
E D I T O R I A L



Michael J. Sleasman, PhD | Editor
Mario Tafferner, MA | Managing Editor

In this issue of *Dignitas* we feature two essays. The first essay, by Dr. Jürgen-Burkhard Klautke, discusses the long-forgotten Christian meaning of the term *euthanasia*, “the good death.” While euthanasia is a perennial topic of bioethical controversy over the last several decades, it is only since the modern period that authors have used this term to refer to a voluntary death with the goal of avoiding unnecessary suffering. For earlier Christian writers, the term was closely connected to a longstanding tradition of preparing for death in a godly way. Klautke’s essay provides a helpful window into this rich history. Up until the modern era, people were encouraged to bring their lives in order, that is, to make peace with both God and their neighbor. Accelerated by the enormous number of deaths during the plague, the Christian tradition made a conscious effort to produce works to help the dying and their families to achieve this goal.

In his essay, Klautke narrates the story of such books, paintings, and sermons by discussing exemplary and important works from the literary tradition of the *Ars Moriendi* (“art of dying”). He takes his readers through writings by

Johannes Gerson, Johannes von Staupitz, and Martin Luther, emphasizing their preparatory function. The reflections these Christian authors provided was not abstract or theoretical but edifying, a witness to their concern for the care of the dying.

Klautke’s study is not only helpful from a historiographical perspective. The final section of his piece is devoted to a reflection of how the rich Christian tradition regarding the “good death” can both inform and reform our experience of death and dying today. Dr. Klautke provides helpful points of contact between our reality and the *Ars Moriendi*, arguing that the past meaning of the term *euthanasia* must not be forgotten but can be reclaimed with its powerful message that it is possible to die well despite the cruelty of death. In this respect, Klautke extends a growing body of literature exploring the practices surrounding and retrieval of the *Ars Moriendi* tradition for dying well in such work as Allen Verhey, *The Christian Art of Dying: Learning from Jesus* (Eerdmans, 2011) and Lydia Dugdale, ed. *Dying in the Twenty-First Century: Toward a New Ethical Framework for the Art of Dying* (MIT Press, 2017).

Similar to Klautke’s reflections on the counter-cultural possibilities of the pre-modern *euthanasia* tradition, Julia Bolzon’s essay discusses Christian conceptions about humanity’s givenness and creatureliness as standing in conflict with the “spirit of biotechnology.” She is particularly concerned with humanity’s desire for a god-like control over nature, a longing she explains by recent conceptions of man as *Homo Faber*, the fabricator of the world.

Bolzon was the 2018 recipient of the student paper competition award, and this essay is adapted from that paper submission. In her essay, Bolzon argues that it is the yearning to eliminate finitude and our givenness as created beings that underlies many biotechnological procedures today: what she refers to as the “spirit of biotechnology.” Bolzon is attentive to the questions raised by such a forceful critique, and in this respect one must take care not to misunderstand her concern. She is not opposed to the traditional aims of medicine in its provision of care, comfort, and when possible cure. Rather, her critique is aimed at the longing to make humans more than a creature, that is, to eliminate ontological boundaries of our creatureliness and rise above our finitude and givenness to control “the very nature of reality.”

In this, Bolzon's essay represents a timely interaction with trends to extend our humanness through alternative means. Such contemporary trends span the gamut from medicalization to human enhancement and on to transhumanism, but the focus of her discussion spotlights issues such as germline editing and life preservation at all costs. In the end, Bolzon's critique responds to this "spirit of biotechnology" by emphasizing our ontological dependence upon God.

Bolzon is the first of two essay contest winners that we will be featuring as part of the Center's inaugural student paper competition, which was held in conjunction with our 2018 summer conference. Both award recipients presented versions of their submissions as parallel paper sessions during the conference and were invited to revise their papers for inclusion in *Dignitas*. This student paper

competition is one among several initiatives that the Center has unveiled as part of **BioethicsNEXT**.

As part of the Center's 25th Anniversary celebrations, CBHD launched BioethicsNEXT as an initiative focused on two strategic priorities: 1) inspiring young thinkers to courageously promote human dignity and foster human flourishing, and 2) helping pastors guide their congregations to wisely face difficult issues in medicine, science, and technology. To learn more about BioethicsNEXT and how you can partner with the Center in making a difference among pastors, young professionals, and students, please visit cbhd.org/bioethicsnext.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM CBHD!

Happy Holidays from all of us here at CBHD! We are so grateful for those of you who partner with us through membership and generously giving towards the work that we are accomplishing. As we approach the end of this year, would you consider giving a tax-deductible gift to further the work and mission of the Center? Thank you!

Give at cbhd.org/give