium, which lives in Orthodox Christianity, has resisted the view that there is a morality, in the sense of an understanding of the good, the right, and the virtuous, that can be anything but one-sided and incompletely appreciated outside of an appropriate recognition of God. As a consequence, like Orthodox Judaism, traditional Christianity in an important sense has neither a morality nor a theology. There is no vantage point from which definitively to assess critically the moral life outside of the religious life. Nor is there an intellectual philosophical discipline able to revise theological claims. Over against Plato's Euthyphro, Orthodox Judaism and Christianity both recognize that, since God is the fully transcendent Creator of all things, nothing created can be understood apart from Him. As a consequence, it is inadequate to say that the good, the right, and the virtuous are such because God approves of them. Rather, it is the case that anything that is created can only be one-sidedly and incompletely appreciated apart from its Creator. So, too, the good, the right, and the virtuous can only be one-sidedly and incompletely appreciated apart from the holy. The recognition of a transcendent

21. St. Athanasius the Great (A.D. 295-373) summed up the doctrine of salvation in terms of God becoming "man that we might be made God." "De incarnatione verbi dei" § 54.3, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), vol. 4, p. 65. For an account of salvation as theosis or deification, namely, of what it means through participation in the uncreated energies of God for men to become gods through grace (John 10:34-35), see Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ*, trans. Normal Russell (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), and Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984).

22. Theologians in the strict sense are not those who merely know about God, but those who know God. Such knowledge is the fruit of a life of asceticism and prayer. As Evagrius the Solitary from Pontus (A.D. 345-399) underscores, "If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian." Evagrius the Solitary, "On Prayer," in *The Philokalia*, eds. Sts. Nikodimos and Makarios, trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), vol. 1, p. 62.

23. The mystical theology at the root of the Christianity of the first millennium understands that through purification, illumination, and union with God one comes to know truly. "Therefore we do not engage in idle talk and discuss intellectual concepts which do not influence our lives. ...the change of man's essence, theosis by grace, is a fact that is tangible for all the Orthodox faithful. ... Therefore, the Orthodox Christian does not live in a place of theoretical and conceptual conversations, but rather in a place of an essential and empirical lifestyle and reality as confirmed by grace in the heart [Heb. 13:9]. This grace cannot be put in doubt either by logic or science or other type of argument" (Bartholomew I, "Joyful Light").

24. For an overview of the mystical theology of Orthodox Christianity in contrast to that of the West, see Metropolitan Hierotheos, *The Mind of the Orthodox Church*, trans. Esther Williams (Levadia, Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1998), pp. 213-239.

Creator God places all created being in relation to the Creator, so that there is no moral philosophy or natural theology that can be the judge of a morality or a theology rooted in a rightly-ordered relationship with God. In traditional Christianity, morality and theology are appreciated as expressions of aiming rightly at God rather than as independent areas of insight regarding proper conduct and belief.<sup>25</sup>

Last but not least, Christian moral accounts are person-directed. Christianity recognizes that truth is ultimately a Who, not a what. As a consequence, final or ultimate interpretations of reality that are impersonal are foundationally wrongheaded. The ultimate truth is not a principle or a set of facts, but the Trinity. The result is a threefold contrast between traditional Christianity and its bioethics on the one hand, and the secular culture and its bioethics on the other. First, their foundational, metaphysical understandings are incompatible, one being grounded in a personal transcendent Trinitarian God, and the other in principles and circumstances set within the horizon of the finite and the immanent. Second, their foundational moral-epistemological understandings are different, one being grounded in an experience of a Person, the other in reflections on discursive principles, immanent moral intuitions, and empirical facts. Third, the canons for Christian behavior on a wide range of issues are radically at odds with those of the secular,

moral establishment, because Christianity's primary focus is on the holy. As a consequence, with respect to a number of bioethical issues ranging from abortion, human embryonic stem cell research, and treatment for sexual dysfunction outside of the marriage of a man and a woman, to the intentional withdrawal of medical treatment in order to bring about death, the morality of traditional Christianity conflicts with that of the secular culture. The two perspectives are fundamentally different. Each will regard the other as wrongly fundamentalist.

