

BEYOND THERAPY CONFERENCE

BY JENNIFER MCVEY

Every summer a group of individuals passionate about engaging bioethics in all walks of life descends upon the campus of Trinity International University seeking knowledge about the newest thought and developments in the field. For some, this is a first time experience; others partake of the tradition on a yearly basis. Many things are predictable: more than likely it will be unbearably hot and humid; wraps and pasta salad will be served at the opening reception. Old friends gather together and greet, new professional relationships are established. The unknown is always what the plenary speakers bring to the table and how they will challenge the audience to respond.

The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity continued a rich seventeen year history of conferencing with the July 15-17, 2010 summer conference: *Beyond Therapy: Exploring Enhancement and Human Futures*. CBHD played host to seven distinguished plenary speakers from across the country: William P. Cheshire, Jr., Maureen Condic, Amy Laura Hall, William B. Hurlbut, Dorothy Roberts, Michael Slesman, and Brent Waters.

The purpose of *Beyond Therapy* was to investigate both the opportunities and perils of scientific discoveries and technological innovations that are transforming the nature of biomedicine and revolutionizing the expectations for biotechnology. The intention of the program was to probe some of the toughest questions in bioethics where, as Paige Cunningham, our Executive Director has pointed out, the “boundaries are not neat and tidy.” These questions surrounding the shift from therapy to enhancement are some of the most important for the future of our humanity. It was our hope that attendees would deeply consider and engage the moral and ethical questions surrounding the move from therapy to enhancement, what it means to be human, and the impact on human dignity.

This conference was an opportunity to hear from some of the top experts who dedicate time to think extensively about the questions presented by this shift. What are the prospects and challenges to human futures in light of advances within science and technology? What is the role of race and ethnicity in race-based biotechnologies? What are the contributions of regenerative medicine to science and medical research, as well as ethical, legal, and social concerns? Can the ability to pursue perfection lead to a rhetoric of shame?

Dr. William B. Hurlbut (former President’s Council on Bioethics member) eloquently set the stage for the weekend in his opening address entitled “Embodiment, Biotechnology, and

Human Dignity.” Dr. Hurlbut commented that enhancement is at the heart of the deepest dilemmas we face as a society, because of its close link with the future of humanity. This link is not just tied to the practical outcomes and potential physical side effects of various types of enhancement, but is rooted in a deeper ethical, philosophical, and spiritual understanding of what it is to be human and what it means to live authentically in our humanness within our natural limitations. In order to reflect well upon these changes, Dr. Hurlbut proposed that we need to have a more radical understanding of the meaning of “beyond therapy,” one that includes the whole of life and is not only seen through the lens of medicine, sickness, and healing: an understanding of “beyond therapy” that incorporates psychological, moral, and spiritual lenses.

The speakers that followed Hurlbut’s opening address used these expanded lenses to address issues and opportunities that will affect human futures. The bioethics conversation regarding therapy and enhancement continues, but I believe that those who attended left with both a better understanding of the issues that dot this landscape and the moral framework for engaging lingering questions. At the very least, that was my experience.

I would like to invite you to the Center’s 18th Annual Summer Conference: *The Scandal of Bioethics: Reclaiming Christian Influence in Technology, Science, & Medicine*. I am pleased to announce a distinguished schedule of plenary speakers: H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., Kevin FitzGerald, Dennis Hollinger, C. Christopher Hook, Edmund Pellegrino, David Stevens, and Daniel Sulmasy. During the conference we will glance backward to ask questions about the legacy of Christian thought in bioethics, while facing the future, the purpose, and the place of Christian thought in bioethics. Do not miss the opportunity to address the tough questions: Has ‘Christian bioethics’ made any difference? Will Christians lead with courage and moral imagination? Is there a future for right of conscience in medicine and research? I would invite you now to begin considering how you might contribute to the conversation through paper and poster sessions. Once again, individuals passionate about engaging bioethics in all walks of life will descend upon campus of Trinity International University and more than likely there will be wraps and pasta salad as we greet our friends at the opening reception, but the unknown will be how the plenary speakers will inspire us to engage our world. Mark your calendar now for July 14-16, 2011. I will see you there!