



# **HEALTH-CARE ETHICS**

**A Comprehensive Christian Resource**

**James R. Thobaben**

  
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## Preface

**F**or a follower of Jesus Christ, writing a work that calls for specific moral conduct and judges the behaviors of others to be correct or incorrect is spiritually awkward. Certainly there are immature believers who presume to speak from their own purported purity and there may be the occasional prophet who proclaims particular words in particular times that are clearly from God. The latter is not a claim I make, and I hope I am not manifesting the former. In other words, regardless of how others may “feel” about ethical declaration, I have a great sense of self-consciousness. After all, I have been saved by grace, and that is not my own doing; therefore, I have nothing of which to boast except the mercy of God.

I came to God through several events in high school, college and seminary. While sitting behind my house in my early years, I intellectually concluded that it was rational, or more precisely not irrational, to believe in God. Later I discovered Pascal and others made this argument, but it was refreshing and enlightening to me. Though I had a family tradition of singing hymns and attending church, a friend who was part of the Jesus movement helped initiate my more rigorous consideration of spiritual matters. In the early 1970s he took me to a Billy Graham Crusade where I heard for the first time (or the first time I remember) that Jesus was the full *and* exclusive incarnation of God. Yet, it was not the Jesus movement counterculture but the dominant youth culture (that masqueraded as a counterculture) that was most influential morally. So, in college I held an intellectual belief in Christ, but lived fully within the baby boomer generation, holding at least some degree of genuine sociopolitical concern while indulging in self-righteous indignation and pubescent angst. My first years at college were simply an expression of irresponsibility. Then, during my junior year, I experienced an epiphany. One winter night, while walking through a building on campus, I was suddenly struck with the necessity of having Jesus as my Lord, not just an abstract representation of Christianity. This was not an experience of the “Christness of the universe” or the “mystery of God” in some generic sense, but a confrontation with the liv-

ing One who had dwelt on the earth as one of us. I realized Jesus expected to be Lord of anyone who claimed to affirm him as God. And if that was the case, then so be it.

Though my behaviors did not absolutely and completely change, they were immediately altered in a manner that allowed me, by the Spirit, to discard—some quickly, some over time—inappropriate habits and tendencies. With this change, many of my friends fell away, or more precisely, I began to fall away from them. To this day, I regret never apologizing to them if my hypocritical Christian example hurt them or led them away from the One. Further, I was still so spiritually immature that I did not seek out a strong Christian community, which meant I had no significant encouragement or accountability. The only Christian community I had was the “cloud of witnesses” as I started to read various works of Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley and Søren Kierkegaard.

Soon, I realized that for me submission to God included a calling into ministry, so I applied to seminary. I chose Yale for no particular reason beyond the name. This was the hand of Providence. Though Yale had no expectation of doctrinal orthodoxy, the Yale faculty honestly noted that historical Christianity had been trinitarian and dependent on the idea that grace was dispensed through the presence of God on earth as Jesus of Nazareth (though some faculty thought it was wrong). My roommate, who was going through the same process of theological clarification, and I often discussed how to understand our faith. The result was that I (and he) became clearly doctrinally orthodox at Yale and began to self-identify as an evangelical in the Wesleyan tradition, one who asserted the need to express the relationship with God in correct understanding and in personal holiness and social service.

My doctrinal and ethical position was solidified by my marriage to a woman who had traveled from high Episcopalian through New Age religion into Pentecostal holiness Protestantism. It was further reinforced in raising children, as the values one holds are either validated or negated by how one treats, teaches and sets an example for the young over whom one is responsible. Wesleyan evangelicalism remains the position to which I adhere and is, no doubt, expressed in this book.

Nonbelievers who read this work should feel free to ascribe my religious transformation to the following sociological and psychological arguments:

- Family of origin: *I was raised in a family that was nominally Christian.*
- Cultural linguistic: *I accepted the value grammar of my “tribe.”*

- Neo-Freudian: *I lost an ego integration conflict to the superego, with a seemingly excessive response to guilt and shame.*
- Reductionist humanism (“Scientism,” particularly its harsher forms from Nietzsche through Thomas Huxley, Herbert Spencer, and, more recently, Richard Dawkins and Peter Singer): *My religiousness is indicative of intellectual and personal weakness that “should” be selected out evolutionarily.*
- Popular humanism: *I needed to be justified and was not able to find self-esteem.*

No doubt, there are other reasons that can be used to explain away faith.

I do not deny that some of these may have been partial factors in my life. I did have Christian models to use. I did have a moral language to use, and I have certainly attempted to teach the same to my children. I did feel guilty and I was ashamed. Further, I was too weak to do anything about it. I did believe I needed a justification—a purpose—beyond myself. And, I do deny that even if those were factors they in any way negate the reality of God.

These “explanations” elevated to the status of worldviews may partially explain away my choices and behaviors to those who find reductionist metanarratives sufficient intellectually and existentially. I do not find them compelling. Rather, the lives of those I have known—in particular those marked by humility, service, gentleness, confidence and kindness—have led me to conclude that life has purpose only if there is a Purpose-Giver, and I am not capable of filling that role for myself.

Since that epiphany and my acceptance of what in my faith tradition is labeled a *call* into ministry, I have been blessed and privileged to serve as a local pastor, as a seminary professor, and as a clinical ethicist and chaplain. To those of the various communities I have served or of which I have otherwise been a part, I offer the following apologies and declarations of appreciation:

- I know the many failures of my past and realize my potential for failing in the future. No Christian should enter into the analysis of morality, especially when dealing with nonbelievers, with any pride or arrogance. Pascal said that “true religion would have to teach greatness and wretchedness, inspire self-esteem and self-contempt, love and hate.”<sup>1</sup> Metaphorically, then, I turn away from the altar rail and ask all those against whom I have sinned, with malice or through a lack of concern, to forgive me. If those sins are old, my hope in Christ is that they have not had any harsh impact. If those sins are recent, then I am willing to be held accountable by those

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<sup>1</sup>Pascal *Pensées* # 450

of the faith. I am well aware of my sins of the past and beg forgiveness from any I have offended.