### Why Christian Bioethics may not Seem That Different

Despite these claims regarding the radical otherness of Christianity, much of Christianity is in fact not at odds with the contemporary culture. In great measure, this is the case because Western Christianity took a fateful turn that placed natural law theory, as well as other forms of philosophical, discursive reflection at the center of its theology. The result is a conflict of competing Christian viewpoints. Over against much of Western Christianity, there are the deep theological well-springs of first-millennium Christianity alive in Orthodox Christianity and at the roots of many fundamentalist Protestant understandings of Christian metaphysics, moral epistemology, morality, and bioethics. The contrast between these two Christianities, one grounded

in a mystical theology alive from the first millennium, and the other grounded in the second-millennium embrace of a discursive rational foundationalism, is cardinal to appreciating the character of traditional Christian bioethics and the extent to which it stands in stark contrast to secular moral morality and its bioethics.

Due to the accent given to natural law and moral philosophy, the second millennium largely embraced the claims of Plato's Euthyphro, so that the good, the right, and the virtuous were to be recognized as such only insofar as they could be discursively and rationally appreciated and justified.<sup>26</sup> The good and the right were no longer understood in terms of the holy. Nor were they to be appreciated most truly within noetic experience. With this development, the meaning of theology changes. Theology takes on the character of a philosophical, discursive, analytic, academic critique of a past deliverance of truth (i.e., the revelations recorded in the Bible or in Church tradition as a partially written and partially oral history), rather than an ongoing experience of a present reality. Theologians are then no longer regarded as primarily those who immediately experience God. Instead, theologians come to be those who reflect about a past experience (i.e., revelation) of God or the deliverances of natural theology. The sociology of this paradigm change is expressed in the shift from understanding ex-

25. A classic statement concerning the theology of the Church of the first millennium is provided by Evagrius the Solitary (A.D. 349-399). "If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian." "On Prayer," in Sts. Nikodimos and Makarios, *The Philokalia*, trans. and ed. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988), vol. 1, p. 62. Evagrius's remark reflects the Christian understanding that false worship leads to perverse moral understandings (Rom 1:18-32), and rightly-ordered true worship and repentance are required for correct moral knowledge (Rom 2:10-16). One should note that the Christians of the first millennium (St. John Chrysostom in particular) appreciated that the ability to see in one's heart the character of proper behavior requires proper worship. St. John Chrysostom, Homily V on Romans.

26. For this reason, Vattimo regards the Enlightenment and even the "nihilism" of post-modernity as a continuation of, and realization of the higher truth of, the Western Christian moral synthesis. For example, Vattimo states, "the West is secularized Christianity and nothing else. In other words, if we want to talk about the West, Europe, modernity – which, in my argument, are held to be synonymous – as recognizable and clearly defined historical-cultural entities, the only notion we can use is precisely that of the secularization of the Judeo-Christian heritage." See Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, trans. Luca D'Isanto (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 73. As to nihilism and Christianity, he asserts, "postmodern nihilism constitutes the actual truth of Christianity." Vattimo, "The Age of Interpretation," in Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*, ed. Santiago Zabala (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 47. Whether intentionally or not, Vattimo transmogrifies Christianity into anti-Christianity, Christ into anti-Christ. "This is my question and problem as a Christian because when I say that 'thanks to God I am an atheist' ... I have become an atheist thanks to Jesus' existence." Vattimo, "What is Religion's Future After Metaphysics?" in *The Future of Religion*, p. 63.

pert theologians in the strict sense as holy men to understanding expert theologians in the strict sense as scholarly academics.<sup>27</sup> With this transformation, the locus of theology is displaced from churches and monasteries to universities. So, too, morality is moved from the expertise of holy men to the expertise of learned theologians usually found in the Academy.<sup>28</sup>

With this paradigm change of the Western Middle Ages, it becomes plausible to give reason equal billing with faith, because faith is no longer recognized as a form of trust that produces knowledge of God.<sup>29</sup> One might think, for example, of how John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio* presupposes that theological truth can be secured through the support of a disciplined, discursive, philosophical reflection on the character of a past revelation in the form of the Bible cum tradition, along with the deliverances of natural theology.<sup>30</sup> Again, the theologians and philosophers who are to guide are scholars, not holy men who noetically, that is, mystically experience the Truth. The consequence of this development for

Western culture, with its consequent recasting of the meaning of theology, has proven wide-ranging. For instance, the turn to natural-law explanations, which characterized much of the reflections of the High Middle Ages, involved a number of crucial but under-appreciated difficulties. First, the appeal to natural law cannot deliver a culture-free, uncontroversial guide to proper conduct. One cannot simply read off from nature what is morally normative by observing what usually occurs in nature. One must already be armed with a properly formed moral sense or set of moral criteria in order to discern correctly what is normative in nature. For example, the characteristic aggression, lust, and greed of humans support "natural" inclinations to do much that many know to be evil. More significantly, Christians know that the world is fallen, that our current existence is at least partially broken and even in many ways perverse. Nature as we find it is therefore not normative. To discern the morally normative in nature, one must already either noetically see to its ideal character or in some

other fashion already know what is normative. One must be able then to distinguish that which is usual in nature from that which is normative for nature.

