

Baiju Julian and Hormis Mynatty, eds., *Catholic Contributions to Bioethics: Reflections on Evangelium Vitae*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2007, pages xxi + 464, ISBN: 81-7086-408-9.

The book, *Catholic Contributions to Bioethics*, is a special volume reflecting on the themes envisaged in the Encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, of Pope John Paul II. The primary task of *Evangelium Vitae* was to address the issues related to the fast emerging branches of study, applied ethics, bioethics, etc. Its prophetic overtones make this document relevant even today.

Evangelium Vitae was compiled with the express purpose that it is read by the lay faithful, as a matter of fact, by all people of good will. For Pope John Paul, “the cause of life is the cause of the Gospel entrusted to the Church, which is duty-bound to raise her voice in the defense of life.” It is this same awareness that every Christian is called upon to familiarize, assimilate, internalize, and finally express in action in their everyday lives. It is within this framework that the articles in *Catholic Contributions to Bioethics* become a must-read. Though the articles lack the pathos and force of arguments of *Evangelium Vitae* to the “scientifically and systematically programmed threats” against life, they nevertheless highlight the key moral and legal issues that govern most of these bioethical issues.

To the uninitiated in bioethics, the book has interesting contributions on all the important and relevant aspects of bioethics: abortion, human cloning, stem cell research, and genetic engineering, to name a few. Expounded in simple and lucid style, the contributions initiate the reader into the myriad issues that challenge the Catholic Church today. It also impresses by virtue of the richness of Catholic contribution to theological ethics.

The book debunks the misconception that those who hold strong religious opinions are antagonistic to scientific investigation. Though scientific progress in biotechnology, such as gene-mapping, is welcome and necessary, its potential for abuse and misuse is a very real and frightening possibility. In fact, it is continued and subtle exploitation of life for profit that we need to be aware of. Furthermore, technology and progress that are apparently promoted as solution to the global problems of hunger and disease ultimately unveil a subtle quest for power and selfish gain that would remain in the control of a few.

The book does a good job of sensitizing its readers to the prevailing issues that promote a “culture of death” in relation to the “culture of life.” In particular, the grave moral illicitness involved in taking all innocent human life, especially at its beginning and at its end, is well studied and critically confronted. The result of such ‘death’ practices is a further marginalization, neglect, and ultimately elimination of the weak (read as new-born and elderly) and the poorer sections of society. In a world that is rapidly losing its sense of sin due to progressive weakening of individual consciences, its only salvation can come from a life empowered by Jesus, the “word of life.” Chew on that!

Francis Lobo