

## Book Review

### **Medical Ethics, Human Choices: A Christian Perspective,**

Edited by John Rogers

Published by Herald Press, 1988, 159 pages, \$9.95, paperback.

Reviewed by Ed Payne.

This book was the result of a Health Ethics Review Committee, called together by the Mennonite Mutual Aid in 1985, "to help it and its constituents consider appropriate responses to the ever-rising river of ethical dilemmas we are facing in relation to medical care." The assembled group had representatives from the health and legal professions, educators, ethicists, and congregational leaders. "Hearings" were also held in various population centers of Mennonite and Brethren churches. Thus, the book is a compilation of efforts from the various people who participated in this process. This book was an extreme disappointment to me. The Mennonites are generally known for their conservatism and commitment to the Bible. This book, however, reflects little of those positions.

An early chapter has a fairly good and adequate discussion of the image of God. It is certainly a topic that is a central issue in medical ethics for Christians. Dr. Conrad G. Brunk, the chapter's author, however, overemphasizes its importance to the exclusion of other Biblical truth. For example, he says, "The decision to withhold or distort the truth about patients' conditions denies them autonomy" (which he derives from our being created in the image of God, p. 35). Here, he misses the greater issue of God's autonomy. In that autonomy God has commanded that we not lie (Ex. 20:16). It is not that we tell the truth to our patients because of their autonomy, but because God has commanded that we do so. (See my discussion in *Biblical/Medical Ethics*, pp. 116-118).

Some may say that I have misrepresented Dr. Brunk. I

fear, however, that my concern is consistent with his other thoughts and with most other writers in this book. Two pages earlier, he says, "The whole of morality is summed up in the ability to love your neighbor as yourself" (p. 33).

The crucial focus that is missing, as represented by these two examples, is a concern for what God has said about these issues. Concretely, this concern is for Biblical principles. While this book was consciously put together by and for the Christian community, it is strangely silent about biblical principles. Such is apparent simply by the few notations of biblical texts.

This error continues to be more the rule than the exception by Christians who write and speak about medical ethics. While they speak as Christians, they do not (and do not seem to be concerned to) speak from a biblical perspective. All manner of secular sources and "authorities" are cited while God's Word is not.

For me, this book read consistently as a presentation of Neo-orthodoxy. It discusses broad general principles, sometimes using the language of Scripture and theology, but rarely focuses on specific biblical principles to give concrete direction. One positive note is its realization that economic resources are limited and that life is not to be preserved at all costs. This realization is one that is generally missing from most discussion by Christians. Even so, it provides little, if anything, in the way of biblical direction for these realized dilemmas. I am not sure that this book provides anything worthwhile for the Christian who seeks biblical answers.