Second, insofar as one is guided in discerning the normative in nature by the philosophical reflections of the age, one will be hostage to the fashions of the time. As the history of philosophy demonstrates, philosophical fashions come and go. The variety of philosophical positions demonstrates well Jaroslav Pelikan's gloss on Eusebius that truth has no history but only heresy, which arises "at particular times and through the innovation of particular teachers."<sup>31</sup> If theology is shaped and guided by philosophy, it will be shaped and guided by cultural forces rather than anchored in either the unbroken commitments of the Church or the noetic experience of mystic theologians.<sup>32</sup> The result of the Western marriage of faith and reason is the birth of a theology that can be brought into conformity with philosophy, so that philosophy can change theology over time. As a consequence, those forms of Christian bioethics indeb-

27. For traditional Christianity, academics who explain Christian dogma and attempt to find words adequate to its meaning are theologians only in a secondary or derivative sense.

28. The character of morality and theology foundationally changed in the West at the beginning of the second millennium. Morality, which had been appreciated in the light of a noetic experience of God, was recast in terms of the demands of a particular account of philosophical rationality especially indebted to particular theories of natural law. Theology for its part was articulated through a dialectic between a past revelation and the current demands of reason. On the one hand, there is held to have been a past encounter with God, which produced canonical Scriptures, as well as a set of written records considered to constitute a normative Church tradition. On the other hand, there are held to be the demands of reason, which can interpret this past encounter in terms of the requirements of a contemporary rationality. Put in this light, theology became a purely deductive science. "Theology retains the severe character of a science, advancing syllogistically from premisses to conclusion" (John Henry Newman, "Christianity and Physical Science," in *The Idea of a University* [New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1996], p. 208). As a further consequence, this state of affairs created a developmental academic theology cum moral theology isolated from an ongoing experience of the holy. It is important to recognize that this paradigm shift involves a recasting of what is acknowledged as exemplar knowledge, namely, direct, noetic, or mystical experience of God and reality, in favor of that which is vindicated through discursive rational reflection. To offer an analogy, this transformation of theology constitutes a change equivalent to what would be involved in transforming the empirical practice of medicine into a deductive analytic system. This change in theology altered the sociology of theological knowledge. It changed who was recognized as an exemplar knower. Holy men who through purity of heart have noetic or mystical experience were displaced in favor of academics committed to an understanding of exemplar knowledge grounded in philosophical reflection and the critical examination of ancient texts (e.g., the Bible).

29. Consider, for example, the observation of St. Isaac of Syria (A.D. 613-?) regarding noetic knowledge, namely, that those who experience God "can soar on wings in the realms of the bodiless and touch the depths of the unfathomable sea, musing upon the wondrous and divine workings of God's governance of noetic and corporeal creatures. It searches out spiritual mysteries that are perceived by the simple and subtle intellect. Then the inner senses awaken for spiritual doing, according to the order that will be in the immortal and incorruptible life. For even from now it has received, as it were in a mystery, the noetic resurrection as a true witness of the universal renewal of all things." St. Isaac the Syrian, *The Ascetical Homilies*, trans. Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Boston, MA: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984), Homily 52, p. 261.

30. John Paul II, for example, argues against "the distrust of reason found in much contemporary philosophy, which has largely abandoned metaphysical study of the ultimate human questions...." *Fides et Ratio* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), § 61, p. 92. Not only does he regard philosophy as a cardinal source of support for Christian culture, but in addition holds that "the study of philosophy is fundamental and indispensable to the structure of theological studies and to the formation of candidates for the priesthood" (§ 62, p. 93). Granted that St. John Chrysostom recognized true philosophers to be ascetics, the church of the first millennium would have found John Paul II's view puzzling.

31. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 8.

