

Ecclesial Perspectives: Biotechnological Issues Facing the Church.

Roman Catholic Perspectives.

Celia Deane-Drummond, University of Chester

A. Roman Catholic Social Teaching

The following points are worth raising in relation to CST:

1. *The ambiguous nature of biotechnology.*

Pontifical Academy for Life on biotechnology (1999) ‘a source of hope and enthusiasm on the one hand, and alarm and hostility on the other’.

2. *Human intervention in nature is acceptable as long as it is responsible.*

Pope John Paul II, ‘nature is not a sacred or divine reality that man must leave alone. Rather it is a gift offered by the Creator to the human community, entrusted to the intelligence and moral responsibility of men and women’.

3. *Justice and solidarity need to be taken into account, given the social, economic and political implications of biotechnology.*

Solidarity ‘equitable commercial exchange’

4. *Scientists have a vocation to work towards solutions to the problems of food supply and health care.*

5. *The need to take into account the common good*

6. *Biotechnology and human embryos.*

Strong resistance to intervention in human genetics, ‘culture of death’ (Pope John Paul II), and ‘destructive pathology of reason’, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.

7. *Shift towards suspicion of all biotechnology:*

‘it is now clear that the application of these discoveries in the fields of industry and agriculture have produced harmful long-term effects. This has led to the painful realisation that we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas, and to the well being of future generations’ (1990).

Globalisation ‘must be at the service of the human person, it must serve solidarity and the common good’. The poor are ‘potentially productive and creative actors in society’ ‘not all that is technically feasible is morally right’ (2002).

Philippine Bishops: Bt corn denied ‘the blessings of life for millions of people’, so that: ‘the church is not against development and modern technology. Rather, we want to ask our people and leaders: For whom is development? Who is to benefit from these so-called development projects and modern technology? Development must serve the needs and promote the progress of all people’. Experiments with GM foods was tantamount to ‘invasion of the global commons’.

B Seeking Wisdom in an ecologically complex age.

How can we link concern for the earth with solidarity?

Is hostility towards medical science and direct political action the best way forward?

1. *Biblical wisdom*

Rooted in concrete experience and appropriate valuation of reason.

Wisdom is an attribute of God, personified as female.

Human wisdom is linked to humility. (Sir. 10. 7-32) and is prior to exercise of justice.

Limits go beyond that specified in legislation or technology.

2. *Ecclesial wisdom*

The tradition of *Hagia Sophia*

Wisdom in Thomas Aquinas

Prudence is means of attaining goodness, understood in individual and communal terms.

Wisdom is one of intellectual virtues. Prudence follows *phronesis* of Aristotle.

Prudence is learned and gift, incorporated in theological virtues of faith, hope and charity.

Active cooperation required in community discernment, or *political prudence*, incorporating *justice, fortitude and temperance*.

Prudence and biotechnologies.

Eucharist as a shared meal in context of GMOs.