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Review of *Bioethics: A Christian Approach*, by Scott B. Rae and Paul M. Cox, and *Unprecedented Choices*, by Audrey R. Chapman

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existence of the people of Israel, but also poses the crucial question of what form the church should take as the earthly-historical form of the crucified and risen Christ.

That being said, *God So Loved the World* is so well written and achieves its stated objectives with such clarity and insight, such criticisms seem like nitpicking. The book does an excellent job of introducing complex christological issues and questions in a straightforward and accessible manner to those making their initial foray in theology, and in the process invites them to further (and therefore more technical) investigation. Readers from Sunday School to seminary will benefit greatly from Wilson's labors. □

Audrey Chapman

Unprecedented Choices: Religious Ethics at the Frontiers of Genetic Science (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1999), ix + 261 pp.

Scott B. Rae and Paul M. Cox

Bioethics: A Christian Approach in a Pluralistic Age (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), x + 326 pp.

Reviewed by M. Therese Lysaught, University of Dayton, Dayton, OH

How might theology speak to issues in genetics and bioethics, and how ought it do so in public? These two books take up these questions.

Audrey Chapman comes to the conversation out of a varied career history. Having spent almost a decade as a staff member at the United Church Board for World Ministries, the international agency of the United Church of Christ, she moved to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, heading up its programs in Science and Human Rights and the Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion. Her work in these capacities uniquely positions her to comment on the interface of religion and science and the ethics of public policy.

Unprecedented Choices consists of six chapters and is primarily a survey of religious responses to genetics and an analysis of their

methodologies. Chapter one sets the stage, arguing for the need of religious ethics in shaping a public moral response to developments in science and technology. The next three chapters each take up a specific topic—genetics, cloning, and gene patenting—in which Chapman provides an historical overview of the topic, an account of secular responses, and an analysis of statements by both religious institutions and individuals. Her fifth chapter, "Theological Reflections on Genetics and Human Nature," takes up the challenges genetics and science pose to traditional theological concepts, particularly to theological anthropology. In contrast to the previous chapters in which she presents and assesses the work of others, Chapman's own voice emerges in chapter five, where she asks for a rethinking and revision of theological anthropology informed by evolution and genetics. Her final chapter, although in large part a summary of what has come before, takes up the issue of "public theology."

Chapman's book will provide a useful resource for anyone interested in the issue of religion and genetics or bioethics. Her analysis of the statements by religious institutions is a unique contribution to the literature. Her assessment of the work of other theologians writing on these topics, situated within the broader historical context, is also a helpful contribution. Chapman draws heavily on the work of James Gustafson, Ron Cole-Turner, Ted Peters, Phil Hefner and others associated with the Center for Theology and Natural Science. Noticeably absent, however, is greater attention to works by more conservative or "confessional" theologians. Nonetheless, the book is well written and highly readable. (Even the chapter on gene patenting was interesting!) Chapman is thorough, careful, gracious, and fair, while still critical. While located at the liberal end of the denominational spectrum, she makes a strong case for the importance of the theological contributions to public moral discourse and policy making.

Scott Rae and Paul Cox's *Bioethics* is a different book in almost every way. Rae and Cox are both professors of biblical studies and Christian ethics at Talbot School of The-

ology, Biola University, in La Mirada, California. They present here the first volume in the Critical Issues in Bioethics Series sponsored by the Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity. Unlike Chapman's book, *Bioethics* expands the realm of consideration beyond genetics and addresses the field of bioethics as a whole. While it similarly seeks to focus on issues of methodology, it intends itself primarily as a constructive endeavor. Rae and Cox are denominationally far more conservative than Chapman. Nonetheless, they both end up considering the practical issues of public theology. Here their perspectives could not be more divergent.

Bioethics begins with a survey and critique of "Influential Approaches in Bioethics," both religious and secular. Chapter one reviews Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish figures in bioethics, specifically William E. May and Richard McCormick, Paul Ramsey and James Gustafson, and Immanuel Jakobovits and Fred Rosner. Chapter two outlines Beauchamp and Childress' classic *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* and H. Tristram Engelhardt's *Foundations of Bioethics*. Engelhardt merits the more extensive treatment as befits the nakedness of his claims and arguments. Their material on Engelhardt comprises the most useful material in the book.