32. Because the Christianity of the first millennium understood itself as embedded in Tradition, that is, in the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit, Who secures an unbroken experience of revelation, it could hold that "we keep unchanged all the ecclesiastical traditions handed down to us, whether in writing or verbally..." ("Decree of the Holy, Great, Ecumenical Synod, the Second of Nice," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994], vol. 14, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, p. 550).

ted to the High-Middle-Ages' synthesis of faith and reason will at the very least seem less strange to the secular intellectual eye, because they will often be able to accommodate to the demands of the secular culture. For example, if one attends to the bioethics of liberal Roman Catholics, one will find positions quite different from that taken by more fundamentalist Protestants, as well as Orthodox Christians.<sup>33</sup> Such post-traditional Christianities and their bioethics thus may not constitute a fundamentalist other, over against the secular culture and its bioethics.

### Christian Bioethics and the Culture Wars

Many of the non-mainline Protestant churches, as well as Orthodox Christianity, are another matter. They constitute a robust other, over against secular culture. Their moral commitments and the framework that sustains them are at odds with that of the dominant secular morality. They live in a Christian understanding that had already articulated its opposition to many medical and social practices

common to the circum-Mediterranean pagan world of the first three centuries, such as abortion, which practices now mark the dominant secular culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Christian opposition to abortion, for instance, which lies at the root of the Christian opposition to human embryo stem cell research, goes back to the first century and is recorded in the *Didache*,<sup>34</sup> as well as in canons from the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Canon XXI of the Twenty-five Canons of the Holy Regional Council held in Antyra, A.D. 315).

Most importantly, the traditional Christian focus is primarily hierarchical rather merely immanently axiological. Abortion is condemned because it will cause spiritual harm tantamount to the harm caused by murder, even though no claim is made about the early embryo necessarily being ensouled.<sup>35</sup> The evil of abortion is first and foremost understood as involving an inappropriate relationship to God, not in terms of an independent moral-philosophical account of the evil of abortion.<sup>36</sup> As a result, the prohibition of abortion cannot be altered or recast through secular, discursive,

rational argument, because the prohibition lies within a set of considerations that possess a radically different grounding and hermeneutic. Among other things, this hermeneutic does not gear into the philosophical assumptions that the contemporary secular West has inherited from the Western medieval moral-philosophical synthesis.<sup>37</sup> Both in its content and in its framing assumptions, the traditional Christian opposition to abortion will appear from the secular perspective alien and fundamentalist. Its fundamentals will be at odds with those of the secular culture.

The same will be the case with regard to the issue of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia. The contrast with secular morality can be more clearly seen by noting the character of traditional Christian end-of-life decision-making, as this existed in the Church of the first millennium, and as it continues in Orthodox Christianity. On the one hand, suicide has been categorically forbidden as a form of self-murder.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, jumping from a height, even though this will lead to certain death, if undertaken in order to escape from a situation

33. One might compare, for example, Daniel A. Dombrowski and Robert Deltete, *A Brief, Liberal, Catholic Defense of Abortion* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2000), James F. Drane, *More Humane Medicine: A Liberal Catholic Bioethics* (Edinboro, PA: Edinboro University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), and Daniel C. Maguire, *Death by Choice* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974) with John Breck *The Sacred Gift of Life: Orthodox Christianity and Bioethics* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998) and Scott B. Rae and Paul M. Cox, *Bioethics: A Christian Approach in a Pluralistic Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

34. "Thou shalt do no murder; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not commit sodomy; thou shalt not commit fornication; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not use magic; thou shalt not use philters; thou shalt not procure abortion, nor commit infanticide...." *Didache* II. 2, in Kipsopp Lake (trans.), *The Apostolic Fathers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), vol. 1, pp. 311, 313. One finds in the Epistle of Barnabas, a document that like the *Didache* is from either the 1st or the early 2nd century, a similar proscription: "thou shalt not procure abortion, thou shalt not commit infanticide" (op cit., vol. 1, p. 403).

