



from the director's desk

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“John, we thought we could get rid of God and retain a value for human beings, but we found we couldn’t.” John Lennox, Professor of Mathematics at Oxford, made this comment at a conference I recently attended in Indonesia. Lennox referred to a Siberian academic acquaintance who was wrestling with the inability of post-Enlightenment Western thought to account for violence in the 20th century and beyond. The comment illuminates the dominant conclusions about the devaluation and appropriation of human embryos for research.

At the December 2015 conference in Indonesia on “Christian Responses to Global Health Issues,” I had the privilege of attending an event that was conceptualized and planned by someone else, something that many of our CBHD friends experience every June. This gave me the chance to give my full attention to the plenary speakers and presenters without all of the pressures of the behind-the-scenes responsibilities. There is a blessing in being an active listener, a student of the thoughts of others. Some of the ideas generated might be profound in their simplicity.

Dr. Ravi Zacharias, for example, tackled the tough questions of “unwanted children.” He admitted, “Not every child is wanted.” These lonely children may ask the questions we all should ask: “*Why am I? Why do I exist?*” And Zacharias’s life-giving answer: “*You exist because God wanted you to be.*”

Various speakers took up the themes of God’s love for human beings, Christian morality and truth, Christian responses to pain and suffering, and engagement with emerging technologies and treatment, which meshed with the challenges faced by doctors and nurses, but also the broader concerns of bioethics.

One of the four major sessions focused more narrowly on bioethics and technology—the session for which my paper proposal had been accepted. I presented on “Human Dignity and the ‘Child of Choice’: Technology, Human Procreation, and Christian Engagement.” (Yes, we, too, go through submitting proposals for professional conferences.) One doctor asked how I would apply my framework in his context. During the panel session, a bioethicist from Taiwan noted, “*This is the most inspiring conference I’ve ever attended. We should form an association of Christian ethicists.*”

So, why this narrative account of a conference?

Because as a participant, I was open to synthesizing new ideas, generating project possibilities through conversations with others, and learning about bioethical contextualization. One of the most intriguing ideas was the possibility of an international association of Christian bioethicists. One of the original visions I had when I joined the Center more than six years ago, was to form a global consortium of bioethicists and bioethics centers. We have been gradually moving toward that goal.

We initiated the Global Bioethics Education Initiative (GBEI) in 2009, and now eight scholars have spent one month with us. Our relationship with Dr. Jameela George, a 2009 recipient, generated a bioethics workshop in New Delhi in 2011 (co-taught by Dr. Dennis Sullivan and me). That, in turn, generated ideas for “training the trainers” via a Masters in Bioethics from Trinity Graduate School and the launch of a Christian bioethics center in India.

No one could have anticipated the fruitful outcome of our initial friendship with Dr. George. But, trusting in God, we took one step after another, working around detours along the way.

Acquaintances made at the Indonesia conference may one day lead to an international association of Christian bioethicists. Of course, we cannot see that clearly now. But by faith, we can move forward in developing friendships, providing resources, proactively refining ideas, and being available for the next opportunity.

Do you have an interest in global bioethics? Have you made a positive connection at one of our summer conferences? Please send me your story or comments at pcunningham@cbhd.org.

The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity (CBHD) is a Christian bioethics research center at Trinity International University.

“Exploring the nexus of biomedicine, biotechnology, and our common humanity.”

Dignitas is the quarterly publication of the Center and is a vehicle for the scholarly discussion of bioethical issues from a Judeo-Christian Hippocratic worldview, updates in the fields of bioethics, medicine, and technology, and information regarding the Center’s ongoing activities.

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With this issue of *Dignitas*, you will see the fruit of another project, a special supplement on POLST (Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment). It is the result of numerous conversations, some of which took place at the 2014 conference on “Bioethics in Transition.” Differing conclusions about POLST alerted us to the need for clarification. We invited a conversation among scholars of good will, who are committed to the Judeo-Christian Hippocratic tradition and respect for human dignity.

The supplement is a bonus for our members. I hope you find this to be a practical and valuable tool. ●●●

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