- I am also well aware of my current weaknesses and take responsibility for any mistakes in my ministry generally and in this manuscript in particular.
- In the work on this book, fellow believers have proved invaluable. Though my failures are my own, my successes have come, always, with the support of others.
- Specifically:
  - > For years of working together on various projects, including this one, I want to thank Rev. Bruns Myers from the Mississippi Methodist Rehabilitation Center (MMRC). It has always been a blessing to have a brother in Christ with whom to work and, even on occasion, to play. Bruns can take credit for the good things in at least one chapter of this book. Specifically, Bruns and I together developed the material on the ordinal understanding of autonomy in chapter 13.
  - > I want to thank my other friends at MMRC, especially Mark Adams, the C.E.O. who hired me as an “ethicist” and, *in memoriam*, Earl Wilson, the founding trustee chair, and to all who set an example of industriousness.
  - > I want to thank my brothers and sisters at Asbury Theological Seminary. In particular, Joel Green for a conference he coordinated, Christine Pohl (the other professor of social ethics on the Wilmore campus) for long conversations, Joe Dongell for discussions about the personal impact of the health-care system, Jim Holsinger for hours working on the morality of financing health care, Jerry Walls for calling for philosophical precision, and Tapiwa Mucherera for copastoring and for long talks about the interface of bioethics and pastoral care. Also, to Isaac Hopper and David Lilley who helped so much with the initial proofreading.
  - > Without question, I want to thank my students and administrators, especially in the various bioethics classes at Asbury Theological Seminary, Trinity International and at University of Kentucky, College of Public Health. They are too numerous to mention by name and should I attempt, I would certainly leave out someone who had been helpful.
  - > The Bioethics Working Group for the 2005 meeting of the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelism. Special thanks to Brian Edgar for

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- > The people of Mt. Zion—all the students and particular thanks to the “community members.” You got your money’s worth, or better, I hope.
- > Likewise, to the people who are my Christian friends in Kazakhstan. You constantly remind me that all Christians are called to minister to the broken. Were it not for your gentle love, your ongoing witness of service would make me ashamed of myself.
- > The patient people at InterVarsity Press.
- > Melissa Waugh for proofreading with a legal eye and a public health perspective, though she may well not share some of the opinions herein suggested.
- > As far as just “talking” about the impact of moral decision making on how we live our lives, I suppose, excepting my family, two people have had to hear more from me than any others. My friends in ministry have been a continuing source of spiritual guidance and advice about the reality of bioethical issues in the parish. I want to thank Karl Stonebraker for proofreading and for countless conversations in canoes, on hiking trails and on the Camino de Santiago. Similarly, Rod Buchanan must be thanked for proofreading and because his questions keep me thinking and his determination kept Karl and me from simply goofing around in the wilderness instead of actually traveling down the path (any spiritual metaphors are accidental). I thank them.
- > I need to thank my father, my mother (*in memoriam*) and my biological brothers. Through their own injuries and illnesses and responses to the same, they introduced me to the complexity of health care and to the

importance of kindness among those who suffer. And special thanks to my father for help with the farm.

- > Finally and most significantly, it would be difficult for me to overstate how thankful I am to God for my wife and children. Marcelyn is my love and my fellow sojourner on the path of holiness, which we have traveled always with joy and usually with happiness. My children, Zechariah, a pediatric dentist (and his wife, Rebekah Adele), and Anna Rebecca, an anesthesiologist (and her husband, Josh), have been a true blessing. Many fathers can say that they have always loved their children, but I can truly say I like them as friends, as equals. I also need to thank six other family members: Diana Rutiba, Tim Wingerter, Kenyon and Tierre Williams, and Kuda and Simba Kagoro. They were under our guardianship (legal or informal) for extended periods during their teenage years and they remain, to greater or lesser extents, woven into the fabric of our home.
- > I need to thank and acknowledge others in the academic field of bioethics. Persons with whom I have had discussions or by whom I have been influenced through their writings are too numerous to mention. Still, I should note that academics will find commonalities with the following:
  - » My tendency to distinguish strongly between Christian ethics and non-Christian ethics is paralleled in two books by T. Engelhardt.
  - » My strong emphasis on the obligations of the believer, especially as patient, within and to the community of faith is not dissimilar to that described by S. Hauerwas.
  - » My emphasis on American contractarian thought is in some ways similar to J. Rawls and in others to M. Walzer.
  - » My understanding of the obligations of individual believers as they practice caregiving has some similarity to that described by W. May and E. Pellegrino.
  - » My emphasis on the role of the local church and the necessity for non-professional ethicists within the body of believers to learn and engage society is similar to that of my friends J. Kilner and D. Hollinger.

Needless to say, these various thinkers might well disagree strongly with large portions of this work and the peculiar combination of these characteris-

tics. Perhaps none would like my emphasis on moral learning through the sermon, which is not drawn from any other particular ethicist.

For Christians, obligations spring from receiving grace and those obligations extend beyond the faith community. I am duty-bound to serve those of the world by (1) in a small way replicating God's kindness to me, (2) witnessing and (3) advocating and serving justice and mercy, which is a component of God's character and ours as his children. Consequently, I hope, that by God's grace, some part of this work may be useful for those who follow the Christ, but also for those who want to understand why Christians (specifically evangelical Christians) respond to bioethical issues as they do.

Peace in the One who is and was and is to come.

*James R. Thobaben*

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