35. St. Basil the Great, for instance, makes it clear that abortion is to be condemned as equivalent to murder, even were the embryo not ensouled. See Letter 188. In contrast, Thomas Aquinas draws on the biological and philosophical reflections of Aristotle to erect a morally crucial distinction between the human embryo before ensoulment with the human immortal soul and the embryo after ensoulment. For Aristotle's treatment of ensoulment, see *De Generatione Animalium* 2.3.736a-b and *Historia Animalium* 7.3.583b. Aristotle also holds that

As to the exposure and rearing of children, let there be a law that no deformed child shall live. But as to an excess in the number of children, if the established customs of the state forbid the exposure of any children who are born, let a limit be set to the number of children a couple may have; and if couples have children in excess, let abortion be procured before sense and life have begun; what may or may not be lawfully done in these cases depends on the question of life and sensation. [Politics VII.1335b20-26] Given Aquinas's commitment to Aristotelian philosophy, and because Aristotle favors early, not late abortion, Aquinas speaks indulgently of Aristotle's policies in this area. See Aquinas, *Aristoteles Stagiritae: Politicorum seu de Rebus Civilibus*, Book 7, Lectio 12, in *Opera Omnia* (Paris: Vives, 1875), vol. 26, p. 484. Thomas Aquinas addresses this point in *Summa Theologica* I, 118, art. 2, and 2-2, 64, art. 8; and *Commentum in Quartum Librum Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*, Distinctio 31, Expositio Textus, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 11, p. 127. The development of this distinction between ensouled and non-ensouled embryos provides a very important illustration of how, when grounded in philosophical reflection, theology itself becomes recast in the image and likeness of philosophical concerns rather than the teachings of the Fathers.

36. It is important to recognize that the Orthodox Jewish understanding of human moral obligations distinguishes between those obligations incumbent on Jews, versus those incumbent on Gentiles, *bnai-Noah*. See Baruch Brody, "The Use of Halakhic Material in Discussions of Medical Ethics," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 8 (August, 1983), 317-328. For example, while according to Talmudic interpretations Jews are permitted to perform abortions, the performance of an abortion by a *bnai-Noah* merits capital punishment. See Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 57-59.

37. One notices the indebtedness of the dominant secular culture to the Western Christian Middle Ages when, for example, one confronts the secular reflections of contemporary Confucians. See, for example, Ruiping Fan, "Reconstructionist Confucianism in Health Care: An Asian Moral Account of Health Care Resource Allocation," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 27.6 (2002), 675-682.

38. St. Timothy, Pope of Alexandria (fl. 372), in answer to a question, allowed burial when the suicide was insane. Question XIV, "The 18 Canons of Timothy, the Most Holy Archbishop of Alexandria."

in which one might be seduced, is not suicide, but the virtuous act of throwing oneself in the arms of God.<sup>39</sup> That Orthodox Christianity requires eschewing both physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia, as well as taking the needed steps to protect one's will against carnal sin, will surely appear strange from the perspective of secular morality and its culture. Yet, within the life of the traditional Christian, all of this coheres without seeming at all out of place. The coherence of these two requirements can be understood within an internal "logic" that appreciates the good death in terms of humbly taking up one's cross, as did Christ, as well as in terms of the close Christian tie between chastity and holiness, all of which are united in the pursuit of union with God. To appreciate the coherence of this position, one must at the very least enter into the feel of this life-world (to do this with full success will require God's uncreated energies, His Divine Grace). One has to come into traditional Christianity's standpoint of taken-for-granted presuppositions. One needs to enter into the *phronema*, the mind of the Fathers, so as to think within their paradigm. Yet, this ancient paradigm of Christianity is radically at odds with that of the dominant secular culture.

The depth and force of this paradigmatic difference separates traditional Christian from secular bioethics. In traditional Christian bioethics, one is not simply concerned with a set of settled moral judgments sustained by a fabric of discursive philosophical analyses and reflections. Rather, Christian bioethics is embedded in, and is an expression of, a religious way of life that recognizes, and is oriented to, the deep meaning of the cosmos: the Trinity. It is not enough that one does the good, does no wrong, does the right, and achieves virtue (immanently understood). One must also do so for the correct reason, which reason cannot be merely human altruism or a disposition to achieve the good. As Moses Maimonides (A.D. 1135-1204) correctly understood, it is not enough to act properly; one must in addition do so out of love for and obedience to God.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, first and foremost, one must pursue the good, the right, and the virtuous in the light of and because of one's love for the personal and transcendent God.<sup>41</sup>

### Looking Across the Divide

The West has roots in both Constantinople and Paris. In Nicea, a suburb of New Rome, St. Constantine

the Great convened the first ecumenical council (A.D. 325). By 11 May 330, New Rome was the official capital of the empire. It held as such, despite the Fourth Crusade (A.D. 1204) and other travails until that disastrous Tuesday, May 29, 1453. From Constantinople and through the successors of St. Constantine, a normative Christian culture and public policy took shape and prevailed nearly unbroken until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. On November 9, 1793, the French Republic, which had been proclaimed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September the previous year, celebrated its Feast of Reason in the Notre Dame Cathedral. Two quite different cultural perspectives lie at the roots of Europe and all of the modern polities that came into existence under European aegis. At its historical roots and its conceptual foundations, ours is a fragmented culture.

