Catholic Clinical Bioethics

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The Plan

• Why spend your time on this?
• Three thoughts on being Catholic.
• A Catholic orientation toward life.
• Beginning of Life Ethics
• Reproductive Ethics
• End-of-Life Ethics

Why Spend Your Time on This?

Practical Reasons.
Loyola University Chicago: A Jesuit, Catholic university.
Loyola University Medical Center: A Jesuit, Catholic hospital.
– 800 hospitals and health centers.
– 50 million people a year treated.
– Operate 5 of the 10 largest health systems in the U.S. and Canada.

Philosophical Reason. There are no moral perspectives independent of an informing moral vision. There are no "views from nowhere."

Religious and Intellectual Literacy Reason. Familiarity with the traditions from which one stems, familiarity with the Catholic moral tradition as an intellectual tradition from the breadth and depth of its moral thinking in Bioethics.

Likelihood that the intention of this lecture is to convert you to Catholicism: 0%
Three Thoughts on Being Catholic

• Thought #1: The Catholic faith is personal.
  – The Catholic faith is first—and always first—about belief in a person, Jesus of Nazareth, who was eventually recognized as divine, the "son of God."
  – "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).
  – Belief in principles and doctrines are a secondary but natural development of belief in the person.

• Thought #2: The Catholic Church is Conservative.
  – Apostolic Succession: The idea that the Catholic bishops, today, are the successors of the original twelve Apostles, constituting part of an unbroken line to the ministry to which Jesus himself ordained the Apostles. Early bishops chose others among them to consecrate as new bishops. This chain of consecration is called apostolic succession.
  – Hierarchical and Authoritative Teaching

• Thought #3: The Catholic Church is traditional.
  Tradition may be defined as an extension of the franchise. Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to [persons] being disqualified by [the circumstances of their] birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death... Tradition asks us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our father.
  – G. K. Chesterton (1874 – 1936)
A Catholic Orientation Toward Life

- **Our Existence is not earned or of our choosing.**
  - No explanation for creation other than God’s love. God delights in creation, “And God saw that it was good…”
  - Life is a gift, unearned and unexpected, we find ourselves living, our worth is given, not earned.
  - Two Moral insights follow on this:
    - **Stewardship:** not ownership, over creation—that includes ourselves.
    - **Intrinsic Value:** Value of life resides in its source rather than one’s abilities, traits, characteristics.

Beginning-of-Life Ethics

- **The “Jesus Story” and the Question of Abortion.**
  - Joseph was going to "dismiss her quietly" because he was "a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace…"
  - What do we make of embryos?
    - **Donum Vitae** (1987): “Thus the fruit of human generation, from the first moment of its existence, from the moment the zygote has formed, demands the unconditional respect that is owed to a person from the moment of conception, and therefore… As rights as a person must be recognized, among which is the inviolable right of every innocent human being to life."
  - Based on our current knowledge of embryology and a philosophy of potential.
  - Embryonic stem cell research, human cloning.

Beginning-of-Life Ethics

- Argue for a Non-Capacity based approach to human valuing.
  - Our personal histories exist before and after our capacities have developed and waned.
  - Babies with anomalies, e.g., Down syndrome.
  - Dependency is not something we "have" during a period of our lives. It is with us always, inseparably tied to our bodies.
  - We are dependent beings as our nature because we are embodied beings.
  - Dependence is part of the story of the human condition.
  - We are embodied spirits, inspired bodies.
Reproductive Ethics

• The value we place on new life matters.
  – Love understood to mean: “It is good that you exist.”
    • Prenatal-screening and amniocentesis are of value to gain information, to prepare for the
      birth of child that may have a disability, and to try to fix a problem, but it ought not be
      used for aborting pregnancies with disabilities.
    • Meaning of parenthood: a surrender to the in-breaking of new life with a total commitment, not
      a tentative commitment.

Reproductive Ethics

• The context in which we create new life matters.
  – Dual nature of the human being as a composite of spirit and body indicates that our bodies carry moral
    meaning.
    • Bodies are not objects to be used for either pleasure or particular ends, e.g., creating babies. Rather, they are a
      part of who we are.
    • Bodies are designed for procreation through sexual intercourse. We have an obligation to acknowledge the
      morality of our bodies.

Reproductive Ethics

• The spirit in which we create new life matters.
  – Ancient Israel, impressed with transmission of life from father to son used the word, “begetting.”
  – The Greeks, impressed with the springing forth of new life in the cyclical patterns of birth
    and decay used the word, “genesis, meaning ‘to come into being’.”
  – Premodern Christian world, impressed with the world as a creation of God used the word, “pro-creation.”
  – We, impressed by technological advance and efficiency, use the language of the factory, “reproduction.”
End-of-Life Ethics

- Morally Ordinary (proportionate) means:
  - Those that in the patient’s judgment, offer a reasonable hope of benefit and do not entail an excessive burden or impose excessive expense on the family or the community.

- Morally Extraordinary (disproportionate) means:
  - Those that in the patient’s judgment do not offer a reasonable hope of benefit or entail an excessive burden, or impose excessive expense on the family or the community.

- Not dependent upon the medical or technological complexity:
  - Mechanical ventilation for ruptured appendix versus second recurrence of esophageal cancer.

End-of-Life Ethics

- To reject or withdraw treatment because of its burdens is still a refusal of treatment, not of life
- The distinction between what we foresee happening and what we intend to happen is morally important: the Principle of Double Effect

End-of-Life Ethics

- **Two Poles of Catholic Bioethics:**
  - Life is a sacred, precious gift deserving of our utmost respect and protection.
  - Life, as designed by God, is destined to decay and die. It is not, therefore, of ultimate value.
    - Catholics as a “pilgrim people.”
    - Pilgrim “One who journeys in foreign lands.”