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Anthony Fisher

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CATHOLIC BIOETHICS FOR A NEW MILLENNIUM

Can the Hippocratic and Judeo-Christian traditions be synthesized with contemporary thought about practical reason, virtue and community to provide real-life answers to the dilemmas of healthcare today? Bishop Anthony Fisher discusses conscience, relationships and law in relation to the modern-day controversies surrounding stem cell research, abortion, transplants, artificial feeding and euthanasia, using case studies to offer insight and illumination. What emerges is a reason-based bioethics for the twenty-first century; a bioethics that treats faith and reason with equal seriousness, that shows the relevance of ancient wisdom to the complexities of modern healthcare scenarios and that offers new suggestions for social policy and regulation. Philosophical argument is complemented by Catholic theology and analysis of social and biomedical trends, to make this an auspicious example of a new generation of Catholic bioethical writing which has relevance for people of all faiths and none.

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The responsibility of one who undertakes to hand on faith, as a pastor or theologian, and the responsibility of one who undertakes to reflect and discourse philosophically are distinct responsibilities. The disciplines, each with its own criteria of soundness in argument and warrant in affirmation, are distinct. But they are responsibilities that can be united in a single lived vocation, by one who accepts and honours the distinctions but shows that each discipline can be pursued authentically, without compromise or commingling of criteria, but with complementarity, and some convergence of conclusions. That is the sort of vocation that I see being pursued by Anthony Fisher, and this book is one of its fruits. The primacy of the episcopal and theological in his personal calling does not suppress the philosophical in the method and reflective, argumentative grip of the book's core chapters.

They concern human life. But that abstract category can mask a reality which the book never forgets: to speak of such life is to speak of the very existence and reality of a human person, of each of us. For each of us, this existence and reality began in earliest embryonic form, when all our capacities were already given us, but as potentialities which, although they already were present and distinguished us already from embryonic mice, we could not yet exercise. Already, it now seems clear, that all-embracing, distinctively human capacity we call spirit had been bestowed on each of us as the organizing principle informing all the biochemical and biological processes of our individual formation, development and activity. Each of us was already an individual and a person. The difference in origins between most of us and those quite few of us who are monozygotic twins you will find discussed in these pages, and does not alter the essentials which I have just recalled. The dignity of being at once bodily and spiritual distinguishes us from all other creatures, so far as we can know and investigate them. The worth which that

dignity entails is what this book explores and elaborates, and celebrates in its title.

Bishop Fisher expresses his sense of the significance, for his own generation of believers, of the late pope, John Paul II. So it will not be out of place to recall that great bishop's personal sense of the importance not only of the person, and thus of people, but also of the peoples within which human persons flourish by acquiring the language and indeed the whole patrimony of memory, culture and capital that a people – paradigmatically a nation – can accumulate for its members and from which it can draw to benefit other peoples in their need. To think of human life as something to be disposed of by choice – to be 'pro-choice' – is not only to violate those disposed of, and their most basic right, but also to betray one's own people. For a people lives, and carries itself into the future, only by a kind of deep solidarity which is eviscerated in one way by abortion, and in other ways by the various forms of euthanasia, suicide and assisting suicide.

And also by detaching sex from marriage (or approving non-marital forms of sex-act) – a theme which the author intimates in his introductory chapters. The philosophical and theological argumentation deployed in the book – and in the tradition from which it draws – is much more concerned with the way our choices (that is, our intentions, whether more ultimate or more close-in) bear on the persons they intentionally affect than with long-term overall consequences. But the intelligible patterns and structures of our human makeup mean that specific types of intentional choice tend predictably enough to have broadly specifiable types of social consequence. Our generation is witnessing, and the generations soon to come will experience all the more keenly, the consequences of that loss of the marital. In itself, and all the more so in combination with the loss of solidarity manifested in killings, including self-killing, this unwillingness to hand on life in the incomparably appropriate milieu of marital commitment is resulting in the accelerating decline of whole peoples – ours. Though the Church is universal and transcends all peoples, its own culture – at once universal and very specific – is rooted in the cultures of the peoples it has evangelized, and it cannot be indifferent to the collapse and overwhelming of specific cultures, least of all those in which its own tradition and life has been centred.

For the present, the author concentrates his reflective energies and zeal on the threats now commonplace to lives just begun, or wounded

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or debilitated or ageing towards death, rather than on the institution and acts by which life is transmitted and nurtured fittingly well. That focus is sufficient, and very important for us all, and I commend the outcome to readers of every opinion.

JOHN FINNIS

Abbreviations

AA	Vatican II, <i>Apostolicam Actuositatem: Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity</i> (1965)
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> (1993; revised 1997)
CDF	(Vatican) Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
CIC	<i>Code of Canon Law of the Latin (Western) Church</i> (1983)
CMQ	<i>Catholic Medical Quarterly</i>
DH	Vatican II, <i>Dignitatis Humanae: Declaration on Religious Freedom</i> (1965)
DV	Vatican II, <i>Dei Verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation</i> (1965)
ES cells	embryonic stem cells
EV	Pope John Paul II, <i>Evangelium Vitae: Encyclical Letter on the Value and Inviolability of Human Life</i> (1995)
FC	Pope John Paul II, <i>Familiaris Consortio: Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World</i> (1981)
GE	Vatican II, <i>Gravissimum Educationis: Declaration on Christian Education</i> (1965)
GS	Vatican II, <i>Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World</i> (1965)
HV	Pope Paul VI, <i>Humanae Vitae: Encyclical Letter on Birth Control</i> (1968)
IM	Vatican II, <i>Inter Mirifica: Decree on the Means of Social Communication</i> (1963)
iPS cells	induced pluripotent stem cells
JAMA	<i>Journal of the American Medical Association</i>
JME	<i>Journal of Medical Ethics</i>
LG	Vatican II, <i>Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church</i> (1964)

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xii	<i>List of abbreviations</i>
LQ	<i>Linacre Quarterly</i>
NCBQ	<i>National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly</i>
OT	Vatican II, <i>Optatam Totius: Decree on Priestly Training</i> (1965)
PO	Vatican II, <i>Presbyterorum Ordinis: Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests</i> (1965)
ST	St Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologiae</i>
UR	Vatican II, <i>Unitatis Redintegratio: Decree on Ecumenism</i> (1964)
VS	Pope John Paul II, <i>Veritatis Splendor: Encyclical Letter on Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teaching</i> (1993)

The numbers following Church documents refer to paragraph numbers. All Vatican documents are published in Vatican City by Libreria Editrice Vaticana and on the Internet at www.vatican.va.