It is the metaphysical and epistemological differences that are the starkest. It is not just that traditional Christianity and the dominant secular culture collide with respect to important moral prescriptions and proscriptions. Much more significantly the framing epistemic and metaphysical commitments constitute radically different life-worlds and paradigms. The two

39. H. T. Engelhardt, Jr., *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics* (Lisse, Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger, 2000), pp. 327-329, 347. See, also, St. Ambrose of Milan, *De virginibus* VII.32-35).

40. Moses Maimonides stresses, with regard to the obligations incumbent on the sons of Noah, that "Anyone who accepts upon himself the fulfillment of these seven mitzvot and is precise in their observance is considered one of 'the pious among the gentiles' and will merit a share in the world to come. This applies only when he accepts them and fulfills them because the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded them in the Torah and informed us through Moses, our teacher, that Noah's descendants had been commanded to fulfill them previously. However, if he fulfills them out of intellectual conviction, he is not a resident alien, nor of 'the pious among the gentiles,' nor of their wise men." Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, trans. Elyahu Touger (New York: Moznaim Publishing, 2001), Hilchot Melachim UMilchamotehem, viii, 11, p. 582. The point is that a righteous heathen will only have a portion in the world to come if he both observes the laws given to Noah and recognizes them as divinely revealed and required. In his commentary on the *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot Melachim UMilchamotehem, viii, 11, Rabbi Touger notes, "Thus, there are three levels in the gentiles' acceptance of their seven mitzvot: a resident alien who makes a formal commitment in the presence of a Torah court; 'the pious among the gentiles,' individuals who accept the seven mitzvot with the proper intent, but do not formalize their acceptance; and a gentile who fulfills the seven mitzvot out of intellectual conviction" (Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, p. 583). The last genre of bnai-Noah have no share in the world to come. For a further discussion of these matters, see Stephan Schwarzschild, "Do Noachites Have to Believe in Revelation?" *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 52 (April, 1962), 297-308 and "Do Noachites Have to Believe in Revelation?" *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 53 (January, 1963), 30-65. In summary, living a moral life out of rational conviction but not out of obedience to God does not suffice for salvation. This point was appreciated but radically rejected by Benedict Spinoza (A.D. 1631-1677). "Maimonides ventures openly to make this assertion: 'Every man who takes to heart the seven precepts and diligently follows them, is counted with the pious among the nations, and an heir of the world to come; that is to say, if he takes to heart and follows them because God ordained them in the law, and revealed them to us by Moses, because they were of aforesaid precepts to the sons of Noah: but he who follows them as led thereto by reason, is not counted as a dweller among the pious, nor among the wise of the nations.' Such are the words of Maimonides, to which R. Joseph, the son of Shem Job, adds in his book which he calls 'Kebod Elohim, or God's Glory,' that although Aristotle (whom he considers to have written the best ethics and to be above everyone else) has not omitted anything that concerns true ethics, and which he has adopted in his own book, carefully following the lines laid down, yet this was not able to suffice for his salvation, inasmuch as he embraced his doctrines in accordance with the dictates of reason and not as Divine documents prophetically revealed." Benedict de Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise*, trans. R. H. M. Elves (New York: Dover, 1951), p. 80. Needless to say, Spinoza was not alone in trying to think his way around Moses Maimonides's position.

41. The dominant secular culture takes the second of the two great commandments and isolates it from the first and greatest commandment in terms of which alone love of one's neighbor is rightly oriented. "He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment" (Matt 22:37-38).

cultures are divided as to whether knowledge can be obtained regarding the final significance of human existence, as well as about how moral knowledge can be secured. The two cultures are divided regarding the final significance of existence and the deep meaning of all things. Traditional Christians grasp

the ultimate significance of the universe and encounter it as personal, as the Who of the transcendent Trinity. The dominant secular culture eschews claims about ultimate significance. Instead, it invites all to live their lives within the horizon of the finite and the immanent, pursuing the pleasures of this

life within the constraints of liberal secular social-democratic polities. As a result, those who live fully within a traditional Christian perspective and those who live fully within the dominant secular culture will reciprocally recognize each other as profoundly morally strange. Each will be an other to the other.

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