



from the director's desk

BY PAIGE COMSTOCK CUNNINGHAM, JD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SCHOLARSHIP IN COMMUNITY

How do you actually “do” scholarship? It is a fair question, and an important one. At CBHD, we firmly believe that *scholarship happens in community*. Let me give you a few examples of what that means.

In August, I was invited to participate in a Charitable Dialogue for the graduate students at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (known on campus as “TEDS”) and Trinity Graduate School. Dr. John Kilner (director of the MA Bioethics program), Dr. Dennis Magary (Chair, Old Testament), and I discussed Christians and healthcare. How should we think about this as Christians?

Each of us took a different slice: Dr. Kilner commented on Jesus’ ministry of healing and the Bible’s special concerns for the health-related needs of the most vulnerable. Dr. Magary brought insights from the Old Testament on justice and care for the poor. Finally, I concluded with historical reflections on definitions of “health,” insights from the early church, and contemporary obligations. Students were invited to ask questions. Dialogue. Question. Response. Scholarship in community.

In preparation, I “dialogued” with Gary Ferngren’s *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity*.¹ His research illuminated my understanding of the long Christian tradition of medical philanthropy. I also included reflections on the meaning of “health,” which were inspired in part by Dr. Monique Chireau’s plenary address from our 2012 summer conference. Along the way, I discussed my ideas with Dr. Michael Sleasman (Managing Director and Research Scholar at CBHD). The three panelists interacted before the discussion, sharing our outlines.

Why do we spend so much time on these concerns? Because ideas have consequences. Serious ideas demand serious responses. Soundbites simply won’t do the job.

In the past, I have represented an organization that engages in the public square, advocating for pro-life public policies. Advocacy does demand rapid responses, driven by the 24/7 news cycle, and reactive, short-term, time frames that drive Congress and state legislators. Many of these issues can be characterized by pithy phrases. However, when the task is making ethical judgments about issues that are emerging on the horizon, a quick response is inadequate.

That’s why we did not immediately issue a statement when Craig Venter and his team announced their creation of a “synthetic cell.”

More recently, we witnessed thoughtful scholarship in community at our consultation on “The Ethics and Theology of Synthetic Gametes.” Hosted by CBHD’s Academy of Fellows, a team of six scholars probed the implications of reproductive technologies that could create an embryo with three genetic parents. They walked us through why parents want a child “of their own,” a Roman Catholic perspective on the theology of donor insemination, the philosophical and theological meaning of gametes, issues raised by creating gametes from stem cells, and concerns related to four methods of producing synthetic gametes.

During the day-long consultation, participants observed scholarship in action. Dr. Ben Mitchell proposed one position in the morning, but suggested a revision in the afternoon, prompted by questions and discussion. Although these distinguished experts share the same respect for embryonic human life, their presentations were distinct. By the end of the day, we had greater clarity, but also a realization that more work needs to be done.

Of course, an academic’s recommendation may have been worked out in the solitude of the research library. Even then the work does not begin *ex nihilo*, but is steeped in mental dialogue with texts and

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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Submissions & Correspondence

Inquiries about permissions for use, as well as any editorial correspondence and manuscript proposals should be directed to Michael Sleasman by email (msleasman@cbhd.org). Manuscript proposals should be in MS Word, use endnotes for all references, and follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

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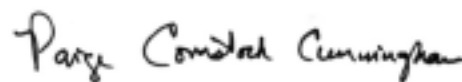
ideas, be they ancient or contemporary. Yet, until a recommendation has been tested by others, its soundness is uncertain. Interactions with the ideas may occur, for example, in private conversations, public debate, Q&A, or by email.

Emerging, and converging, technologies are often more like “Magic Eye” puzzles to be discerned than they are like jigsaw puzzles to be assembled according to the picture. (You may remember magic puzzles with a ‘hidden picture’ you might detect by staring through the puzzle until it emerges into view.) Upon first glance, the implications of the technology are not clear.

It takes time, patience, determination, and shared expertise to understand what the technology is, how it works, and what it does for and to human beings. We consider both its purpose and its potential consequences, both good and ill. One of the most important tasks is to ask the right questions. Only after doing that hard work are we prepared to suggest, with humility, ethical conclusions.

The protracted nature of scholarship in community is one of the reasons we offer so few unequivocal ethical statements on our website. Of course, there are other considerations, but taking the time to do credible research is at the top of our list.

As you read this issue of *Dignitas*, think about your own role as a contributor to this serious engagement. The number of those who embrace human dignity and our common flourishing is a handful, compared to the vast army of those willing to negotiate away the lives of the vulnerable, weak, ill, disabled, and aged. But, in community, illuminated by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can progress in our ability to faithfully carry out the task we have been appointed to with both courage and conviction.



1 Gary B. Ferngren, *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION:

FROM THE EDITORIAL STAFF OF *DIGNITAS*

As you may have noticed, over the past few years we have expanded the length of *Dignitas*, and are including a wider range of materials in each quarterly issue. Additionally, we have regularly solicited responses to the various commentaries and articles that appear in *Dignitas* in order to inspire charitable dialogue between our readers and those who contribute material to this publication. To expand that invitation, we invite you to consider submitting reviews or commentaries on articles in other journals or recently published books relevant to bioethics. We are also quite interested to receive article submissions that engage in specialty or emerging areas of bioethics, particularly in the areas of biotechnology, clinical & medical ethics, disability ethics, emerging technology, genetic ethics, global bioethics, nursing ethics, and public health.

Those interested in submitting a manuscript are encouraged to email an abstract of the proposed piece (article or book for a review, abstract for an article) to Michael Sleasman (msleasman@cbhd.org). Abstracts will be reviewed by CBHD's research staff to offer guidance to increase the potential for publication in *Dignitas*. Final manuscripts should be submitted in MS Word, use endnotes for all references, follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*, and also include the attachment of a recent cv or resumé. Manuscripts are carefully reviewed by the editorial staff with the standards of rigorous scholarship; as a result we cannot guarantee publication. As Paige Cunningham commented in the Director's Desk column, we invite you to participate in *scholarship in community*.

Additional Guidelines:

Letters should reference the original piece in *Dignitas*. When appropriate we may invite the original author to respond to the Letter. Letters must not be longer than 700 words and will be subject to editorial review, though exceptions may be granted.

Reviews & Commentaries serve to unpack the key arguments of recent publications (journal articles or books) and to engage them in critical dialogue. Authors should review publications in areas that best match scholarly expertise. Lengths of reviews and commentaries can range from 300-1300 words. Those desiring to submit reviews or commentaries longer than 1300 words should contact Michael Sleasman (msleasman@cbhd.org).

Articles are major treatments of a particular subject relating to bioethics and human dignity. Pieces should demonstrate a commitment to a Christian position and an appreciation for the wealth of the Hippocratic tradition. Authors should only submit articles in areas of scholarly expertise. Articles must be at least 2000 words, but not more than 6000 words in length, excluding endnotes.