In part two, "Pillars of a Christian Approach," the authors "attempt to develop a viable Christian approach to bioethics" (p. 53). They claim to eschew an "issues" orientation, focusing rather on the "primary theological notions critical for informing a Christian perspective on bioethics" (p. 7). However, the only theological chapter heading is that of "The Image of God and the Sacredness of Human Life." The rest map meta-issues: medical technology, personhood, autonomy, death, and access to health care. Though not consistent, the chapters generally introduce the given topic with short medical scenarios, outline a set of biblical and theological "foundations," and then apply the theological principles to a series of bioethical issues. The last section takes up the apologetic task. As the series editors state, "Because we live in a pluralist

society, we believe that it is our responsibility to explain why all thoughtful people should take Christian perspectives into account" (p. vii). While the authors appear to take up this challenge, they actually do not. Lack of space precludes an exhaustive critique of this book. While clearly well versed in the secular bioethics literature, they do not engage the work of other theologians who have made significant contributions to this field. They do treat May, McCormick, Ramsey, and Gustafson in chapter one, and Catholic magisterial works in later chapters, but their presentation of Catholic works is incomplete, which renders their refutation of these works problematic. Moreover, while these theologians were seminal and influential figures in the field of bioethics, their work has largely been either absorbed or significantly nuanced by later figures who would represent more compelling interlocutors, namely, Kevin O'Rourke, Lisa Cahill, Allen Verhey, Stanley Hauerwas, Elliott Dorff, and Lori Zoloth.

With regard to their constructive project, the principles they develop and employ are adduced in very simplistic, literalist, and *prima facie* manner. For example, God's blessing upon Eve and Adam in Genesis 1:27-28 becomes the principle of dominion. Except for the fact that sin complicates the task of dominion for Adam, Eve, and their descendents, no other scriptural texts are brought to bear on God's blessing to subdue the earth. Once identified, these principles are immediately lifted away from the text and filled with unwarranted content. Rae and Cox are certainly not alone in making these sorts of moves; nonetheless, that does not justify such a move here. What is more, no christological convictions are brought to bear on the interpretation of these issues. In fact, Jesus makes few appearances in this book—a criticism that can be made of Chapman's book, too. With few exceptions, the authors draw predominantly on the Old Testament, with occasional reference to Paul. This is very troubling for "a viable Christian approach."

In sum, the authors assert their principles facily and draw their conclusions just as

quickly. They offer no critical perspective on technology or medicine and privilege medical institutions when interpreting conflicts between them and their patients. Finally, with regard to public theology, they recognize that committed Christians may wish to convince others or influence public policy on important issues but do not think that biblical and theological arguments are publicly persuasive. Rather than providing an account of why all thoughtful people should take Christian perspectives into account, or why Christians ought to witness even if such witness is ineffective, they advocate a strategic approach to garnering public support on controversial issues. In short, they abandon Christian language and state that Christians must find “publicly accessible reasons” whether they be philosophical or practical.

Ironically, it is Chapman who makes a strong appeal for explicitly theological language. While being critical of the work of religious bodies *vis-à-vis* science and genetics and arguing that the work of interfacing religion, science, and ethics is only just beginning, she outlines practical guidelines for how this should be done. Public theology, she states, should “proceed from a clear religious rationale and reflect the priorities of the communities it is representing.” It should be timely, well-reasoned, informed, and understandable, should exhibit knowledge of relevant research and data related to the subject it is addressing, and be clear about what it is advocating as well as what it is criticizing. Finally, she makes clear that it is legitimate to appeal to theological beliefs, “even when those beliefs are not widely shared,” as long as “the logical relationship between the beliefs and the conclusions [are] comprehensible to the believer and nonbeliever alike” (p. 252).

Anyone interested in the interface of genetics and theology will find Chapman’s *Unprecedented Choices* useful and engaging. Rae and Cox’s *Bioethics*, however, remains too flawed to serve as more than a foil. □

Stephen H. Webb

Good Eating (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001), 272 pp.

Reviewed by Steven Bouma-Prediger, Hope College, Holland, MI

Should Christians ever fast? Do dogs go to heaven? Did God want animal sacrifices? Was Jesus a vegetarian? These and other related questions are posed and thoughtfully answered by Stephen Webb in *Good Eating*, the debut volume in The Christian Practice of Everyday Life, a promising new series dedicated to the theological consideration of concerns of everyday life. If this volume is any indication, the series is off to a very fine start, for Webb’s book is theologically informed, carefully argued, and written in a clear and engaging style. Indeed, the scope of issues he considers is matched only by the controversial nature of his views.

Webb’s fourfold aim is to “set the record straight on the biblical view of animals,” to “sort out what the biblical notion of stewardship means in our relationship to animals,” to “present the first modern systematic theology of diet,” and to “contribute to a variety of fascinating historical questions concerning diet, food, and animals” (pp. 13-14). He succeeds admirably with the first and last aims, providing a much-needed and insightful presentation of a biblically-informed view of animals, especially in contrast to the animal rights movement. He also offers great insight on a plethora of historical questions, from whether John the Baptist and Jesus were vegetarians to why the Lord’s Supper is a vegetarian meal and why those in the early church so valued fasting. Webb is less successful in realizing his second and third goals, though here too there is much food for thought (choosing my metaphor carefully).

Webb’s thesis is simple: “there is a good case to be made that vegetarianism is a valid and valuable way of anticipating the kingdom of God by practicing what God most intends for the world” (p. 26). So while “Christian-



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